



'White', indigenous and Australian: constructions of mixed identities in today's Australia

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Delphine David. 'White', indigenous and Australian: constructions of mixed identities in today's Australia. History. Université Sorbonne Paris Cité, 2017. English. NNT: 2017USPCC179. tel-02093056

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UNIVERSITÉ PARIS DIDEROT - PARIS 7
SORBONNE PARIS CITÉ
ED 382 : Economies, Espaces, Sociétés, Civilisations :
Pensée critique, politique et pratiques sociales
EA 337 : Identités Cultures Territoires

THÈSE DE DOCTORAT

Etudes anglophones
Etudes australiennes, Cultural studies

Delphine DAVID

**'White', Indigenous and Australian:
Constructions of Mixed Identities in Today's Australia**

'Blanc', Aborigène et Australien :
Constructions d'identités croisées dans l'Australie d'aujourd'hui

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Soutenue le 27 février 2017

JURY

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Abstract

In the 1990s, Australia set up a ten-year policy of reconciliation aiming at developing a better relationship between Indigenous people and the wider Australian community. This policy was based on the recognition of the enduring dichotomy between both communities despite an increasing acknowledgement of the place of Indigenous people in Australia since the 1970s. The complex relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – and especially ‘white’ Anglo-Celtic Australians – is the result of the process of colonisation, of the subsequent policies designed to control Indigenous people, and of the historical domination of ‘white’ Australia over Indigenous people. As a result of discriminatory policies, many Indigenous families decided to hide their heritage and ‘passed’ into ‘white’ society. Many mixed-race and fair-skinned children were taken from their families and lost their connection with their Indigenous relatives. Today, an increasing number of Australians choose to identify as Indigenous and to reclaim a heritage they were deprived of. But although having Indigenous heritage is no longer regarded as shameful, the road back to Indigeneity can be a difficult one. This study is the analysis of the identity journeys of eleven Australians who were raised in a ‘white’, Anglo-Celtic Australian culture and who have Indigenous heritage. Their perceptions of Indigeneity are analysed to reveal the dominance of ‘white’ discourses about Indigeneity in today’s Australia, but also the presence of restricting essentialist discourses now used by the Indigenous community to keep control over the definition of Indigenous identity. The analysis of the oppositional relationship between Indigenous and ‘white’ Australians in contemporary Australia reveals the difficulty of embracing both ‘white’ and ‘black’ heritages and of claiming multiple identities.

Résumé

Dans les années 1990, l’Australie met en place une politique de réconciliation s’étalant sur dix ans et visant à développer une meilleure relation entre Australiens aborigènes et non-aborigènes. Cette politique est fondée sur la reconnaissance de l’existence continue de tensions entre les deux communautés, et ce malgré une plus grande reconnaissance de la place des Aborigènes en Australie depuis les années 1970. La relation complexe entre Australiens aborigènes et non-aborigènes – en particulier ‘blancs’ et dont les origines sont anglo-celtes – est le résultat du processus de colonisation, des politiques ultérieures conçues pour contrôler la population aborigène, et de la domination des Aborigènes par l’Australie ‘blanche’ au cours de l’histoire. Du fait des politiques discriminatoires, de nombreuses familles aborigènes décidèrent de cacher leurs origines et de se faire passer pour blanches. De nombreux enfants métisses à la peau claire furent enlevés à leurs familles et perdirent leurs liens avec leurs familles aborigènes. Aujourd’hui, un nombre grandissant d’Australiens choisissent de revendiquer leur identité Aborigène et de reprendre possession d’un héritage dont ils ont été privés. Mais si avoir des origines aborigènes n’est plus source de honte, en revanche, le chemin à parcourir pour retrouver son identité aborigène peut être difficile. Cette étude analyse les parcours identitaires de onze Australiens élevés dans une culture ‘blanche’ anglo-celte et qui ont des origines aborigènes. L’analyse de leurs perceptions de l’identité aborigène révèle la prédominance des discours ‘blancs’ sur les Aborigènes en Australie aujourd’hui, mais aussi la présence de discours essentialistes restreignant la définition de l’identité aborigène, et maintenant utilisés par la communauté aborigène afin de contrôler cette définition. L’analyse de la relation d’opposition entre Aborigènes et Australiens ‘blancs’ dans l’Australie contemporaine révèle la difficulté à revendiquer à la fois des origines ‘blanches’ et ‘noires’, ainsi que des identités multiples.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisor Martine Piquet for having supported my work in Australian studies since my second year of Master's and for having helped me go through my doctoral years in the best conditions.

I am very grateful to Dr. Catriona Elder from the University of Sydney, who volunteered her time and energy to help me navigate this complex topic. Her support and enthusiasm for my project helped me overcome many obstacles.

Along with Dr. Elder, I wish to thank the people working in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney, who welcomed me and made sure I could work in excellent conditions while I lived in Australia.

I wish to thank the different bodies which helped me finance my research and field trips to Australia from 2011 to 2015:

- The Université Paris Dauphine for granting me a *contrat doctoral* and two scholarships to travel to Sydney;
- The region of Ile-de-France for its generous contribution to my project;
- The Australian government for awarding me an Endeavour Research Fellowship which allowed me to spend the fourth year of my doctoral studies in Sydney.

From a professional as well as a personal point of view, I felt very lucky to be able to spend so much time in Australia.

I also want to give my greatest thanks to the eleven participants in this study. I felt very privileged to be trusted with their personal stories. I was constantly incited to work hard on this project to do them justice.

Within this group, I would especially like to thank Josh for sharing with me some of his thoughts about his Indigenous heritage back in 2010, thus unknowingly inspiring the topic of this thesis. I may never have written the following pages without you.

Thank you, also, to Michael Peachey from the University of New South Wales' *Nura Gili* and to Damita McGuinness from UTS' *Jumbunna*, for welcoming me into their universities' Indigenous centres and giving me some insight into the way they work.

My grateful thanks go to those who took the time to read, correct and offer their suggestions to improve the following pages: Myriam, Françoise, Jacquie, Lucie and Ifa, and Julien for skillfully and patiently assembling them.

I also wish to thank my most excellent group of friends and fellow PhD students, the *Anglaises* – Myriam, Ifa, Lizzie, Lucie, Anne and Elizabeth – for sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly over the years, and for always making the world a better place!

Special thanks to Ifa for sharing the day-to-day uncertainties, chocolate and gossip.

And thank you, Myriam, for always finding the right words and keeping my spirits up anywhere in the world for the last ten years.

To all my non-PhD friends, in France and in Australia, whose support has been – and always is – just as essential and appreciated, thank you.

Among them, my warmest thanks go to Antoine and Clara, and to Vroni and Nathan for making me feel at home away from home.

Finally, thank you to my family, to Laure, Alice and Christophe, and to my parents who have nurtured my interest in studying, who have always let me free to choose my own way, and who have encouraged and supported me in all my endeavours.

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General Introduction

Context and Research Questions

In 2010, as I lived in Sydney where I was already working on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and the representations of Indigeneity, Josh,¹ an Australian friend of mine told me, in the course of a conversation about my research, that he himself had Indigenous heritage. I had never suspected this as his physical appearance and last name quite obviously pointed to Anglo-Celtic heritage. My enthusiasm about his Indigenous ancestry was met by a more cautious reaction on his part. This seemed to be a topic he did talk about openly. Yes, he was interested in this part of his family history and in learning more about it. However, how would claiming his heritage be viewed considering the way he looked?

Josh grew up during the reconciliation era, at a time when Indigenous people and culture came to the forefront of the Australian political and cultural lives. In 1992, the Mabo judgements reversed the principle of *Terra Nullius* and recognised Indigenous people's right to their lands. The publication of two major reports, the 1991 report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and *Bringing Them Home*, the report on the Stolen Generations in 1997 made public the effects of past policies on Indigenous

¹ The names of the participants in this study were changed to preserve their anonymity.

people and generated shock and sympathy for them within the general public.² The background to these reports was the reconciliation policy set up in 1991 to promote a better understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the wider Australian society. The 2000 Sydney Olympics were to be a climax to the process of reconciliation, displaying to the world the image of a nation at peace with its past and moving as one towards a future built on equality for all. Aboriginal sportswoman Cathy Freeman became the face of reconciliation, and a symbol several of the people I interviewed mentioned as powerful. During the reconciliation era, Indigeneity took a visible place in the nation. Indigenous symbols – such as the famous dot painting style – started being used as representative of Australia. Commercials promoting the country abroad now include the ‘authentic’ Indigenous experience. ‘Acknowledgements of Country’ and ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremonies have become commonplace. The reconciliation era and the positive changes in the vision of Indigeneity it brought about are the background to Josh’s and the other ten participants’ upbringing. However, it is only a part of it.

Indeed, the reconciliation movement was limited in its scope. Critics argue that it was designed by and for non-Indigenous Australians, and that it remained symbolic. The 1990s and 2000s were also characterised by an ambivalent perception of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous Australians, with the election of the Howard government in favour of a more practical approach to reconciliation, and of the return to a more balanced view of history which did not denigrate Anglo-Celtic and European achievements. It was also a time of worry about national unity in the wake of Native Title claims starting around the country. As the reconciliation mood faded away with the new millennium – with the exception of the 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations – strict lines between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities were drawn again and historical power struggles over the definition of Indigeneity continued.³ Bronwyn Carlson summarises the ambivalent perception of Indigeneity in the reconciliation era and subsequent years:

² CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Doctoral Thesis, Sydney: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of New South Wales, 2011, p. 97.

³ For a more detailed account of this period, see 2.1.5.

[I]n this period, the significance of Aboriginal presence was to some extent accepted in Australian public life, albeit conditional and contingent. It was accepted within the 'sorry' discourse but contained where it was seen to exceed the parameters of this discourse, especially where it threatened national narratives of origin.⁴

For this project, I interviewed eleven young and fair-skinned Australians born in the 1980s and 1990s and raised in a 'white', Anglo-Celtic Australian culture, who also have Indigenous heritage in their families. I started this project thinking that having grown up at the time of reconciliation could have helped these eleven participants develop an interest in their heritage, and grow more confident about the idea of identifying as Indigenous as adults. But I realised that ambivalence was indeed at the heart of the relationship most participants had to Indigeneity. If the participants were indeed more open to discuss their Indigenous heritage than their parents, they were also very much aware of enduring negative representations of Indigeneity within 'mainstream' Australian society. Such representations were part of discourses presenting Indigenous people and culture in a stereotypical way. The strong influence of these discourses on the participants' perception of Indigeneity is evidence of the inability of the reconciliation movement to move beyond symbols and to bring actual people together. Restricting and dominant discourses about Indigeneity played an important part in the participants' constructions of their Indigenous identity, by framing their understandings of it, and by creating issues of legitimacy and control.

The ambivalent perception of Indigenous people by 'mainstream' Australia, blending an increasing interest in and knowledge about Indigenous people and culture on the one hand, and suspicion and rejection on the other, as well as the oppositional relationship between both groups form the basis for the analysis carried out in this thesis. These elements were already visible in the story about Josh I recounted at the beginning of this introduction. Josh seems aware of the complexity of the 'white' and Indigenous relationship. As a result, he is interested in his heritage and yet reluctant to embrace it. He

⁴CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Doctoral Thesis, Sydney: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of New South Wales, 2011.

is knowledgeable about the diverse experiences of Indigenous people today as a result of past policies – which affected his family – and yet influenced by discourses still presenting Indigenous people in a stereotypical way – here, as dark-skinned.

The conversation I had with Josh prompted me to analyse at the personal level what I had previously studied at a national level. The first question I want to study is the perception of Indigenous people and culture are in today's Australia, as well as the extent of the evolution of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians during and after the reconciliation era, and the effects of such a potential change on people like Josh. I ask whether or not individuals are now more willing and able to embrace their Indigenous heritage. By looking at which discourses about Indigeneity influence the participants, how these discourses encourage them to or prevent them from identifying as Indigenous, and what type of reactions they are confronted with when they claim their heritage, I can find elements of answer to this first question.

The group of people I decided to study is at the heart of the complex relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, both 'white' and Indigenous, both representative of the past colonial power and still dominant 'white' culture in Australia, and of the Indigenous minority asking for the recognition of its unique status. The participants inhabit an in-between space where Indigenous and 'white' identities cohabit, where they meet and oppose. As I will explain, the figure of the mixed-race Indigene in Australian history is that of an outcast, belonging nowhere. By analysing how the participants in this study position themselves and make sense of their mixed identities, the second issue I wish to consider is how this image has evolved, and how mixed identities, reflecting a postmodern outlook on the concept of identity, are accepted within the ambivalent context of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship in today's Australia.

Literature Review

I will explain in 1.2 that this thesis draws from various fields and theories. It aims at making sense of the identity journeys of eleven participants whose in-between status

positions them at the intersection of several research questions linked to the general question of identity construction: the construction of whiteness and of Indigeneity in Australia, the construction of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous – especially ‘white’ Anglo-Celtic – Australians, and the construction of the identities of people in-between these two groups.

With the exception of chapter 3 which is focused on analysing the concept of whiteness as a dominant, structuring concept in Australian society,⁵ most of the sources used in this thesis and which helped build my reflection are analyses of Indigenous identity and of its construction. However, it is impossible to look at Indigenous identity, especially as a construction, without analysing the colonial and post-colonial context in which this construction happened and continues to be built. Therefore, whether adopting an essentialist outlook on Indigeneity, or adopting a more open definition of it, the literature about the construction of Indigeneity is built around the relationship between Indigeneity and the rest of Australian society. Consequently, these analyses of Indigenous identity not only helped me understand Indigeneity itself, but also the links between whiteness, Australian-ness and Indigeneity in Australia, both from Indigenous and non-Indigenous points of view.

As Bronwyn Carlson explains, the debate about which criteria should be taken into account in the definition of Indigeneity has been constant from the creation of colonial

⁵ Considering that the concept of whiteness in this thesis is further studied in relation to the construction of Indigeneity, a thorough analysis of sources about whiteness as a separate concept was not carried out. Some of the main sources used to analyse the concept of whiteness in Australia outside of its influence on Indigeneity are Ghassan Hage's *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Nathan Ganley's doctoral thesis *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, Jan Larbalestier's article "What Is This Thing Called White? Reflections on 'Whiteness' and Multiculturalism" and Jon Stratton's *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*.

HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nations: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998.

GANLEY, Nathan T., *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Brisbane: School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland, 2007.

LARBALESTIER, Jan, "What Is This Thing Called White? Reflections on 'Whiteness' and Multiculturalism" in HAGE, Ghassan, COUCH, Rowanne (eds), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's 'The Migrant Presence'*, Sydney: Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1999, pp. 145-162.

STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998.

discourses about Indigenous people to present debates.⁶ The literature used in this thesis starts in the 1980s – when most participants were born – and ends in the present. The end of the twentieth century is a period of social and political changes during which the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians fluctuated (see 2.1.5). As I explained earlier in the introduction, the decades during which the participants grew up were marked by an ambivalent perception of Indigenous people.

The Non-Indigenous Relationship to Indigenous People

The ambivalent relationship non-Indigenous Australians have with Indigeneity was analysed in this thesis through several angles revealing the contradictions at the heart of this relationship.

Several authors emphasise the growing interest, even fascination, experienced by non-Indigenous Australians for Indigeneity, and the desire for reconciliation in the last decades of the twentieth century, but also point out their problematic aspects. Peter Read describes the non-Indigenous desire of belonging⁷ to the land in the same way as Indigenous people. Rolls describes the need for “black spice” in “white lives”.⁸ Cowlshaw, Elder *et al.*, E. Moran, Gooder and Jacobs,⁹ among others, analyse the problematic notion of reconciliation, a project often meant for ‘white’ Australians and carried out on their terms.

⁶ In her doctoral thesis, Carlson devotes three chapters to a thorough review of the discourses constructing the definition of Indigenous identity, especially that of ‘part-Indigenous’ people, from colonial to present representations.

CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today? Op. cit.*

⁷ READ, Peter, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁸ ROLLS, Mitchell, “Black Spice for White Lives”, *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, January 2000, pp. 149-161.

⁹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Mythologising Culture: Part 1, Desiring Aboriginality in the Suburbs”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 2010, Vol. 21, pp. 208-227.

COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Mythologising Culture: Part 2, Disturbing Aboriginality in the Suburbs”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 2011, Vol. 22, pp. 170-188.

ELDER, Catriona, PRATT, Angela, ELLIS, Cath, “Running Race: Reconciliation, Nationalism and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games”, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, pp. 181-200.

MORAN, Elizabeth, “Is Reconciliation in Australia a Dead End?”, *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, pp. 109-140.

Consequently, despite a growing interest in Indigenous people and culture, whiteness remains dominant in today's Australian society. Racism continues to be another major theme in today's research about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. Hollinsworth, Mellor, Paradies and Cunningham or Javasuriya¹⁰ are examples of authors working on racism in the past and in the present. Bullimore¹¹ analyses the treatment reserved for Indigenous people in the media. Indigenous journalist Stan Grant's articles¹² keep denouncing racism against Indigenous people in today's Australia. The case of footballer Adam Goodes is a recent example used in this thesis.

The Construction of Indigeneity

In academic literature, from the 1980s onwards, more attention was paid to Indigeneity as a constructed concept, which is what I focus on in this thesis. In his 1989 book, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Bain Attwood writes, "Whereas other historians have taken 'Aborigines' as a given, I have seen Aborigines as an historical phenomenon which can only be understood in the context of colonisation and of their relationships with Europeans."¹³

The links between Indigeneity and the factors contributing to its creations are the objects of study of many articles at the end of the twentieth century. Among them is the collection of articles in Jeremy Beckett's (ed.) 1988 *Past and Present: The Construction of*

GOODER, Haydie, JACOBS, Jane M., "On the Border of the Unsayable: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 "Righting Wrongs, Re-Writing History", 2000, pp. 229-247.

¹⁰ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, Melbourne, Victoria: Thomson Social Science Press, 2006 [1998].

MELLOR, David, "Contemporary Racism in Australia: The Experiences of Aborigines", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 29, Issue 4, pp. 474-486.

PARADIES, Yin, CUNNINGHAM, Joan, "Experiences of Racism Among Urban Indigenous Australians: Findings from the DRUID Study", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, March 2009, pp. 548-573.

JAYASURIYA, Laksui, "Understanding Australian Racism", *Australian Universities Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2002, pp. 40-44.

¹¹ BULLIMORE, Kevin, "Media Dreaming: Representation of Aboriginality in Modern Australian Media", *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, Vol. 6, 1999, pp. 72-81.

¹² GRANT, Stan, "Black Australia is a Foreign Place and I Feel Like a Foreign Correspondent in My Own Land", *The Guardian*, 7 December 2015.

GRANT, Stan, "I Can Tell You How Adam Goodes Feels. Every Indigenous Person Has Felt It.", *The Guardian*, 30 July 2015.

¹³ ATTWOOD, Bain, *The Making of the Aborigines*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1989, p. 147.

Aboriginality. These articles were originally presented at a conference of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies which aimed at emphasising the constructed aspect of Indigeneity. As Beckett explains, the appeal for contributions went as follows: “There has been some tendency among anthropologists to regard Aboriginality as unproblematic. To do so is to ignore a process of cultural construction that is integral to the working out of relations between Aboriginal and European Australians.”¹⁴ ¹⁵ In this collection, the construction of Indigeneity is analysed in relation to the nation-state (Beckett’s “The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality”, Morris’ “The Politics of Identity: From Aborigines to the First Australian”) or to anthropology¹⁶ (Gillian Cowlshaw’s “The Materials for Identity Construction”). This collection also looks at issues regarding the construction of Indigeneity which are central to other discussions about this concept. One of them is the weight of traditional-only representations of ‘authentic’ Indigenous people. Deirdre Jordan’s “Aboriginal Identity: Uses of the Past, Problems for the Future?” analyses the role of bringing traditional, past elements into present constructions of Indigeneity, an issue I analyse in chapter 7 as I study the importance of traditional representations of Indigeneity for the participants.¹⁷ Jane M. Jacobs’ “The Construction of Identity” also analyses the issue of traditional representations of Indigeneity¹⁸ in the claim for land rights.

This selection of examples shows the importance in academic literature of questioning taken-for-granted definitions of Indigeneity, and of exploring it as a concept in evolution.

¹⁴ BECKETT, Jeremy (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, e-book, 1988.

¹⁵ In her 1993 essay, Marcia Langton also insists on the mutual construction of Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity.

LANGTON, Marcia, *‘Well, I Heard It on the Radio and I Saw It on the Television...’: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, Woolloomooloo, NSW: Australian Film Commission, 1993.

¹⁶ The role of anthropology in the construction of the definition of Indigeneity is also studied by Cowlshaw in 1987, in “Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists”.

¹⁷ The use of the past in the definition of Indigeneity in the present is also part of Andrew Lattas’ 1993 “Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity” in which he defends this use, something Jordan does not.

¹⁸ Robert Tonkinson’s 1999 “The Pragmatics and Politics of Aboriginal Tradition and Identity in Australia” is another example of a reflection on the meaning of traditional Indigeneity.

TONKINSON, Robert, “The Pragmatics and Politics of Aboriginal Tradition and Identity in Australia”, *Journal de la Société des océanistes*, Vol. 109, No. 2, 1999, pp. 133-147.

Thus, the focus on traditional Indigeneity in anthropology and in the general representation of Indigenous people is called into question. The questioning of this concept led to a greater attention being paid to non-traditional Indigenous people, to the analysis of urban Indigeneity, and to the rehabilitation of mixed-race Indigenous people historically regarded as “cultureless outcasts”.¹⁹

In “Urbanizing Aborigines, the Social Scientists’ Great Deception”, Marcia Langton was one of the first academics to denounce anthropologists’ distinction between so-called ‘real’ Indigenous people and culture-less urban populations. More recently, other Indigenous authors like Bronwyn Fredericks²⁰ and Larissa Behrendt²¹ have defended their right to be Indigenous while living in urban areas and mingling with ‘mainstream’ Australian society. The analysis of how Indigenous people maintain a sense of identity in an urban context is an important topic of academic discussion in this period and today, still. Articles about this subject include David Hollinsworth’s “Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia”, Geoffrey Gray’s “[The Sydney School] Seem[s] to View the Aborigines as Forever Unchanging’: South-Eastern Australia and Australian Anthropology”, Tim Rowse’s “Transforming the Notion of the Urban Aborigine”, Yuriko Yamanouchi’s “Managing ‘Aboriginal selves’ in South-Western Sydney” and “Kinship, Organisations and ‘Wannabes’: Aboriginal Identity Negotiation in South-Western Sydney”, or George Morgan’s book *Unsettled places: Aboriginal people and urbanisation in New South Wales*²² Recently,

¹⁹ CREAMER, Howard, “Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the Image of Cultureless Outcasts” in BECKETT, Jeremy (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988.

²⁰ FREDERICKS, Bronwyn, “Urban Identity”, *Eureka Street*, Vol. 14, No. 10, pp. 30-31.

²¹ BEHRENDT, Larissa, “Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 2015, pp. 55-61.

²² HOLLINSWORTH, David, “Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia”, *Oceania*, Vol. 63, No. 2, December 1992, pp. 137-155.

GRAY, Geoffrey, “[The Sydney School] Seem[s] to View the Aborigines as Forever Unchanging’: South-Eastern Australia and Australian Anthropology”, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 24, 2000, pp. 175-199.

YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, “Managing ‘Aboriginal selves’ in South-Western Sydney”, *Oceania*, Vol. 82, 2012, pp. 62-73.

YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, “Kinship, Organisations and ‘Wannabes’: Aboriginal Identity Negotiation in South-Western Sydney”, Vol. 80, No. 2, July 2010, pp. 216-228.

MORGAN, George, *Unsettled places: Aboriginal people and urbanisation in New South Wales*, Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2006.

Reuben Bolt also wrote a doctoral thesis about “Urban Aboriginal Identity Construction”,²³ These studies highlight Indigenous people’s responses to the consequences of colonisation and contend that Indigenous identity is not necessarily remote and traditional, and most importantly, that it is constantly being re-invented by Indigenous people.

Another important area for this research project is the evolution of the analysis of mixed-race Indigeneity. Several of the studies quoted previously also analyse this topic. Indeed, it is in urban centres that the Indigenous population is most mixed. In chapter 9, I describe the historically negative vision of ‘hybrid’ Indigenous people until the middle of the twentieth century.²⁴ The focus on traditional Indigeneity meant that mixed-race Indigenous people were not considered ‘real’ Indigenous people in the same way urban Indigenous people’s authenticity is still doubted today. Although this vision of hybridity is no longer used, of particular interest for this thesis is the analysis of the persistence of discourses presenting ‘authentic’ Indigeneity as traditional, remote, and black.

Several Indigenous authors share their experiences of not fitting in these essential definitions of Indigeneity. For example, Jean Boladeras²⁵ and Maureen Perkins²⁶ explore the issues of skin colour in relation to the act of passing as ‘white’. Bindi Bennett’s recent article “How Do Light-Skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?”²⁷ tackles similar

²³BOLT, Reuben, *Urban Aboriginal Identity Construction in Australia: An Aboriginal Perspective Using Multi-Method Qualitative Analysis*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Sydney: The University of Sydney, 2010.

²⁴ See for example Henry Reynolds’ study of mixed-race people whom he calls “nowhere people”. Indigenous academic Ian Anderson also analyses hybridity in Tasmania. John McCorquodale, in his study of the many definitions of Indigeneity used in history describes the blood-quantum system of definition of Indigenous people and the treatment reserved for ‘hybrids’.

REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, London: Penguin, e-book, 2008.

ANDERSON, Ian, “I, the ‘hybrid’ Aborigine: Film and Representation”, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Issue 1, 1997, pp. 4-14.

MCCORQUODALE, John, “The Legal Classification of Race in Australia”, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 10, No. ½, 1986, pp. 7-24.

²⁵ BOLADERAS, Jean, *It’s Easier to Be Black If You’re Black*, unpublished Masters Thesis, Perth: Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology, 2002.

BOLADERAS, Jean, “The Desolate Loneliness of Racial Passing” in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 49-63.

²⁶PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2007.

²⁷ BENNETT, Bindi, “How do light-skinned Aboriginal Australians experience racism?”, *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous People*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2014.

issues to those experienced by the participants and analysed in chapter 6. The problems encountered by fair-skinned Indigenous people, and more generally by people who do not fit the restricted, fixed definitions inherited from the past are an important topic of today's discussion about Indigeneity in which authenticity is now linked to the question of financial benefits. This was made clear in columnist Andrew Bolt's articles for the *Herald Sun* in 2009,²⁸ and in other debates in the media such as the SBS *Insight* program entitled "Aboriginal or not? Who Gets to Determine Who Is Aboriginal?"²⁹

Paradoxically, one of the responses of Indigenous people to the imposition of definitions through history was to protect the specificity of their identity by using essential elements of definition themselves. Thus, characteristics such as a specific relationship to the land, an inherent sense of 'caring and sharing' (see 8.3) are described as Indigenous qualities only. The opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is therefore reinforced at a time when Indigeneity is recognised as a constructed concept, and when people like the participants become more attracted to their Indigenous heritage but are thus prevented from claiming it. The debate around the use of essentialism as an empowering tool of self-identification is a significant one in today's academic writings in Australia, and in this thesis. The ability for the participants in this study to embrace both their 'white' culture and Indigenous heritage is severely limited by the enduring dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia which is reaffirmed by essentialist definitions of both groups.

On one side of the debate, then, are authors, Indigenous or not, defending the right for Indigenous people to claim a separate identity based on essential traits. Some of these are Andrew Lattas,³⁰ Jackie Huggins,³¹ or Larissa Behrendt.³² On the other side are scholars defending a constructed vision of Indigeneity which allows individuals to identify in

²⁸ BOLT, Andrew, "It's So Hip to Be Black", *The Herald Sun*, 15 April 2009.

BOLT, Andrew, "White Fellas in the Black", *The Herald Sun*, 21 August 2009.

²⁹ "Aboriginal or not? Who Gets to Determine Who Is Aboriginal?", *SBS Insight*, 7 August 2012

³⁰ LATTAS, Andrew, "Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity", *Oceania*, Vol. 63, No. 3, March 1993, pp. 240-267.

³¹ HUGGINS, Jackie, "Always Was, Always Will Be" in GROSSMAN, Michele (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003, pp. 60-65.

³² BEHRENDT, Larissa, "Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings", *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 2015, pp. 55-61.

various ways allowing them to embrace different meaningful parts of who they are. Among them, Myrna Tonkinson³³ warns against the use of the blood discourse which refers to divisive definitions of Indigeneity based on blood quantum and used in the colonial era. Carlson, Nakata and Harris³⁴ defend a definition of identity recognising the diversity of Indigenous experiences in today's Australia, and denounce the pressure to conform exercised by the Indigenous community, and which is reminiscent of that Indigenous people were subjected to under the colonial rule. On the non-Indigenous side of the debate, Rolls³⁵ or Bell³⁶ also analyse the negative effects of perpetuating a strict division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at a time when identity is recognised as plural and in movement (Ganter).^{37 38}

Personal accounts lamenting the impossibility of having the effects of colonial disruptions on Indigenous families recognised³⁹ mirror several Indigenous people's claims to be allowed to embrace their different heritages (Holland, Dillon, Paradies, Anderson).⁴⁰ These claims are not well-received by Indigenous people defending an "either/or" identity separate from that of non-Indigenous Australians. However, such a plural vision of identity

³³ TONKINSON, Myrna, "Going Backwards After Abbott's 'Urban Aboriginal Gaffe'", *Eureka Street*, 18 November 2012.

³⁴ HARRIS, Michelle, NAKATA, Martin, CARLSON, Bronwyn (eds), *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, Sydney: UTS ePress, 2013.

CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Doctoral Thesis, Sydney: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of New South Wales, 2011.

³⁵ ROLLS, Mitchell, "The Meaninglessness of Aboriginal Cultures", *Balayi*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2001, pp. 7-20.

³⁶ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

³⁷ GANTER, Regina, "Turning Aboriginal-Historical Bents", *Borderlands e-Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2008, pp. 1-19.

³⁸ On the question of essentialism, also see KEEFFE, Kevin, "Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence", *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 1, 1988, pp. 67-81

THIELE, Steven, "Introduction", *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, August 1991, pp. 157-160.

³⁹ See, for example, Lynette Russel, or Henry Reynolds's personal conclusion to *Nowhere People*.

RUSSEL, Lynette, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2002.

REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, London: Penguin, e-book, 2008.

⁴⁰ HOLLAND, Wendy, "Rehearsing Multiple Identities" in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 85-102.

DILLON, Anthony, "Defining Aboriginality", *Digital Global Mail Limited*, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/46864147>

PARADIES, Yin C., "Beyond black and white: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, Issue 4, 2006, pp. 355-367.

ANDERSON, Ian, "I, the 'hybrid' Aborigine: Film and Representation", *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Issue 1, 1997, pp. 4-14.

recognises the evolution of this concept as described by Stuart Hall – multiple and in constant evolution (see 1.2.3.2).

These attempts to broaden the definition of Indigeneity – in a context of enduring contest between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for the control of this definition – are at the heart of recent debates about Indigenous identity, and of this thesis. Bronwyn Carlson explains that a recent evolution within this debate is, as several examples given previously show, the increasing Indigenous production about this topic.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, increasing numbers of identity studies were undertaken by Aboriginal people. Many of these attempt to represent the ‘inside view’ experienced in journeys of re-discovery of Aboriginal identity.⁴¹ Some place more emphasis on the constructed nature of Aboriginal identities, including ways of publicly and privately expressing Aboriginal identity in changing urban or local context.⁴² Together these studies highlight the precarious position of urban, light-skinned, ‘dual-heritage’ and/or newly-identifying Aboriginal people and how they are positioned by discursive practices that continue to regulate and police Aboriginal identities as either Aboriginal or not Aboriginal.⁴³

The conversations in the scholarly literature [in the last twenty years] reveal the difficulties and challenges faced [in particular] by (...) [dislocated Aboriginal people] who discover a submerged Aboriginal connection in their family history, and who wish to explore it and re-establish membership of the Aboriginal collective, [and] find themselves traversing a complex terrain shaped by the [historical] discursive history.⁴⁴

41 Carlson cites Jean Boladeras’ thesis, already mentioned, Chelsea Bond’s 2007 doctoral thesis, *“When you’re black, they look at you harder”: Narrating Aboriginality within public health* or Fiona Noble’s 1996 Masters’ Thesis *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning About Their Aboriginality*.

BOND, Chelsea, *“When You’re Black, They Look at You Harder”: Narrating Aboriginality within public health*, unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Queensland, 2007.

NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning About Their Aboriginality*, unpublished Masters Thesis, Griffith University, 1996.

⁴² See LAMBERT-PENNINGTON, *Being in Australia, Belonging to the Land: The Cultural Politics of Urban Aboriginal Identity*, unpublished, Doctoral Thesis, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 2005

GREENOP, Kelly, *Place meaning, attachment and identity in contemporary Indigenous Inala, Queensland*, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, School of architecture, The University of Queensland, 2009

Or Reuben Bolt’s thesis mentioned earlier.

⁴³ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today? Op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

This research project falls within this group of recent studies about “dislocated” Indigenous people and within the debate around the need to open up the definition of Indigeneity in order to recognise the variety of Indigenous experiences resulting from past treatments of Indigenous people. This debate also stresses the now significant role of the Indigenous community in restricting Indigenous people’s identity choices, thus shifting the criticisms about identity policing from ‘white’ to ‘black’ Australia.

This thesis is particularly related to two studies from Indigenous writers: Fiona Noble’s *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning About Their Aboriginality* and, more recently, Bronwyn Carlson’s *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Both studies emphasise that Indigeneity is constructed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and consider the identity journeys of their participants. Both stress the difficulties for mixed-heritage participants learning about their Indigeneity to make sense of what being Indigenous means – having been influenced by a plethora of discourses coming from non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities – and to find their place in a society where the boundaries of identity are clearly marked, and where ‘black’ and ‘white’ are often still opposed.

The first difference between this thesis and the two studies described above is the standpoint adopted. Being a non-Indigenous – and non-Australian – researcher may have affected my point of view on the notion of Indigenous identity, as I am less personally involved – whether as ‘white’ Australian or as Indigenous – in the understanding of this concept. As far as the content is concerned, a few specificities to this study should be noted. First, my aim was to interview exclusively ‘young’ Australian in order to analyse the effects of the policy of reconciliation, and of the more general evolution in the perception of Indigenous people and culture in the 1990s and 2000s. Secondly, the place of whiteness in this study is significant. It was clearly present in the recruitment of participants (asked to have been “raised in a white Australian culture”, see 1.1.2.1) and in the subsequent analysis. The aim was to study the dominant status of whiteness and of ‘white’ discourses about Indigeneity, and their influence on the participants’ vision of Indigenous people and culture. I also wanted to analyse how the participants’ privileged status as ‘whites’ in

Australian society affected their relationship to their Indigenous heritage. This status of the participants is particularly significant when studying the degree of control they have over their identity, and the way they choose – and are able to – identify in plural and fluctuating ways (see chapter 10).

Other differences lie in the way the primary data – the interviews – is used in relation to the theory. While Australian theses I have read often separate the two in their development, this research project constructs a reflection not only on Indigenous identity, but more generally on the notion of plural identities, through a constant confrontation of theoretical works – but also of sources from the media or the internet – with extracts from the interviews.⁴⁵ The variety of theories brought in to examine the participants' discourses (see 1.2) helps shed light on issues of in-between-ness in different ways, and explore the concept of identity from diverse angles. I believe this is where the originality of this particular project lies.

Thus, this research project should contribute to the recent Australian literature about people learning about their Indigeneity and the difficulties which are specific to people in-between, while also bringing a different perspective on this group of people and on identities lived in-between more generally.

Outline

This thesis is divided into four parts.

The first part, “Contexts”, presents a methodological, theoretical and historical background to the reflection carried out in the thesis. Chapter 1 details the methods and theories used in this research project, while chapter 2 presents the main developments in the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and their influences on the participants' families.

⁴⁵ The primary sources always came first in this process. Theory was brought in to further analyse it.

The second part, “Constructing Indigeneity and whiteness”, explains how the main groups analysed in this thesis were constructed. Chapter 3 presents the concept of whiteness in Australia and explains how it still is central and dominant in today’s Australian society. Chapter 4 and chapter 5 detail the ambivalent construction of the notion of Indigeneity by non-Indigenous people.

In the third part, “Authenticity and legitimacy”, three of the major discourses delineating ‘authentic’ Indigeneity, and how the participants relate to them, are studied. Chapter 6 is an analysis of the links between authenticity and skin colour. Chapter 7 describes how authentic Indigeneity is also imagined in time and in space, as traditional and remote. Chapter 8 analyses the discourse of Indigenous disadvantage.

The fourth and final part of this thesis, “Part-identities”, analyses how the participants in this study deal with their in-between position as ‘white’ and Indigenous. Chapter 9 looks at the concept of in-between-ness as problematic and difficult to move beyond considering the enduring dichotomy between ‘white’ and ‘black’ Australia. By using the theories of hybridity and of postmodern identity, Chapter 10 presents ways in which some of the participants managed to overcome this dichotomy and to accommodate the different parts of their identities in their everyday lives.

PART I

Contexts

The first part of this thesis is an introduction to the main questions tackled in Part II to IV. It delineates both the methodological and historical contexts on which this research project is based.

Chapter 1 details the methods used to collect the data which is at the heart of this project, and the methods chosen to analyse it. It also describes the field of studies and paradigm within which this project falls, before identifying some of the main theories used to make sense of the data.

Chapter 2 offers a chronological description of the main developments in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia from 1770 to the present. Considering that the rest of this thesis will be ordered thematically, the aim of this chapter is to present a factual historical context which can be referred to in the problematised analysis of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians developed in subsequent chapters.

Based on the historical events previously described, chapter 2 also presents a background to the participants' stories. The very existence of such a group of people who

have grown up without knowing – or knowing little – about their Indigenous heritage, is the result of past treatments of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous Australian governments and society. This chapter sheds light on the effects of past policies and treatments of Indigenous people on the participants' families, and therefore on the participants themselves.

CHAPTER 1

Methods, Methodologies and Theories

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain how I collected the data I use in this thesis, and I will present the methods I have used to analyse it. I will then explain which research field and paradigm I have chosen, and comment on the theoretical framework I have used to make sense of the primary sources.

1.1 Methods and Methodologies

1.1.1 Qualitative Research

I approached this project from a qualitative point of view and used qualitative methods in my research.

A focus on a qualitative approach to this project was both imposed and chosen. As I will explain in 1.1.3, I had difficulty finding participants for this project. This is mostly due to the nature of the group of people I decided to study. I wanted to analyse the reasons why young Australians having received a 'white' upbringing but having Indigenous heritage decided or not to explore it. Therefore, I was interested in people who were *in the process* of learning about Indigeneity and how to personally relate to it. This particular status of the

participants meant that they were not easy to find: it is unlikely that someone who is going through the private and complex process of coming to terms with their Indigenous heritage will advertise it. Moreover, as this thesis will demonstrate, considering that relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are sometimes tense, claiming one's Indigenous heritage with little or no links to the Indigenous community can be difficult. As a result, a limited number of participants were interviewed. This automatically limited the scope of this study.

But above all, a qualitative study was better suited to the concept of identity I focus on in this project. A qualitative approach allowed me to better take into account the diversity of the participants' responses, and to study identity from an individual point of view. This is particularly relevant to the vision of identity highlighted in this study. In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Uwe Flick explains that "qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations due to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds", something Ulrich Beck (quoted by Flick) calls the "individualisation of ways of living and biographical patterns". Flick argues that "This pluralization requires a new sensitivity to the empirical study of issues. (...) Locally, temporally, and situationally limited narratives are now required."¹ Flick also mentions the postmodern outlook on identity which describes this concept as multiple and fluctuating (see 1.2.3.2). In sum, a qualitative approach to the question of identity meant that, while I looked for common patterns in the participants' understandings of Indigeneity and of their identities, I also paid attention to individual differences in narratives of identity constructions.

As far as the scope of this project is concerned, considering the limited number of participants and my choice to focus on their personal definitions, the conclusions I will draw about these subjective issues will need to be put into perspective. I believe that such perspective can come from a comparison of this study with other past and future similar analyses, and that adding evidence to support or refute these is part of the value of such a qualitative research project.

¹ FLICK, Uwe, "The Relevance of Qualitative Research" in *An Introduction to Qualitative Research, Edition 4*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2009 [1998], p. 12.

1.1.2 Interviews

1.1.2.1 Deciding Who to Interview

Figure 1: flyer to recruit participants.



This flyer which I used to recruit the participants in this study reveals upon which criteria they were selected. I will now explain how these were adopted.

The first criterion mentioned on this flyer is age. As explained in the general introduction, one of the assumptions I started with was that the reconciliation era which spanned over the 1990s had – to a certain extent –brought about a positive evolution in the perceptions non-Indigenous Australians had of Indigenous culture and identity. I was under the impression that Indigenous culture was now more attractive, something which several demonstrations of goodwill towards Indigenous people² in the 1990s and 2000s

² The reconciliation era was filled with events of symbolic importance, both public and official, such as the successful reconciliation walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000, or the government's official apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008.

Another illustration of the non-Indigenous community's involvement in the reconciliation project is the Sorry Books: following the recommendations of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report on the impact of the removal policy, and the subsequent refusal from former Prime Minister John Howard to offer an official apology, apologies from diverse bodies and individuals flourished: "Various formal apologies from governments and

seemed to confirm. Therefore, I wondered to what extent having Indigenous heritage would now be viewed with more pride than shame, as it so often was the case for previous generations (see 2.2). Having grown up during the reconciliation era was therefore the first criterion I chose to recruit participants.

As well as having had a general exposure to more positive depictions of Indigenous culture during their childhoods, there was also a chance that young Australians might have received different teachings about Indigeneity at school (see 5.3.1.2). When the participants were growing up, a more balanced view of the process of colonisation was starting to emerge, as well as a more accurate presentation of the diversity of Indigenous people and cultures. I wondered to what extent this generation of students had acquired a more complex knowledge of Indigeneity.

I also wondered if, as adults, individuals with Indigenous heritage would feel encouraged to research their heritage if they had previously gained a subtler understanding of Indigenous people and culture through positive but also more varied depictions presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as living and evolving.

The second criterion was that the participants should have received a 'white Australian' education. Although I knew the term 'white' deserved further explanations, I did not thoroughly question its use when I distributed these flyers. It is a term which is widely used in Australia to talk about what is also called 'mainstream Australian culture', that is to say that of the Anglo-Celtic, and later European, 'white' Australians who colonised the country. The concept of whiteness in Australia linked to the idea of a mainstream, Anglo-Celtic-European culture, will be the subject of chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say

organizations have been accompanied by a proliferation of personal apologies from ordinary Australians. (...) By May 1998, just four months after the original Sorry Book was opened, it was estimated that over a thousand Sorry Books had been opened nation-wide and over a million signatures and personal apologies collected"

GOODER, Haydie and JACOBS, Jane M., "'On the border of the unsayable': The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2000, pp. 230-240.

that I understood being “raised in a white Australian culture” as meaning that the potential participants should not have been raised in an Indigenous cultural environment.

In hindsight, I further reflected on the decision to use the term ‘white’ rather than ‘non-Indigenous’. This had implications beyond the problematic conflation of colour and culture. Indeed, the use of ‘white’ narrowed down the participants to people whose heritage was British, Irish, or European (see 3.2.3). It did not include other ethnicities whose cultural backgrounds would not be represented by the expression ‘white Australian’. This choice was both dictated by personal interest and by historical reasons. I had been studying colonial and post-colonial relationships in Australia with a focus on ‘black’ and ‘white’ power struggles and I had become interested in this topic. Beyond this, the relationship between ‘white’ settlers and their descendants, and Indigenous people, can be set apart from relationships between other groups of Australians and Indigenous people. This can be explained by the long domination of ‘white’ settlers and of ‘white’ culture over Indigenous people and over Australia as a whole.

‘White’ settlers colonised Australia and, in so doing, positioned themselves from the start as superior to the Indigenous populations whose lands were stolen and whose status as first inhabitants was not recognised. This dominant status of whiteness in Australia over the years has meant that many Indigenous people were forced or chose to assimilate into ‘white’ society. This explains why the knowledge about many families’ Indigenous heritage was lost and the fact that many people who see their culture as ‘mainstream Australian’ can, today, still, find out about their Indigenous background.

The domination exercised over Indigenous populations and the hierarchy set up between colours have created strong divides between Indigenous people and ‘white’ Australians, which renders new identification as Indigenous complex and sensitive issues on both sides. It is because I wanted to explore this specific relationship between whiteness, Indigeneity and Australian-ness that I decided to focus on participants with a ‘white’ cultural upbringing.

It is interesting to see that, despite the fact that the use of the word 'white' to describe an upbringing is questionable, none of the participants commented on it, which tends to prove that this word is commonly used to refer to the 'mainstream' Anglo-Celtic-European-based Australian culture.

In the same way that 'white' was left unquestioned, either by myself at the beginning of this project, or by the participants, the notion of being 'raised Indigenous' was not specifically defined at first. I am aware that this is a problematic notion and that there are obviously many different ways of being raised Indigenous. Location, socio-economic statuses of the families, proximity or not and links or absence of them with the communities, personal and formal educational choices are some of the factors which will make Indigenous educations different. In spite of my lack of precision, I was not questioned on the meaning of an Indigenous upbringing, and in the interviews, a majority of the participants spontaneously mentioned that they had not been raised Indigenous. Several identified as 'white Australians' as I will explain. The fact that this expression did not raise any questions tends to show that despite the vast array of Indigenous educations in today's Australia, there seemed to be a set of criteria in the participants' minds defining what it means to grow up Indigenous. The participants seemed to understand not having been raised Indigenous as not having grown up learning about the traditional culture from the place where their Indigenous community is from, or even about more general Indigenous cultural knowledge. To them, it also meant that they had been raised in a nuclear family rather than as part of a larger community. Other criteria which were not exactly related to education were nevertheless linked to Indigeneity for some of the participants, and are linked to the expression 'lived experience' used by one of them to describe what she lacked. Those were 'having been disadvantaged' (in terms of education or living conditions, for example) and 'having experienced racism'.

In short, the people who replied to the advertisement understood it this way: Indigeneity could have been present in the periphery of their education, but could not have been its central element.

Of course, the participants' vision of what an Indigenous education is – and mine when I started – was influenced by a non-Indigenous, general understanding of Indigeneity and particularly by the idea of 'traditional' Indigeneity as the main standard to which one should conform.³

The third and final criterion was that the participants should not have known about their Indigenous heritage during their childhoods, or, if they had, not have identified as Indigenous then. This criterion is linked to the other two: through these participants' experiences, I wanted to study the evolution of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians during and after the reconciliation era. But it is the point of view of Australians whose childhood had been spent in the 'mainstream' part of society, and who would therefore be outsiders to Indigenous culture, that I was most interested in. In studying how the participants viewed their Indigenous heritage, I hoped to understand if and how the way Indigenous people were perceived by non-Indigenous Australians was evolving. I thought it important for the participants not to have been raised Indigenous to analyse how learning about their Indigenous heritage while having grown up 'white' would affect them, and to see what their reactions could tell me about the way Indigenous people are perceived in today's Australia. I was also particularly interested in the participants' in-between status, the effects of which, I believed, could be more deeply felt since the participants had not known about their heritage for a number of years. I wondered how the participants would position themselves after having "strictly be[en] white" as Adam, one of the participants, said, and having been exposed mostly to non-Indigenous representations of Indigenous people, but now discovering that Indigeneity is a part of their heritage and a potential part of their identity.

1.1.2.2 Collecting the Data

Finding participants for this research project was not an easy task, which explains the relatively small number of people interviewed in the end (eleven).

³ The notion of 'traditional' Indigeneity and its predominance are analysed in chapter 7.

The first difficulty was of a geographical nature since I have had to divide my time between France and Australia and since, apart from one participant living in Paris, all others resided in Australia.

As I explained in 1.1.1, the second difficulty lay in the criteria I chose to select the participants. I wanted to speak to people who were starting to approach their Indigenous heritage, and who would not have identified yet, or not long before the interview. Consequently, I expected these people would still be dealing with this knowledge and be in the process of defining what it meant to them. They would not be Indigenous people embedded in their communities. This is the reason why the participants were not easily found. For example, I left copies of the flyer at the Redfern⁴ Community Centre or at the Sydney Eora College for Aboriginal Studies, which did not bring any results. From this, I concluded that people visiting the Community Centre or attending this college would mostly be Indigenous people who already identified as such and were comfortable with their identification.

There were few places where I could approach potential participants who were probably not too certain themselves about where to go and who to turn to in order to engage with Indigenous people and culture. Some of the places where I could have recruited participants were the Indigenous centres in universities. As it turned out, several participants mentioned these centres as spaces where they felt comfortable identifying, or simply asking questions about their heritage.

When I started advertising my project, there was no longer a specific room for the University of Sydney Koori Centre. I therefore posted advertisement around campus. I went to, or sent flyers to, several universities around Sydney including Macquarie University, the University of New South Wales (UNSW), the University of Technology of Sydney (UTS) or the University of Western Sydney (UWS). However, I did not receive any replies from students going to these centres.

⁴ Redfern is a suburb of Sydney known for its high rate of Indigenous inhabitants.

Part I

Another recruiting tool I used was the placement of advertisements in *The Koori Mail*, a national Indigenous newspaper. Although I assumed that the readership would probably not correspond to the people I wanted to talk to – being, once again, more clearly identified Indigenous people – I received two replies from Miriam and Adina.

I found two other participants through the website of the Australian TV channel SBS. At the time when I started looking for participants, an *Insight*⁵ program had been devoted to the questions of the rising number of identifications as Indigenous, and to the issue of which criteria can be used to define Indigeneity. The program⁶ dealt with many of the themes I will study in this thesis such as skin colour, legitimacy, part-identifications, certificates of Aboriginality, or financial benefits. It sparked a lot of comments on the website. Among these were those of Casey and Megan who I managed to contact through Facebook, and later interviewed.

Adam was another participant I found through the internet. Adam's story featured in an article from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, published ten years earlier, about the rise of identifications among Indigenous people with a fair skin. In this article, Adam explained that although he looked white, he fully embraced his Indigenous heritage, along with his French, Scottish and other backgrounds, and Australian identity. He agreed to meet me to correct some of the mistakes present in the article, and to tell me how he had dealt with his Indigenous heritage in the years preceding and following the article.

Michelle was the only participant whom I interviewed in France. I had posted my research project on the forum of the Australian Expats Meetup Group in Paris and received her reply.

The rest of the participants were either Australians I knew personally and who had previously hinted at their Indigenous backgrounds in conversations we had (Josh and Kate), or people who were contacted by Australian friends of mine after I created a

⁵ SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) is a radio, online and television network founded in 1975 to provide multicultural and multilingual programs. *Insight* is a current affairs TV program.

⁶ Full transcript of the program available here: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/tvepisode/aboriginal-or-not>

Facebook page asking for help in finding participants. This is how I met Andrew, Ben and Vanessa. It turned out that word of mouth was the best way to find participants since several of them, as I explained, were still processing the meaning of their Indigenous heritage and therefore unlikely to identify openly. Several participants would only confide in their close friends or family members. I was able to interview Josh and Kate because I knew them personally. Josh specifically mentioned this to me: “It definitely helped you in that, if I didn’t know you already, I would not have participated.” In the same way, an Australian friend came to tell me that one of his high school friends had recently discovered that he had an Indigenous background. Ben had grown up with little interest or knowledge in Indigenous culture and originally refused to talk to me about the way he felt about this heritage. He finally agreed to answer my questions via emails.

Although I would have been interested in meeting more people like Ben who are not interested in researching their Indigenous heritage or in identifying, this proved difficult. I think it is a possibility that it could be tricky for someone to acknowledge their lack of interest in their Indigenous heritage, if asked directly, as this is a sensitive topic which can be subject to political correctness. The other reason for the absence of such stories is of course that someone who is not interested in his/her Indigenous heritage is very unlikely to want to discuss it at length with a researcher.

1.1.2.3 The Participants⁷

1.1.2.3.1 Gender, Physical Appearance and Age

All participants have a fair skin which does not signal their Indigenous heritage. Three of the participants have features which have prompted people to ask them “what they have in them”, as Megan said, because these features can indicate non-Anglo-Celtic or European origins. One of the participants mentioned her “olive skin”, another her curly black hair which “seems to throw people off”, and another described herself as “un-identifiable”,

⁷ Refer to appendix 3 for individual forms presenting the main characteristics of the participants and timelines of their stories.

having been mistaken for a Caribbean, Sicilian, Indian or Middle-Eastern woman at different times in her life. However, none of the participants experienced being identified straight away as Indigenous, which has been perceived as either an advantage or an obstacle (see chapter 6).

At the time of the interviews (2013-2014), the participants were aged between 19 and 34. Five participants were in their thirties, five were in their twenties and one in his late teens. The participants who were in their thirties often remembered the highlights of the reconciliation era, as well as the Mabo decision⁸ or the rise of sportswoman Cathy Freeman better than the younger ones who were probably too young to understand or care very much about this.

No previous thought was given to balancing the number of male and female participants given the difficulty of finding interviewees in the first place. In the end, six of the participants were female, and five were male. The study of differences in identity perceptions based on gender was not part of my initial project. Within the group I studied, I did not perceive a strong impact of gender on the participants' views about their heritage or on their ability or not to identify.⁹ The high level of education of all participants and their lives in major Australian cities may have smoothed out differences to a certain extent. Nevertheless, no conclusion can be drawn at this point without paying more attention to this question.

⁸ The 1992 Mabo decision put an end to the *Terra Nullius* principle which was the justification for the colonisation and settlement of Australia (see 2.1.5.3). It was given an important coverage in the media and the fear that Indigenous people would take back their lands was something several participants clearly remembered.

⁹ There was one instance in which a difference between male and female participants may have existed. In 6.3.1.1.1, Megan explains that people complimented her olive skin and asked her where it came from. She enjoyed the attention her skin colour drew. In their study of mixed-race people in Britain, Peter Aspinall and Miri Song noticed that physical ambiguity was mainly perceived as positive among their female participants. However, considering that none of the male participants in this study had olive skin, no comparison can be made with the female participants.

1.1.2.3.2 Geography, Education and Work

Kate and Megan grew up in a Sydney suburb, as well as Adam who later moved to regional New South Wales, not far from Sydney, where Ben was also raised. Adina, Miriam and Andrew grew up in further regional or coastal parts of New South Wales. Josh spent most of his childhood in Canberra, in the Australian Capital State, while Casey was born in New Zealand but left at the age of five to live on the Gold Coast, in Queensland. Michelle was raised in a very small town of regional Victoria. Vanessa grew up in the capital city of South Australia, Adelaide. She also spent part of her adolescence in the United States, in New York. Six participants went to a private school. All of them moved to major cities – Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Wollongong, Newcastle or the Gold Coast – to pursue tertiary studies, and they all lived in urban areas at the time of the interviews.

As I will later show, some of the participants mentioned differences between rural and urban Australia, and insisted on the importance of education with regard to perceptions of Indigeneity. Having interviewed young Australians who have all pursued tertiary studies and have lived and/or still live in major Australian cities will have an influence on the way they perceive Indigenous people and culture.

At the time of the interviews, three participants were still university students. The others worked in various fields, but four of them worked in close relation with Indigenous people or issues. Two of them worked in identified Indigenous positions.

1.1.2.3.3 Discovery of Indigenous Heritage

As I explained, I originally wished to talk to people who had learnt that they have Indigenous heritage as adults. I had to broaden the selection criteria when it proved too difficult to find enough participants in this situation.

The participants can therefore be divided into four categories:¹⁰

¹⁰ See appendix 1 for a spectrum of knowledge about Indigenous heritage as a child/teenager.

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- those who did not know anything about having Indigenous family members and only discovered it as teenagers or adults,
- those who grew up with hints of Indigenous culture around them but who did not realise what it meant until they were adults,
- those who always knew about Indigenous heritage being a part of their family, but for whom this knowledge had little incidence on everyday life,
- those for whom Indigenous culture was clearly present in education but still as a peripheral rather than as a central element.¹¹

A member of the first category, Ben only learnt a few years ago, in a casual conversation with his mother, that his grandmother was Indigenous. He recalled being a little shocked upon hearing the news.

Vanessa belongs in the second category. She also explains that she was shocked to have her mother “sitting [Vanessa and her brother] down” and giving them documentation about their Torres Strait Islander grandmother when Vanessa was in her mid-teenage years. However, retrospectively, she recognised that her mother included Indigenous cultural elements in her education.

Vanessa *My mum, (...) [did] things I didn't realise were Indigenous culture, like storytelling. She always did storytelling. So we didn't have books. Before bed, she told stories. (...) And you know the ceremony of life on the first of July – which is Torres Strait Islander bringing-of-the-light festival – we've always celebrated that. And we do this weird ritual where you cut your hair and then you like spit in something three times, and then you burn it. You take a bit of dirt inside from the front of your house, the back of your house, and it's to cleanse. And I didn't realise other families didn't do that. (...) So I went through my childhood... She put stuff in there, and then when I hear from other people, I'm like, "Oh, yeah, we do that too! Ok, cool." And she cooked us traditional food. I went to a cook-up in Canberra, and there was a bunch of Indigenous grads. We all sat around and we all had to cook and I was like, "I don't really know what to cook", so I just cooked what Mum used to cook, and they were like, "Oh yeah, this is traditional. This is what my grandmother used*

¹¹ The reasons explaining why the participants did not know or realise that they had Indigenous heritage will be analysed in chapter 2.

to make!"

Michelle is also in the second category. She grew up with several signs of Indigeneity around her: she recalled being selected at school to take part in Indigenous cultural lessons, walking in the bush with her father and looking for witchetty grubs,¹² or finding out through a casual remark from her father that the black-skinned man he had been talking to while she and her brothers were waiting in the car was their "Uncle Jack". In spite of this, she said, "I always considered myself a white kid. I never considered myself an Aborigine." It was not until she was eighteen and her father died that she started entertaining the possibility that he had been of Indigenous descent.

Adina was raised by her grandparents. After a brief affair with an Indigenous man, her mother left Adina with her grandparents who made her believe for many years that they were her biological parents. She often questioned her place within the family: "I just knew I felt different. I knew I looked different." She later had a son whom she calls her "olive-skin baby" or "coco boy" because his skin is browner than that of his parents. But it was not until the age of twenty-eight that Adina found out through a government enquiry that she had Indigenous heritage.

Adina *My parents (...) just didn't tell the school they were the adoptive parents, not the birth ones, cause, you know, the secret, the big secret. (...) I've got coeliac disease, which is a disability, and they have to do a job capacity assessment (...). I rang up the job provider only to find out I'd been put on to a different job provider. I'd given them my real birth certificate, which I'd finally gotten, (...) and they'd gone through the system and (...) they put me into the Indigenous job provider. And I asked them why, because I'm not Indigenous. "Well, apparently you are. Your father's Indigenous." Interesting. So I went back to my mother with this little piece of, "What the hell in?", and she said to me, "Oh, yeah, he did seem a bit brown when I was with him."*

The majority of the participants belong in the third category.

Josh does not remember not knowing that Indigenous heritage is present in his family. For example, he did a presentation at school on his grandmother's father who was a famous

¹² Witchetty grubs are white larvae which some Indigenous Australians eat.

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Indigenous shearer. It became clear to him at the age of eight, when his parents took him and his sisters on a trip to their Indigenous community where they reconnected with members of their extended family.

Casey also learnt about his ancestry when he was around eight years old. His story is similar to Josh's in that it is also his father who decided to explore the family's heritage after Casey's paternal grandfather died in New Zealand, denying any connection to Indigeneity until the end of his life.

For his part, Andrew remembers understanding his mother had Indigenous heritage in his early teenage years, as his parents joked about it at the dinner table.

Andrew *Probably the first discussion with my parents surrounding my heritage (...) [was], I think, in reference to Australia introducing a new law where you had to have a license to go fishing. This is one of my first proper memories of it, and my dad made a reference just in a joking way, because of my mum's heritage, that he wouldn't be required to get a license. We laughed at the idea that people had been charged for going fishing.*

Miriam does not recall not knowing about her Indigenous heritage: "I guess we always knew."

Megan and Kate also say they always knew about their heritage. They also mention skin colour within their families as pointing to an Indigenous background.

Megan *I think it was fairly well-known... People always commented on... – because we were quite dark as kids.*

Kate *It was something that we always kind of knew about, but it was unspoken. I had a great grandmother who is very dark-skinned.*

Adam is the only participant in the fourth category. I originally interviewed him after I read an old article in which he was described as someone who had learnt about his Indigenous background when he was fifteen, and still embraced it fully at the age of twenty-three. It turned out that the journalist had mixed up Adam's and his father's stories, the latter being the one learning about his Indigenous heritage at the age of fifteen, or even

possibly later, according to Adam. Adam, on the other hand, was raised knowing about his Indigenous heritage and very much encouraged by his non-Indigenous mother to embrace it proudly, to learn about Indigenous culture, and to keep in touch with his extended family. He told me, “I never had to actually become Aboriginal myself to some degree. My parents were making me into an Aboriginal person.” Nevertheless, he also told me that, as he was growing up, “all this Aboriginal stuff [was] there, and it [was] definitely around me, but I [was] still in white culture.” Adam was not sure about the role played by the education he received as far as his identification as Indigenous is concerned.

Adam *It's all so much of who I am as a person that I can't tell if it was just my mum or if it was me taking it on, or if it was the fact that my grandmother was so supportive. It's probably all of those things.*

1.1.2.3.4 Links with Indigenous Heritage Today

The participants' links with their Indigenous heritage at the time of the interviews varied. Again, the participants can be classified in categories following what I see as a spectrum of identification.¹³

Ben is the participant who was the least involved with his Indigenous background. He does not identify as Indigenous and does not envisage doing it in the future. Although he acknowledges his Indigenous heritage, he does not show much interest in learning more about it today, but does not exclude wanting to research his different heritages later in his life.

In a second category are participants who do not identify today, but who may have done so in the past, or consider doing it at some point in their lives, and/or have a certificate of Aboriginality or are interested in getting one someday, and finally, whose interest in their Indigenous heritage is quite strong.

¹³ See appendix 2 for a spectrum of identification of the participants.

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Josh has a certificate of Aboriginality and identified as Indigenous in his first years at university. He also once or twice 'ticked the box' – he identified as Indigenous Australian on a national census. He calls himself "Indigenous in some ways" and remains interested in his heritage. Nevertheless, he also said, "I suppose it's not part of my everyday identity."

Michelle who now lives in France would like to know more about her family history although she feels this may be difficult because she has lost touch with this part of her family. She is also interested in a general Indigenous culture and feels close to some general Indigenous values. While studying Indigenous studies at university in Melbourne, she made a documentary and interviewed Indigenous people living in Redfern. She later worked for a company distributing Indigenous products, which was for her a way of being in touch with her heritage.

Michelle *It's always been something, since I was eighteen... I kind of felt a lot of empathy towards the Aborigines. I knew that that existed in my family, but I had no way of reconnecting with it, and so my way of connecting with the Aboriginal community was...as a satellite, indirectly, as in I want to help as much as I can, but I would never feel confident enough to actually integrate the community.*

In a similar way, Megan is interested in her family history and enjoys having this "interesting connection in [her] history". At the time of the interview, she only relied on her father's knowledge of this side of their family history, and was interested in documenting it further at some point in her life. However, she did not know exactly how to go about it.

In spite of their interest in their heritage and in Indigenous culture and issues, Josh, Michelle and Megan identified as "white Australians" and not as Indigenous.

For her part, Kate became more interested in her heritage when her mother recently reconnected with her extended family and when she started working with Indigenous students at university. At the time of the interview, she worked in close relation with Indigenous people and felt that thanks to her job, she was already aware of cultural protocols in Indigenous culture. She did not want to formally identify until she and her family had researched their family history properly.

All the participants in this category felt they could not identify as Indigenous for several reasons linked to their representations of Indigeneity and because they felt they were not – or not yet – legitimate enough to do so.

I placed Andrew and Adina in a third category of participants who identified as Indigenous at the time of the interview, but whose identification seemed to be on a more personal level than that of people in the fourth and fifth categories.

Andrew identified as Indigenous while he studied at university. He did not need to have a certificate to do so. At the time of the interview, he was not involved in the Indigenous community and believed that choosing to identify as Indigenous should be a personal choice above all, based on personal criteria which do not necessarily match the official definition of Aboriginality or the expectations linked to this identity – such as being involved in the Indigenous community.

Adina was on her way to discovering her Indigenous heritage, helped by an Indigenous friend at university where she was officially recognised as Indigenous. She was not involved in the Indigenous community but was glad that her son received Indigenous teachings at school. She emphasised the fact that she identified because her son had the right to know his family history, something she was denied for a long time. Like Andrew, it seemed as if she was crafting her personal definition of Indigeneity without caring too much about the expectations associated with identifying.

In the fourth category are participants who identify as Indigenous because they are interested in their heritage and because of its relevance in their daily lives.

Adam who was particularly proud of his Indigenous heritage when he was in his early twenties later felt he needed to distance himself from it and to achieve things that were not linked to his Indigenous identity. He now teaches at university and identifies to his students – something he feels is his responsibility. It is important to him to show Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike that being Indigenous, ‘white’ and educated are not incompatible.

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Both Miriam and Vanessa have a strong interest in their cultures and in Indigenous issues, at a personal or at a more general level. They both think that their Indigenous identity is relevant to their daily lives.

Miriam did an internship for the Aboriginal Legal Service¹⁴ and now works in Law in an identified Indigenous position. She was particularly interested in the question of Indigenous identity.

I met Vanessa while she was working at a university in Sydney, helping academics support Indigenous students. She had identified during her studies in order to mentor Indigenous high school students as part of a program. Even though she was not sure about wanting to continue working in this environment, her job helped her make her Indigenous identity “[her] everyday life”. Talking about her work, she also told me that being involved in Indigenous matters seemed an obvious choice to her.

Vanessa *It's something I wanted to do. I don't even think it's an expectation; it just makes sense. (...) [I]n everything I've done in government, there's always an Indigenous element. And even if I don't identify, I'm quite passionate about it. I think there hasn't been a question that I wouldn't go back and try. It just seems like the right thing to do.*

Finally, I chose to place Casey in a fifth and last category since his identification as Indigenous led him to sever most of his connections with his non-Indigenous friends. In embracing his Indigenous heritage, Casey also embraced the Indigenous cause, fighting for Indigenous sovereignty while denouncing ‘white’ Australian ongoing colonialism. He is also passionate about reviving the language of his people. Casey’s choice to identify provoked significant changes of values and priorities in his life.

¹⁴ The Aboriginal Legal service is a non-governmental community organisation providing free legal services to Indigenous people.

Casey *I guess within the last year, my whole identity has...flipped. (...) So I don't think for one second that – not anymore anyway – that I don't belong with black people.*

1.1.2.4 Conducting the Interviews

The interviews of the eleven participants were conducted between January 2013 and July 2014. On average, an interview lasted an hour and forty-five minutes.

The interview was roughly divided into three parts.

As an introduction, I first asked the participants to describe who they were, where they grew up and studied, what their work consisted in etc. I also asked them to tell me about their families, their backgrounds, and to explain where their Indigenous heritage came from.

The second part of the interview was meant to revolve around the discovery of their Indigenous heritage and the way they perceived it. It was subdivided into five sections.

In what I called the 'public knowledge' section, I asked the participants what they remembered knowing about Indigenous culture and people before finding out they themselves had Indigenous heritage. In this section, I was particularly interested in the vision they had developed of Indigeneity outside their private sphere. For example, were their representations influenced by school and later by university, by books, films, documentaries or news reports etc.? Did they hear about and remember any of the reconciliation events, or the official Apology of 2008?

I then turned to 'private knowledge' and asked the participants how Indigenous people and culture were represented within their family or friends' circles, and how it could have influenced their current representations. I then asked them to tell me how they had found out about their Indigenous heritage, and what the different steps in their discovery of it had been. I was interested in learning about who they had confided in about this – friends, family, organisations – and if they had then decided to research their heritage further.

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The third section was about the participants' reactions to discovering their heritage. I asked how they had felt personally, how people around them had reacted to this news, and if people's reactions had influenced their subsequent actions: did they feel encouraged or discouraged from investigating their Indigenous background? Did they take any action following their discovery? Did they, perhaps, start some genealogical research, contact an association,¹⁵ enrol in an Indigenous Studies course, document themselves about Indigenous culture in general or about their own people? I asked them to tell me about the reasons behind their choice to investigate or not their heritage, and about what they expected they would find, obstacles which might have stopped them or positive experiences that might have helped them progress.

In the fourth section, I asked about the participants' interest in Indigenous culture before they found out about their heritage. Did they have an opinion about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures? Did learning that it was part of their background affect this opinion and how?

I finally asked the participants how they related to the official definition of Indigeneity created in 1981,¹⁶ whether or not they were interested in obtaining a certificate of Aboriginality, and what this meant to them. Following this, I asked if they would like to go further and perhaps visit their community to meet Indigenous relatives, or take steps towards becoming more involved in Indigenous culture and issues – in any way they thought was interesting or valuable.

In the third and final part of the interview, I asked the participants to reflect about their identity and about the importance or not of it being strong and well-defined. I first

¹⁵ For example, the association *Link-Up* which was created to help members of the stolen generations find their lost relatives, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/finding-your-family/where-get-help/link-up-services>, accessed on 22 March 2016.

¹⁶ The three-part definition is the following: "An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives."

"Kinship and Identity: Legal definitions of Aboriginality", *Australian Government-Australian Law Reform Commission* website, <http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/36-kinship-and-identity/legal-definitions-aboriginality>

asked them to tell me how they would define themselves, and if there was any part of what constituted their identity they thought mattered more to them now. I gave examples such as gender, ethnicity or sexuality. I then moved on to the meaning of being Australian and to the degree to which they identified with the word. Finally, I was interested in learning how they viewed their Indigenous heritage in relation to Australian-ness.

In the end, the interviews seldom respected this exact order. I had decided before I started that I would adopt a semi-structured style of interviews, keeping in mind a frame and list of themes I wanted to cover while allowing the participants to stray from my questions. This technique seemed – and often proved – to be the best way for them to move from one story to another and to broach themes which I had not anticipated.

As well as the interviews from the eleven participants, I decided later on in my research to visit Indigenous centres in universities around Sydney. Several participants had mentioned these centres as places where they had felt comfortable identifying or asking questions about Indigeneity. I wanted to know more about how these centres welcome students who, like the participants, are still “tiptoeing around” their Indigenous heritage, as Adina said, and what they could offer them. In August 2014, I therefore interviewed Michael Peachey, the Students’ Services manager at Nura Gili, the University of New South Wales Indigenous centre, and Damita McGuinness, a coordinator of Indigenous Students Services at the Indigenous House of Learning Jumbunna at the University of Technology Sydney.

1.1.2.5 Analysing the Data: Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.”¹⁷ They describe thematic analysis as the first method newcomers to qualitative analysis should use. Catherine Kohler Riessman agrees and writes in her description of narrative thematic analysis that, “Theorizing across a

¹⁷ BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, “Using Thematic Analysis”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006, p. 79.

number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative inquiry.”¹⁸ I used a thematic analysis to make sense of the data collected through the interviews because this is a method which allows flexibility, as Braun and Clark further explain.

[Thematic analysis is] essentially independent of theory and epistemology, and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. (...) Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.¹⁹

The freedom Braun and Clark describe is consistent with the inscription of this thesis in the field of Cultural studies which is itself a flexible field allowing different critical approaches to interact, as I will further explain in 1.2.1.

Thematic analysis allowed me to make sense of the data I collected without being tied to “a particular theoretical or epistemological position.”²⁰ Having said this, Braun and Clark warn against the possibility of an excess of flexibility leading to analyses without structure or substance. Therefore, they advise about clarifying three points when undertaking such an analysis.

The first one is to decide whether the analysis is more inductive – when theories are drawn for the data – or deductive – theory precedes the data. The second is about the level at which the themes will be identified: either at a more semantic or explicit level, or at a latent or interpretative level, while the third is the choice of either an essentialist or constructionist paradigm. I will deal with this third point in 1.2.2.

Concerning the first point, I used a deductive approach in this research. I had already worked on issues of representations within the Australian context when I started this particular project. I also spent the first two years of my research reading quite broadly

¹⁸ KHOLER RIESSMAN, Catherine, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Thousand Oaks, California, London, UK, New Delhi, India, Singapore: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008, p. 74.

¹⁹ BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, “Using Thematic Analysis”, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

²⁰ BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, “Using Thematic Analysis”, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

about the several topics I thought I would have to analyse before devising the questionnaire I would use for the interviews and meeting the participants. However, I was also careful to remain open to discovering themes in the data that I had not envisaged. This explains the choice of a semi-structured interview which allowed flexibility. I therefore used a deductive approach to narrow down the questions I wanted to ask the participants, which was followed by a combination of deductive and inductive approaches as I conducted the interviews and analysed the data.

As far as the level of identification of the themes is concerned – the second point highlighted by Braun and Clark – Helene Joffe writes that both semantic and latent levels are often used in a research project.²¹ Both levels can indeed be found in this thesis. Nevertheless, Braun and Clarke write that a latent analysis is often associated with a constructionist paradigm²² – which is the one I use. A constructionist thematic analysis will use the words of the participants less as a given than as socially constructed, thus elaborating on more latent themes which may not have been made explicit by a participant. Examples of both levels can be found in the list of themes I used to classify my data. For example, within the broad theme of ‘Legitimacy’ is a subtheme called ‘I am not disadvantaged/ I did not experience racism’. These are words uttered by the participants and which, at the time of classification, are analysed at a semantic level. On the other hand, within the same theme of ‘Legitimacy’, another subtheme is one I called ‘Safe spaces of identification.’ The participants talked about places, environments or conditions in which they felt comfortable identifying. But the name I chose for this theme is already an analysis of what these spaces – geographical, social, mental – represent for the participants’ ability to identify as Indigenous. This particular subtheme is already analysed at a more latent level at this stage of the analysis. Thus, Braun and Clark conclude that “for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized.”²³

²¹ JOFFE, Helene, “Thematic Analysis”, in HARPER, David and THOMPSON, Andrew (eds), *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 209.

²² BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, “Using Thematic Analysis”, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²³ *Ibid.*

1.1.2.5.1 Steps of Analysis

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were more focused on the content than on the mode of delivery, in the way Riessman describes: “In thematic narrative analysis, emphasis is on “the told” – the events and cognitions to which language refers (the content of speech).”²⁴ Little attention was paid to the potential impact of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, or to that of the conditions in which the interviews were conducted. The thematic content was the focus of the analysis.

Braun and Clarke defined a series of phases one should follow in order to conduct a thematic analysis: transcribing, coding, identifying and naming themes. After having familiarised myself with the content of the data in the process of transcribing the interviews, I classified the whole content of the interviews into themes. The coded segments were at least a couple of sentences long, sometimes entire paragraphs. This corresponds more to the approach taken by Riessman in *Narrative Thematic Analysis* and which tends to preserve sequences rather than small segments – something I also do in this thesis. Comments were added when an analysis at a latent level could be started. Some of the themes were quite broad (‘family’ or ‘school’ for example) or descriptive and drawn from the different phases of the interview (‘phases in learning about one’s heritage’ for example), while others were already in the process of being analysed (‘partial identifications’ or ‘shifting identities’). It is from these themes that a list of the questions I needed to tackle in my research project was drawn. A difficulty was to be careful to try and balance theory and data in order to always give priority to the latter. I attempted to do this through a constant reviewing of both recordings and transcripts of the interviews.

²⁴ KHOLER RIESSMAN, Catherine, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, op. cit., p. 58.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

As Braun and Clark write, “a thematic analysis has limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made.”²⁵

In this section, I will define the research field and paradigm I used, and the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis.

1.2.1 Research Field: Cultural Studies

This research project falls with the interdisciplinary field of Cultural studies. In their introduction to cultural studies, Ziauddin Sardan and Borin Van Loon attempt to delineate the common characteristics of a broad field.

Cultural studies function by borrowing freely from social science disciplines and all branches of humanities and the arts. (...) It straddles the intellectual and academic landscape from old established disciplines to new political movements, intellectual practices and modes of inquiry. (...) Cultural studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of *cultural practices* and their *relation to power*. Its constant goal is to expose power relationships and examine how these relationships influence and shape cultural practices. (...) Cultural studies is not simply the study of culture as though it was a discrete entity divorced from its social or political context. Its objective is to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyse the *social and political context* within which it manifests itself. (...) Cultural studies aims to be both an intellectual and a pragmatic enterprise.²⁶

This work belongs in the field of cultural studies for several reasons stated in the above definition. First, it borrows from different disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology or psychology, and uses several theoretical frameworks (see 1.2.3) in order to make sense of the complex notion of identity and of its construction. I believe it is through the interaction of a variety of theories and disciplines that such a concept can be best understood.

²⁵BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, “Using Thematic Analysis”, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁶SARDAR, Ziauddin, VAN LOON, Borin, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, New York: Totem Books, 1998, pp. 8-9.

Secondly, this research project does examine cultural representations and their “relation to power.” Today’s power struggles between Indigenous and dominant, ‘white’ Australia over the definition of identity are the background to this study. Consequently, this is a study which is indeed only relevant in a specific “social and political” context. Finally, I also believe that this study is, to a certain extent, a pragmatic enterprise. I wish to examine how the relationship of power I described has a real impact on the participants’ understanding of Indigeneity and of their identity in their everyday lives. Explaining how discourses about Indigeneity are constructed and reproduced within this relationship of power, and pointing out the issues it creates for the participants make problematic dynamics visible and may help shift perceptions.

1.2.2 Research Paradigm: Constructionism

In this project, I adopted a constructionist point of view which allowed me to consider the participants’ experiences as influenced by discourses about Indigeneity, whiteness or Australian-ness which are constructed over time.

The constructionist point of view is particularly significant when studying definitions of Indigeneity which are often presented as essential. An example is the common discourse about Indigenous people and their relationship to the Australian land presented as “incommensurably”²⁷ different from that of non-Indigenous Australians, regardless of how far back the families of the latter have been living in the country. Several participants also mentioned an attachment to the land that they associate with their Indigenous heritage. Adopting a constructionist point of view means questioning such an essentialist statement, not so much to confirm or infirm its reality as to understand how the participants – with a ‘white’ upbringing and Indigenous heritage – relate to it, and how this discourse is used as an inclusive or exclusive device – hence the importance of the notion of power.

²⁷MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, “I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society”, in AHMED, S., CASTANEDA, C., FORTIER, A. andSHELLER, M. (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroupings: Questions of Home and Migration*, New York: Berg, 2003, p. 31.

This outlook on the issues at stake is derived from a social constructionist paradigm first theorised by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966.

1.2.2.1 Social Constructionism

It is our contention (...) that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'. And in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that *the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality*.²⁸

This statement from Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* informs the approach adopted in this thesis. There are two significant elements in this statement.

First of all, knowledge is constructed. This research project aims at explaining how the representations of Indigenous identity constructed over the years have in turn constructed the participants' visions of Indigeneity. The main question for the participants is to know whether or not they fit within the definition of an Indigenous person they have built, and why. This obviously depends on the knowledge about Indigeneity they have acquired through what Berger and Luckmann call "social situations" – which in this case may be as different as having an Indigenous friend at school, watching Cathy Freeman on TV or reading a history textbook about the 'first Australians'.

Most of the knowledge constituting the participants' representations of Indigeneity was constructed by non-Indigenous people. However, it is interesting to see that in this research, Indigenous and non-Indigenous discourses often overlap. Indeed, several representations emanating from the Indigenous community, and which constitute obstacles to identification for the participants, mirror the 'white' representations of Indigenous people and culture. For example, parts of both communities can regard a lack of

²⁸ BERGER, Peter L. and LUCKMANN, Thomas, *The Social Construction of Reality*, London, England, New York, USA, Ringwood, Australia, Toronto, Canada, Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin, 1991 [1966], p. 15.

colour, of culture, or of a 'lived experience' of disadvantage and/or racism as evidence of inauthenticity.

I would like to link Berger and Luckmann's statement on the social construction of reality to another which is more specific to the 'white'/Indigenous relationship, and which is at the foundation of this research project. Marcia Langton adopts a constructionist view of Indigeneity when she states that "the most dense relationship is not between actual people but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists." While Berger and Luckmann emphasised the fact that "face-to-face situation" is the best way for us to apprehend others because "in the face-to-face situation the other is fully real",²⁹ they also explained that we interact with contemporaries whom we "apprehend only by means of more or less anonymous intersecting typifications"^{30 31} but also with successors and predecessors. In the Australian context, the stories about Indigeneity which circulate in non-Indigenous Australian society have notably been constructed over the years by predecessors, as Marcia Langton writes, and, according to her, their accounts have more influence on the way non-Indigenous Australians understand Indigenous people than "actual" social relationships – something which, as we will see, can be problematic.

However, the potential lack of 'truth' of such stories does not erase their impact on the participants. The second important element in Berger and Luckmann's statement is the idea that the validity or invalidity of knowledge is inconsequential, which is an important tenet of this project. Coming back to the example of Indigenous people's relationship to the land, as I stated, whether or not the feeling of being close to the land only results from the influence of the essentialist discourse I described matters less than the influence of this feeling on the way the participants relate to their Indigenous identity. I considered that whatever representations the participants had gathered to form their understanding of Indigeneity were 'truths' of their own, since this knowledge informed their realities. As

²⁹BERGER, Peter L. and LUCKMANN, Thomas, *The Social Construction of Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³⁰ For example, an Indigenous Australian can be typified as black and traditional.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 47.

William I. Thomas' theorem states: "If people define things as real, they are real in their consequences."³² Thus the aim of this research project is not to uphold or reject any specific definition of Indigeneity, but to reveal how discourses about this concept are constructs in evolution. To use Sardar's expression, the "pragmatic enterprise" behind this is to broaden the definition of Indigeneity to include experiences like that of the participants, and to move beyond strict oppositions between 'white' and Indigenous identities.

1.2.2.2 Interpretive Social Constructionism

Understanding someone's reality – and more particularly in this case, identity – as socially constructed is adhering to the social constructionist paradigm. Scott Harris goes further to introduce a distinction between what he calls Objective Social Constructionism and Interpretive Social Constructionism.

Interpretive constructionists believe that researchers ought to study the meanings people live by and how those meanings are created. (...) They are not principally concerned with discovering what things "really" mean in order to dispel myths or correct misunderstandings. They try to suspend belief and disbelief in reality in order to examine how meanings and reality are produced by and for members of various social settings. (...) For Objective Social Constructionist analyses, what are made, built or assembled are not interpretations but (...) real state of affairs. As a result, OSC arguments can be made without necessarily attending so much to what things mean to actors and the intricate processes through which those diverse meanings are created.³³

This is an interesting distinction as far as this study is concerned since, as I wrote, I often questioned myself on the importance of reality in the issues the participants mentioned and most particularly so when studying the notion of essentialism which is an important aspect of this study. Harris explains that interpretive social constructionists "sidestep [the "nature vs nurture" debate] in order to study more carefully what people claim to be the reasons for behaviour, as well as how those claims are advanced, confirmed,

³² THOMAS, William I. quoted in HARRIS, Scott R., *What is Constructionism? Navigating its Use in Sociology*, Boulder, Colorado and London, UK: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010, p. 7.

³³ HARRIS, Scott, R., *What is Constructionism? Navigating its Use in Sociology*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

and contested. In contrast, more objective constructionists try to separate myth from reality regarding human behaviour.”³⁴ I have at some stages in this research considered that some phenomena were real – for example ‘white’ or Indigenous educations. Some sections of this thesis may also adopt a more objective approach (Harris pointed to the fact that it is often the case that both approaches are used by the same scholar, depending on the issue he/she deals with). Nevertheless, my interest lies less in finding out the real reasons for the phenomena I study than in understanding why they are important in the participants’ definitions of who they are, and how they make sense of them. This approach also makes sense considering the limited scope of this project.

1.2.2.3 Discourse, Knowledge and Power

The word ‘discourse’ which I use extensively across this thesis is thus defined by Ziauddin Sardar: “A discourse consists of culturally or socially produced groups of ideas containing texts (which contain signs and codes) and representations (which describe power in relation to Others). As a way of thinking, a discourse often represents a structure of knowledge and power.”³⁵ The links between discourse, power and knowledge were studied by Michel Foucault whose work has become influential in social constructionist analyses. The links between these three concepts have informed the general way I approached this research project. According to Foucault,

It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (...) Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it,

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁵ SARDAR, Ziauddin, VAN LOON, Borin, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, New York: Totem Books, 1998, p. 14.

renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (...) There can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.³⁶

Foucault's attempt at defining the complexity and variability of the links between discourse, power and knowledge strongly resonates with the intricate way in which discourses analysed in this thesis work. I can think of several examples illustrating Foucault's definition in this project. The use I mentioned earlier of colonial representations of Indigeneity by Indigenous people today, such as the blood discourse, is one illustration of the "complex and unstable" relationship between discourse and power, where a dominant 'white' discourse is now used by the dominated minority as a tool of re-empowerment.³⁷ The degree of control – or power – that the participants have over their identity when exposed to the different discourses about Indigeneity, whiteness or Australian-ness can be analysed by keeping in mind, as an overarching concept, Foucault's links between discourse knowledge and power.

Another important point in Foucault's theory is stressed by Stuart Hall: "Foucault does *not* deny that things can have a real, material existence in the world. What he does argue is that 'nothing has any meaning outside of discourse.'" ³⁸ This can be linked to my previous remarks on the concepts of truth, or of reality. The point of this thesis is to show that the realities the participants experience – for example, being called inauthentic because of a fair skin – are the products of discourses – "An Indigenous person is black", in this case – which need to be understood as empowering or disempowering tools.

³⁶ FOUCAULT, Michel, "Method", in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (translated from the French by Robert Hurley), New York: Vintage Books-Random House, Inc., p100, 1990

³⁷ See 9.1.2.1.1.

³⁸ FOUCAULT, Michel quoted by HALL, Stuart, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse" in WETHERELL, Margaret, TAYLOR, Stephanie, YATES, Simeon J. (eds), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005 [2001], p. 73.

1.2.3 Key Theoretical Concepts

Following the inscription of this thesis in the field of cultural studies, the theoretical framework I adopt is an eclectic one. The reason for this is that the topic of this research project is at the intersection of several questions and therefore theories. This is already visible in the title of this thesis which combines three different, sometimes opposed, sometimes united, always intersecting identities – ‘white’, Australian and Indigenous. A mixed theoretical approach was the best way for me to explore several angles of the issue, and to make sense of the complexity of the relations between these identities.

In spite of the variety of theories used, all revolve around a central concept, that of identity. This is a vast concept and in this section, I will explain how it is used and how it relates to the major theories used in this thesis.

1.2.3.1 Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, Settler Colonialism and Critical Whiteness Theory

This thesis analyses how participants construct mixed-identities at the intersection of ‘white’, Indigenous and Australian cultures. Having grown up embedded in a ‘white’, Anglo-Celtic Australian culture, the participants form part of this dominant culture and benefit from the privileges being ‘white’ entail in today’s Australia.³⁹ They are also influenced by prevalent non-Indigenous representations of Indigenous identity. Nevertheless, they also have Indigenous heritage, which places them in an in-between position. The participants’ experiences of identity constructions are thus studied in a particular context which is the result of the colonial process started in 1788. Identity in this thesis will thus be studied in relation to colonialism, to the division it brought about and perpetuates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but also to the links it created between the two groups.

The study of the relationship between colonisers and colonised in the past and in the present is the object of post-colonial studies. Therefore, post-colonialism is the first

³⁹ Whiteness and its links to the Anglo-Celtic, ‘mainstream’ culture is analysed in chapter 3.

theoretical field to which this research is attached. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin thus define “post-colonial”:

‘Post-colonial’ as we define it does not mean ‘post-independence’, or ‘after colonialism’, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being. (...) We use the term ‘post-colonial’ to represent the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout [a] diverse range of societies, in their institutions and their discursive practices.⁴⁰

The grounding of the term in European colonialist histories and institutional practices, and the responses (resistant or otherwise) to these practices on the part of all colonized peoples, remain fundamental.⁴¹

That “post-colonial” does not mean “an end to the colonial process” is made clear in this thesis as I study the present power relationships between Indigenous people and ‘white’, ‘mainstream’ Australia. Chapter 3 analyses the enduring dominance of a ‘white’, Anglo-Celtic culture and worldviews in Australia. Indeed, one of the participants, Casey, goes as far as to claim that the colonial project is ongoing in today’s Australia. This thesis is inscribed in the field of post-colonial studies because it analyses, as Ashcroft *et al.* explain, “the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges”, especially “discursive practices”. In the case of this research project, dominance is analysed through the continued use and influence of non-Indigenous discourses about Indigenous identity. One of the results of the colonial process in Australia is indeed the persistence of discourses about Indigenous people which limit their right to self-identification and the ways the participants in this study perceive Indigeneity. In this thesis, the responses of Indigenous people are studied as far as they have influenced the participants’ understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. Because the participants are less privy to Indigenous views, and because this thesis revolves around their stories, it explores non-Indigenous representations about Indigeneity in greater depth.

⁴⁰ASHCROFT, Bill, GRIFFITHS, Gareth, TIFFIN, Helen (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 2003 [1995], pp. 117 and 3.

⁴¹ASHCROFT, Bill, GRIFFITHS, Gareth, TIFFIN, Helen, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London, New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 189.

Within the field of post-colonial studies, the theory of settler colonialism⁴² can also be used to better address the issue of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in Australia. Lorenzo Veracini explains that

there is no such thing as neo-settler colonialism or post-settler colonialism because settler colonialism is a resilient formation that rarely ends; (...) as Patrick Wolfe has noted, settlers come to stay. (...) And settler colonialism is not colonialism: settlers want Indigenous people to vanish.⁴³

The power struggles – over the definition of Indigeneity in this thesis – need to be studied by looking at the effects of settler colonialism in Australia. As Veracini explains, part of the settler colonial project is to eliminate Indigenous people. The historical attempts to erase the Australian Indigenous population are the reason people like the participants exist and are disconnected from their Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ They also shape Indigenous people's responses to protect their identity. One of these responses is to draw strict lines between 'white' and 'black' Australia. Such a response is an example of the way in which the effects of settler colonialism can affect the participants' identity constructions.

Another theoretical field I used to make sense of the participants' positions and of their impacts on identity construction is critical whiteness theory.⁴⁵ As I explained, 'white' culture is dominant in today's Australia and the participants partake in this since, as they explain, they grew up 'white'. I use critical whiteness theory in chapter 3 to explain how whiteness came to represent 'authentic' Australian-ness and how people belonging to 'white' Australia are privileged and get to define other people's – including Indigenous people – place in the nation. I also use this theory in chapter 6 to analyse the part played by a white skin in the participants' ability or not to claim an Indigenous identity. Some of the prominent theorists using this theory are Richard Dyer or Steve Garner, and in the

⁴² Examples of authors using this concept in Australia are Anthony Moran or Patrick Wolfe.

⁴³ CAVANAGH, Edward, VERACINI, Lorenzo, "Editors' Statement", *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 3, No.1, 2013.

⁴⁴ See 2.2.

⁴⁵ The origins of this theory and its aims are explained in chapter 3.

Australian context, Ghassan Hage, Jon Stratton or Aileen Moreton-Robinson, among many others.⁴⁶

1.2.3.2 Postmodern Identity and Hybridity Theory

From the 1970s onwards, Indigenous people have been asking for more rights and for a recognition of their status as first inhabitants of the continent (see 2.1.4). Thus, one of the responses of the Indigenous community to the attempts of colonial Australia to eliminate their people and cultures was to claim a unique identity and to assert their essential difference from 'white' Australia. Essentialism is an important concept in this thesis.⁴⁷ Indigenous discourses about Indigeneity often emphasise the existence of essential – or inherent – elements shared by all Indigenous people. As I explained, one example of these is a special connection to the land which non-Indigenous Australians cannot experience. In this thesis, I analyse the impact of such essential discourses on the participants' identity journeys. Such discourses do not recognise that Indigeneity – like whiteness – is a constructed identity, and that it was built in relation to colonialism. Although the existence of people like the participants is evidence of the links between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and cultures, the enduring presentation of Indigeneity as essential prevents people in-between cultures from claiming their Indigenous heritage.

As I explained, I understand identity as constructed.⁴⁸ I base my understanding on the postmodern vision of identity thus defined by Stuart Hall:

[T]he postmodern subject [is] conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the way we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self". Within us are

⁴⁶ The concepts studied here are very much intertwined, which explains the fact that many authors I quote also use several theories.

⁴⁷ The right and benefits for Indigenous people to use essentialism in the definition of their identity is much debated in academia. I analyse this in 9.2.2.1.

⁴⁸ In the Australian context, some of the authors who especially focus on the construction of Indigeneity are Bain Attwood, Jeremy Beckett *et al.*, Gillian Cowlishaw or Marcia Langton, among others.

contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (...) [A]s the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.⁴⁹

The postmodern theory of identity not only understands this concept as constructed but also as multiple and in constant evolution. Such a perception of identity allows me to account for the participants' desire to embrace different heritages and the sometimes convoluted identity journeys they go through as they identify in different ways at different times in their lives, or in different contexts. The problematic aspects of this definition in relation to Indigenous identity are analysed in chapter 10.

Ashcroft *et al.* explain that postmodernism and post-colonialism share similarities. They mention the post-colonial project of “dismantling the Centre/Margin binarism of imperial discourse”.⁵⁰ Similarly, postmodern identities are no longer unified around a coherent self but fragmented and subject to diverse influences. Therefore, they can be an answer to binarisms presented as essential.

Also aiming at breaking binarism is the theory of hybridity which I especially use in chapter 9 and 10. Originally, hybridity was not regarded as a desirable feature in colonial societies. This was particularly true in Australia. Until the mid-twentieth century, the country strove to remain ‘white’ in colour and culture, and the ‘half-caste’⁵¹ population was regarded as a threat. ‘Half-castes’ were seen as lost in-between ‘white’ and ‘black’ races and as inferior to both. However, the concept of hybridity was adopted by post-colonial theorists and re-defined. Hybridity is then used as an answer to colonial binarism. As Paul Meredith explains,

[T]he concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. It is “celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to

⁴⁹ HALL, Stuart, “The Question of Cultural Identity” in HALL, Stuart, HELD, David, HUBERT, Don, THOMPSON, Kenneth (eds), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996, p. 598.

⁵⁰ ASHCROFT, Bill, GRIFFITHS, Gareth, TIFFIN, Helen, (eds) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 2003 [1995], p. 117.

⁵¹ See 1.3 for an explanation of how colonial denominations of Indigenous people will be used in the thesis.

the advantage of in-between-ness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference.⁵²

Homi Bhabha developed the theory of the third space, an ambivalent space where fixed meanings can be re-negotiated. I explain this concept in more details in chapter 10. I use it in conjunction with the postmodern vision of identity to analyse the participants' plural identities, and I question its limits in the specific context of this study.

1.2.3.2.1 Postethnicity and Symbolic Ethnicity

Linked to a postmodern vision of identity as plural and fluid are the theories of postethnicity and symbolic ethnicity. These two theories emphasise the fact that ethnicity is no longer the core of someone's identity but a choice within the variety of other identity options available. These concepts were originally used to talk about the ways 'white' descendants' of migrants kept links with their ancestor's cultures.⁵³ These concepts are used in chapter 10 to further analyse the ways in which the participants relate to their Indigenous heritage and to question their ability as 'whites' to embrace or discard it at will.

1.3 Terminology

I would like to end this chapter by explaining choices made regarding the use of a few complex terms.

When referring to historical definitions of Indigeneity, I will refer to terms now no longer officially used. The terms 'full-blood', 'half-caste', 'quadroon' or 'octoroon' were used to describe the quantum of Indigenous blood of Indigenous Australians in the nineteenth century. Although some of these terms are still in use in today's public language – particularly 'full-blood' – they are offensive to Indigenous people who do not conceive of

⁵²MEREDITH, Paul, "Hybridity in the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-Cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand", paper presented at the TeOruRangahau Maori Research and Development Conference, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 1998, p. 2, <http://lianz.waikato.ac.nz/PAPERS/paul/hybridity.pdf>

⁵³ Herbert Gans and Mary C. Waters write about ethnic options in the United States.

Indigeneity in terms of percentage, and who reject these references to colonialism. Every time I will use these terms, they will be in inverted commas.

Several terms are used to refer to the first inhabitants of Australia. I chose to use the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Indigeneity' which I think are the least connoted. While Aboriginal and Aboriginality are also widely used, they only refer to the mainland populations and exclude the Torres Strait Islands. The expression 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' can therefore be used. But choosing the shorter 'Indigenous' as an umbrella term also allows me to include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in my descriptions. There are instances when I use the term 'Aboriginal' because it is the preferred term in specific collocations. Examples of this are "the definition of Aboriginality", "a certificate of Aboriginality" or the movement of "pan-Aboriginality".

A slightly more controversial expression is 'Indigenous Australian'. Some Indigenous people, like Casey, refuse to be associated with the word 'Australian' as it is tainted with colonial history. Moreover, the name 'Australia' is a word created by 'white' people, and Indigenous groups have different names for the different the places they come from. Although I am aware of these issues, in this thesis, I decided to use 'Indigenous Australian' as a neutral expression – equivalent to Indigenous people – since, while Indigenous people have a unique status as first inhabitants, they are also Australian citizens.

'White' is a word I analyse in chapter 3. The analysis in this chapter reveals the complexity of this term although I explained how common it is in Australian English. In the way it is often used, 'white' is a conflation of colour and culture. It also refers to a vaguely delineated category of people, as I will later show. I consider such a use of this term as problematic, which is why I decided to use inverted commas when 'white' does not only refer to a skin colour. Inverted commas will also be used for 'black' when it refers to a culture and not simply to a skin colour.

'White' and 'black' are not capitalised while 'Indigenous' is. I chose to capitalise 'Indigenous' as I use it to refer to the Indigenous people of Australia, as opposed to any people who are 'indigenous' of a place. 'White' and 'black', although they do refer to a

category of people, are not capitalised for the same reason I use inverted commas: the problematic conflation of a colour with a culture – and people.

The expression '*mainstream* culture/community/Australia' is analysed in chapter 3 as problematic. Indeed, it refers to a 'white', Anglo-Celtic culture which is still dominant in Australia. The expression does not take into account the multiplicity of other cultures in Australia. Again, it is often used un-problematically in Australian English, but I choose to use inverted commas.

In chapter 7, I analyse the meaning of the word 'culture' in relation to Indigeneity and I mention the fact that the existence of the plurality of Indigenous cultures should be recognised and that we should therefore talk about 'Indigenous cultures'. The common use of this expression in the singular partakes in the more general problematic homogenisation of Indigenous peoples and cultures in Australian society. The same applies to the expression 'Indigenous people' which, although already in the plural, does not exactly recognize that there are actually different 'Indigenous peoples'. In this thesis, I use both expressions in the singular. This is a choice which reflects most of the participants' relationship to Indigeneity. As I am, most participants are aware of the the existence of a plurality of Indigenous cultures, and a few, like Casey, are particularly interested in learning about their Indigenous people's specific culture. However, most participants still approach Indigenous culture from a more general point of view, and refer to symbols or values common to most Indigenous people. This is obviously due to the fact that the participants have not grown up embedded in a particular community and have generally learnt about Indigenous culture in a more general way. This common set of cultural values and symbols has also been promoted by the Indigenous community itself (again, a problematic expression which I keep in the singular for the same reasons) from the 1970s onwards, as part of the creation of a pan-Aboriginal movement the aim of which was and still is to present a united front when demanding specific rights for Indigenous people in Australian society. In more recent years, this movement has existed in parallel with a growing recognition of the specificities of different groups of Indigenous people.

Finally, I am also aware that the expression 'non-Indigenous' is a problematic one, even though I use it in this thesis. In today's Australia, the diversity of this group of people means that the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians needs to be qualified. However, to a certain extent, and as this thesis will show, the separation between Indigenous people and the rest of Australian society does exist. A more refined analysis of the non-Indigenous group of people would nevertheless be needed, but it is not the object of this thesis which is mainly focused on the relationship between 'white' Australians and Indigenous people.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the methods I used to find and interview participants in this study. I explained how I analysed the data I had collected by using the method of thematic analysis. I inscribed this thesis in the field of Cultural studies and stressed that I adopted a constructionist point of view on identity, which I linked with Foucault's theory of discourse, power and knowledge. The analysis of discourses of identity are at the heart of this thesis, and to make sense of them, I use an eclectic theoretical framework. I draw from post-colonial, settler colonial, and critical whiteness theories to explore the concept of identity in the context of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian relationship. I also use a postmodern understanding of identity which I again link with my constructionist understanding of this concept. In order to analyse fragmented identities, I also engage with the theory of post-colonial hybridity.

CHAPTER 2

A Short Racial History of Australia and Its Consequences on the Participants

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this introductory chapter is twofold. First, because this thesis will be focused on the analysis across time of recurring discourses rather than on particular events, I wish here to summarise in a factual way the major developments in the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' relationship, from the arrival at Botany Bay of Captain James Cook in 1770 to the mid-2000s, in order to give a chronological background to the analysis which will follow in the rest of this thesis.¹ I have included a few quotes from the participants which illustrate some of the events described here.² These events have influenced the participants' vision of Indigenous people and culture more or less directly because they have contributed to the construction of relationships of power between both groups, and of representations of Indigenous people, both positive and negative. Moreover, the policies and treatment of Indigenous people delineated in this chapter have had practical consequences for the participants' families and are the reasons why the group of people I have chosen to study exists (there were, in the participants' families, cases of

¹ Unless otherwise mentioned, the historical chronology presented in the first part of this chapter is adapted from David Hollinsworth's *Race and Racism in Australia*.

HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, Melbourne: Thomson Social Science Press, 2006 [1998].

² Some of the more recent events or policies presented here have touched the participants' lives and their understanding of Indigeneity more closely than others. They will be given special attention in following chapters. This is particularly the case of the policy of reconciliation analysed in chapter 5.

stolen children, of decisions to pass into ‘white’ society, for example). Therefore, the second part of this chapter is dedicated to analysing the repercussions of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian history on the participants’ families. It is composed of quotes from the participants explaining their families’ attitudes towards Indigeneity. Again, in this chapter, the aim is less to theorise than to introduce the topic of this thesis by explaining how the eleven Australians who took part in this study came to be in a situation where their heritage was mostly unknown to them as children and is therefore often difficult to deal with or to claim in the present.

2.1 A Short History of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Relationships

2.1.1 First Contact

In 1770, Captain James Cook claimed the east coast of the Australian continent under instruction from King George III. In spite of instructions to obtain the consent of the inhabitants if there happened to be some, Cook seems to have ignored the presence of the local Indigenous people as he claimed the continent. The principle of *Terra Nullius*,³ a land which has not previously been subject to the sovereignty of a state, and therefore perceived as belonging to no one, justified the appropriation of Australia by the British Crown and its subsequent colonisation, before its revocation in 1992.

In 1788, the First Fleet commanded by Captain Arthur Phillip landed in Botany Bay where Britain had decided to create its new colony. A settlement was established at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788, thus starting the process of colonisation of the Australian continent.

³ See 4.1 for a more detailed analysis of the reasons why the British did not recognise Indigenous sovereignty.

It was said for a long time that the Indigenous population did not resist colonisation.⁴ However, although Governor Phillip instructed his men not to set themselves against the local Indigenous people, violence was soon committed on both sides. As the settlements spread along the coast and settlers started encroaching upon Indigenous people's lands and competing over their resources, clashes became frequent. Punitive expeditions were sent after Indigenous people burnt or stole Europeans' crops or killed their cattle. Common European diseases such as smallpox against which Indigenous people lacked immunity decimated the population. Frontier violence continued with the expansion of settlements, creating a climate of increasing distrust between Indigenous people and European settlers which was to endure into the nineteenth century. While the former grew to see the invaders as violent and uncivilised, the latter held Indigenous people in much the same regard. David Hollinsworth quotes a Murrumbidgee squatter describing Indigenous people in 1838:

Every man of common experience knows that the Aborigines of my native country are the most degenerate, despicable and brutal race of being in existence, (...) a scoff and a jest upon humanity – they are insensible to every bond which binds man to his friend – husband to wife – parent to its child – or creature to its God.⁵

Another view of the Indigenous Australian was that of the noble savage, following the eighteenth century Western tradition of imagining Indigenous people as pure beings uncorrupted by civilisation.⁶

But whichever view of Indigenous people they held, European settlers colonised Australia with the conviction – widespread at the time – of their superiority, and feeling

⁴ In her overview of Aboriginal history, Ann Curthoys explained that "Aboriginal history has developed since the late 1960s from a neglected to a highly significant and well-known field within Australian historiography. Historians have a complex past of their own on Aboriginal history issues: on the one hand, they are largely responsible for a pioneer legend which for many decades erased Aboriginal experience from Australian history; and on the other, more recently, they have been in the forefront of attempts to develop greater public awareness of a destructive colonial past."

CURTHOYS, Ann, "Aboriginal History" in DAVISON, Graeme, HIRST, John, MACINTYRE, Stuart (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 3.

For the consequences of the rise of the New Histories in the 1960s, see 2.1.5.7.

⁵ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 74.

⁶ These two visions of Indigeneity – the noble and ignoble savages – and their ambivalence are analysed in chapter 4 and chapter 5.

entitled to live on a land which they thought the locals had failed to claim as their own and develop. It is now known that Indigenous Australians have inhabited the continent for at least 50,000 years and that they were divided into about 250 nations speaking at least the same number of languages. They had inherited a very complex and diverse set of beliefs, practices, ceremonies, as well as societal organisation. Although the ways of life differed across the continent and on the islands, Indigenous people were generally semi-nomadic population, hunting and gathering food on their land. A group's superiority over another was not based on race but on the knowledge of the country⁷ they lived on. The importance of the land for Indigenous people was not understood by European settlers for whom fences and cultivation symbolised ownership. The settlers also failed to understand the special relationship Indigenous people have with their land. It is still very hard to grasp for many non-Indigenous Australians⁸ and land ownership remains a contentious issue in today's Australia.

2.1.2 Separation and Segregation

The settlement of Australia was formed without any consideration of the claims of the natives, or scarcely a recognition of their existence. They were too weak to present opposition, and too degraded to excite sympathy. The assumption of absolute jurisdiction over the new territory followed the occupation, just as if it had no previous inhabitants.⁹

Despite resistance, the Indigenous population could not win the war against an enemy greatly superior in number. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the settlers moved inland, Indigenous populations were forcibly moved from their lands and reduced to poverty. With the years, it was more and more assumed that Indigenous people, perceived as unable to adapt to European ways were a race doomed to extinction. To 'soften' their passing and protect them from abuses from the non-Indigenous population, reserves were set up to segregate them from the settler society. Missions were created by

⁷ To an Indigenous person, the word 'country' refers to the land to which they belong, and to their place of Dreaming. Usual expressions in Aboriginal English include: 'to live on country', 'to go back to country'. This is the place where someone's ancestors are from and where the knowledge comes from.

⁸ See 5.1.1.

⁹ James Bonwick quoted by HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 72.

churches or religious individuals to teach Indigenous people the Christian religion and train them for work, as domestic workers for example. Stations – or managed reserves – were run by the Aboriginal Protection Boards, the first of which was created in Victoria in 1869. Protectors of Aborigines were appointed nominally to protect Aborigines from all sorts of injustices. In reality, they took control over many areas of the lives of Indigenous people, restricting their freedom of movement, right to marry, or control over personal finances. They were the legal guardians of every Indigenous person up to the age of 16 to 21. One of the most controversial rights given to protectors was that of removing children, including those who were neither orphaned nor ill-treated, from their Indigenous parents and families to be raised as ‘white’.¹⁰ Boys’ and girls’ homes were created to train children for domestic works or farm labouring. This process which lasted until the end of the 1960s created what was later called the Stolen Generations.

2.1.3 The Stolen Generations and Assimilation

The 1997 report which investigated the removal of Indigenous children from their families concluded to a genocide:

Nationally we can conclude with confidence that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970. In certain regions and in certain periods the figure was undoubtedly much greater than one in ten. *In that time not one family has escaped the effects of forcible removal* (...) Most families have been affected, in one or more generations, by the forcible removal of one or more children. (...) [The violations] were an act of genocide, aimed at wiping out indigenous families, communities, and cultures, vital to the precious and inalienable heritage of Australia.¹¹

¹⁰ See note 47, chapter 4.

¹¹ Australian Human Rights Commission website, *Bringing Them Home* report, chapter 2, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-chapter-2>, accessed on 10 February 2015.

The basis upon which non-Indigenous Australians took upon themselves to remove ‘half-caste’¹² children from their Indigenous families first lies in the belief mentioned previously that Indigenous people were facing extinction. Social Darwinism upon which Europeans based their understanding of races and their hierarchy led ‘white’ Australian to believe that, being an inferior race unable to cope with the arrival of the superior British race, Indigenous people and their cultures would soon disappear. This belief justified the treatment of Indigenous people over the years. A settler, Thomas Major, wrote in his 1900 memoirs *Leaves from a Squatter’s Notebook* that

For untold centuries the aborigines have had the use of the country, but in the march of time they, like the extinct fossil, must make way. They now encumber the ground and will not suit themselves to altered circumstances. The sooner they are taught that a superior race has come among them, and are made to feel its power, the better for them (...) The survival of the fittest is nature’s law and must be obeyed.¹³

On the contrary, ‘white’ settlers were seen as pioneers and glorified for bringing progress to the Australian continent which was considered under-exploited before their arrival. The hierarchy of races was both cultural and biological. While ‘full-blood’ Indigenous people would slowly disappear, segregated in reserves, it soon became apparent that the offspring of mixed parents (often white men and Aboriginal women) would not. The ‘half-caste’ child was a serious issue for Australia: the country could not abandon children whose ‘white’ blood gave them the possibility to become integrated into ‘white’ society if cut off from their Indigenous families and cultures at an early age and raised ‘white’.¹⁴ From very early on, blood, colour and culture became inseparable in the minds of Australians:¹⁵ “An individual’s character, morality, personality and worth were all seen as largely determined by their blood, an error arising from the lack of scientific

¹² As explained in chapter 1, the terms ‘full-blood’, ‘half-caste’, ‘quadroon’ or ‘octoroon’ are based on blood quantum and were used to describe the degree of Indigeneity of Indigenous Australians in the nineteenth century. They are offensive to Indigenous people.

¹³ MAJOR, Thomas quote in WHITE, Richard, *Inventing Australia*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1981, p. 70.

¹⁴ BOND, Chelsea, BROUGH, Mark, COX, Leonie, “Blood in Our Hearts or Blood on Our Hands? The Viscosity, Vitality and Validity of Aboriginal ‘Blood Talk’”, *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the consequences of the colour and culture conflation, see chapter 6.

knowledge of genetics.”¹⁶ Paler children, when they were not considered tainted by their Indigenous blood, were seen as having a chance to blend into ‘white’ society, and it was believed – as protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, A.O. Neville did – that after a few generations, the black colour could be bred out, and the Aborigines absorbed into the ‘white’ population. Neville took his case to the 1937 conference in Canberra.

If the coloured people of this country are to be absorbed into the general community, they must be thoroughly fit and educated at least to the extent of the three R's. If they can read, write and count, and know what wages they should get, and how to enter into an agreement with an employer, that is all that should be necessary. Once that is accomplished there is no reason in the world why these coloured people should not be absorbed into the community. To achieve this end, however, we must have charge of the children at the age of six years; it is useless to wait until they are twelve or thirteen years of age.¹⁷

The conference was organised to bring together State and Commonwealth officials responsible for Aboriginal affairs. Indeed, the 51st article of the Constitution, written in 1901 when the six Australian colonies federated, left the States the responsibility of Indigenous Australians: “The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to (...) the people of any race, *other than the aboriginal race in any State*, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.”¹⁸ This article excluded Indigenous people from Commonwealth control. This conference on Aboriginal welfare aimed, among other things, at finding a solution to the problem of the growing ‘half-caste’ population. The policy of assimilation was thus devised to ensure the future of ‘mixed-blood’ Indigenous people in settled areas. This policy was later defined in these words by the 1961 Native Welfare Conference of Federal and State Ministers:

¹⁶ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 106

¹⁷ “Education and training Policy for Half-Caste People”, *The Stolen Generations* website http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148&Itemid=117, accessed on 10 February 2015.

¹⁸ “The 1967 Referendum”, *State Library of Victoria* website, <http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/fight-rights/indigenous-rights/1967-referendum>, accessed on 15 December 2016.
The section in italics was removed after the 1967 referendum.

“The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians.”¹⁹

The policy of assimilation must be connected to the focus on whiteness²⁰ put forward in 1901. In terms of race, the political will at the time of Federation and until the 1970s was that Australia would remain a ‘white’ country. The term ‘white’ is a complex one in Australia, encompassing the ideas of colour, culture and way of life. The White Australia policy officially proclaimed what had been implied since the beginnings of colonisation: Australia was founded on the premises that the ‘white’ and especially British race was superior. With culture associated to skin colour, it was implied that a ‘white’ Australia would be based on a culture and values inherited from the motherland. The 1901 Immigration Restriction Act (one of two acts forming the White Australia policy) made it practically impossible for undesirable migrants to settle in Australia. In spite of being two separate debates, the attempts to prevent non-European immigration to Australia (and particularly the Chinese perceived as a “Yellow Peril”) and the dispossession and segregation of Indigenous people were the two sides of the same coin, as Ann Curthoys explains:

The common feature of the Aboriginal and Chinese situations in the nineteenth century was clearly colonial racism, in one case justifying the taking of the land and in the other being a cause for keeping that land for Europeans. In both cases a strong sense of British and European racial superiority was expressed and reinforced, and the conviction that coloured races were inferior to whites was confirmed.²¹

Adam recounted the story of his grandmother who grew up identifying as Aboriginal in Redfern²² in the 1930s and who experienced discrimination in her daily life:

¹⁹ “Native Welfare Conference”, *AIATSIS* website

http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/_files/archive/referendum/18801.pdf, accessed on 11 February 2015.

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of the concept of whiteness in Australia, see chapter 3.

²¹ CURTHOYS, Ann, “An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous” in DOCKER, J., FISCHER, G. (eds), *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2000, p. 24.

²² Redfern is a suburb of the Sydney Inner-West where a lot of Indigenous people still live today.

Adam *My grandmother (...) was an Aboriginal girl growing up in Redfern. As far as she's concerned, she was always Aboriginal, and in fact she got treated like she was. For instance, (...) she told us a story about working in a shop in Redfern when she was a teenager, and she was serving and that sort of stuff, and someone came in and said, "I don't want to be served by that nigger." And basically she got fired because...nobody wanted to be served by an Aboriginal. And as far as I'm concerned, she didn't even look that Aboriginal. But it was enough for her to be tainted by that. Another story that I was told was about my great grandfather – her father. He fought in WWI, or WWII maybe – my history's a bit funny here – but when he came back, he wasn't officially an Australian citizen. He came back, and everyone else got war-houses and all that sort of stuff, and he didn't because he was Aboriginal. So they got back here as war heroes. He got back here as an Aboriginal person. And from my grandmother's point of view, they'd been ripped off. She was not given the same life as all the 'white' kids around her because her father was Aboriginal. She was not able to work in shops in Redfern because she was Aboriginal. So she never saw being Aboriginal as a great thing, and she never wanted to make her kids a part of that.*

2.1.4 From Resistance to Self-Determination

Indigenous people resisted dispossession and segregation. Resistance gradually moved from a demand for equality and civil rights in the 1930s to the recognition of a unique status as Indigenous in the 1970s. In 1938, the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) from New South Wales organised the first Day of Mourning on Australia Day (January 26th) to protest against the celebrations of the sesquicentenary anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet. The day was marked by the re-enactment of the landing of Captain Phillip and flag-raising at Sydney Cove. Indigenous people from neighbouring settlements were brought to Sydney to portray the scenes of resistance encountered by the settlers upon arriving on the Australian shores. Meanwhile, about a hundred Indigenous people assembled to ask for full citizen rights. Support for Indigenous civil rights slowly increased over the years while, at the same time, Australia became concerned about its international image and about the possibility of being labelled a racist country, based on the treatment of its original inhabitants. The Second World War had made issues of discrimination based on race very sensitive, and the process of decolonisation of the African and Asian continents opened the door to the idea of self-determination. The implication that Indigenous people had to relinquish their culture in order to assimilate became more and more criticised and

a move was made towards integration instead. The policy of assimilation was amended as follows during the 1965 Native Welfare Conference: "The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent *will choose* to attain a *similar* manner and standard of living of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community."²³ In effect, little changed until the 1967 referendum.

Hollinsworth quotes the words of Maude Tongerie who looks back on the South Australian campaign for a 'Yes' vote in the 1967 referendum:

The pigs were counted, the horses, the emus were counted – but the Aboriginal people were not. We really had to work hard. We had a body of Aboriginal people going out and speaking to the community and pleading to the public. We said, 'we are here, we have been here for a long time and for God's sake, somebody look at us, accept that our colour is different. We are human beings and we want self-management.'²⁴

The national referendum which asked if the two sections of the Constitution placing Indigenous people outside the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth should be removed was adopted with a 'Yes' vote of 90.77 percent. The referendum did not give Indigenous people Australian citizenship (which they acquired in 1949, along with all other Australians who were previously British subjects) as it is often said. It allowed the Parliament of Australia to legislate about Indigenous people, therefore preventing States from discriminating against them. Above all, the referendum had great symbolic value as it seemed to be the response to growing activism from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in favour of civil rights, land rights or equal pay for pastoral workers.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Freedom Riders led by Charlie Perkins, the first Indigenous graduate from the University of Sydney, toured New South Wales to protest Indigenous people's exclusion from clubs, cafes or swimming pools. A pan-Aboriginal identity started to emerge in opposition to the common view that rural and urban Indigenous people – as opposed to remote ones – had lost their culture and Indigenous identity, and had become

²³ Quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

assimilated into 'white' society. The Aboriginal flag²⁵ was adopted in 1971 as a symbol of unity. At the same time, a Labor government with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam at his head was elected. Whitlam proclaimed his will to improving Indigenous people's lives: "Australia's treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians not just now, but in the greater perspective of history."²⁶ The new government's agenda included a focus on land rights, health and education, and compulsory Indigenous studies for all Australian children.

In the meantime, more radical campaigning emerged with ideas based on the American Black Power movement. Their Indigenous leaders, inspired by the Black Panthers gained a lot of publicity with extreme and fearless statements and a willingness to use violence and endure arrests in order to achieve equality. In 1972, a group of Indigenous activists planted a beach umbrella later replaced by a tent on the lawns of the Old Parliament House in Canberra. They proclaimed the site was the 'Aboriginal Embassy', thereby declaring that Indigenous people were treated as foreigners in their own country. The group declared the tent would remain until the government granted Indigenous people land rights. In spite of several attempts to dismantle it, the tent embassy is still present today. In 1972, it was becoming clear that equality with other Australians was no longer enough and that specific rights and self-determination for Indigenous people were needed.

The Whitlam government "did result in the entry of indigenous people into the centre of the Australian political process"²⁷ with the creation of Aboriginal units in the state Departments of Health or Legal Aid and Housing Schemes. The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) was set up to represent Indigenous people on a national level. The Committee had little power and support from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

²⁵ The Aboriginal flag represents a yellow circle in-between a black and a red band. It symbolises the sun, the black people and the red earth on which they stand. The red colour is also a reminder of the blood spilt during colonisation. The Torres Strait Islander flag uses green and blue to represent the land and sea, black for the people and white as a symbol of peace. The dhari (headdress) represents Torres Strait Island people and the five-pointed star represents the five major island groups. The star also represents navigation, as a symbol of the seafaring culture of the Torres Strait. It was designed in 1992.

²⁶ WHITLAM, Gough, "1972 Election Policy Speech", Whitlam Dismissal website, <http://whitlamdismissal.com/1972/11/13/whitlam-1972-election-policy-speech.html>, accessed on 12 February 2015.

²⁷ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 149.

Frustration was felt on both sides as little progress was made, funds were mismanaged, and non-Indigenous Australians became more and more hostile towards self-determination or land rights.

The Fraser Liberal government (1975-1983) moved from a policy of self-determination to self-management which translated into more government control over Indigenous organisations and reduced funding. The States were mainly left in charge of Indigenous policy and the federal government often failed to intervene in favour of Indigenous communities facing mining companies on their traditional lands. The media often portrayed land claims as little more than a way for Indigenous people to fill their pockets with government money (especially when those claims were made by urban Indigenous people perceived as inauthentic) and the Terra Nullius doctrine still prevailed as this 1976 statement from the Western Australian Premier Charles Court reveals:

The land of Western Australia does not belong to the Aborigines. The idea that Aborigines, because of having lived in this land before the days of white settlement, have some prior title to land which gives them perpetual right to demand tribute of all others who may inhabit it is not only inconsistent with any idea of fairness or common humanity, in fact it is as crudely selfish and racist a notion as one can imagine. Nor is it an idea which has ever accorded with the law of this nation.²⁸

During those years, the egalitarian discourse which had so far been used to promote rights for Indigenous people started to be used against them. Indigenous people became seen as both dispossessed and disadvantaged, and as having too much, an ambivalent feeling which endures today, as the following chapters will demonstrate. Added to the idea that Indigenous people received too much money and preferential treatments from the government, to the detriment of the non-Indigenous average 'Aussie battler',²⁹ was the

²⁸ Western Australian Premier Charles Court in 1976, quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia, op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁹ "The term battler has been used to describe 'ordinary' or working-class individuals who persevere through their commitments despite adversity. (...) Australians use the term battler with particular meaning related to their cultural attitudes such as toughness, informality, modesty and egalitarianism". SEKIYA, Noriko, "Aussie 'Battler' as a Cultural Keyword in Australian English", *Griffith Working Papers in Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication*, Vol.1, No. 1, 2008, pp. 21-23.

belief that the special programs created at school for example, and the special status given to Indigenous people in general was a threat to national unity.

After the end of the White Australia policy, multiculturalism became the official government policy in 1978, with the aim of portraying Australia's cultural diversity as enriching. The policy of multiculturalism turned its back on assimilation and encouraged immigrants to retain their cultural identities while living in Australia. Nevertheless, despite the support given to the different ethnic communities, the multicultural policies were "based upon the premise that all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future first and foremost."³⁰ The focus on national unity was an argument in favour of what John Howard would later call 'practical reconciliation', "where basic entitlements as citizens are endorsed but specific rights as Indigenous people are constrained or denied within mainstream political and administrative practices."³¹ The official policy of self-determination era ended with the election of Liberal Prime Minister John Howard in 1996, and with the failure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) – created in 1990 and later accused of corruption and mismanagement, and eventually dismantled in 2004 – to allow Indigenous Australians to become involved in political decisions affecting them.³²

2.1.5 1990s-2000s: The Ambiguous Decades

The 1990s and 2000s combined an increasing awareness and interest in Indigenous people, culture and issues, with a continuing reluctance to grant Indigenous people special rights which would potentially undermine the Australian unity and core identity.

³⁰ MORAN, Anthony, *Australia: Nation, Belonging, and Globalization, Australia: Nation, Belonging and Globalization*, London, New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 111.

³¹ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

³² ATSIC was replaced in 2010 by the non-governmental National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (NCAFP) to "give advice, advocate, monitor and evaluate government performance on Indigenous issues, but not deliver services or programs (like ATSIC did)."

KORFF, Jens, "Aboriginal representative bodies", *Creative Spirits*, 22 June 2016, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/selfdetermination/aboriginal-representative-bodies#ixzz4ErckOUwa>, accessed on 19 July 2016.

2.1.5.1 Deaths in Custody

In 1987, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was established to respond to the concerns of the families of a significant number of Indigenous prisoners who died in custody. Indigenous people were – and still are – arrested at rates which are much higher than other Australians.³³ The commission investigated 99 deaths which had happened between 1980 and 1989 and concluded that they were not due to police violence. Even though a death could not be attributed to a specific police officer, the Indigenous families hoped the report would recognise the responsibility of the non-Indigenous Australian community in creating circumstances which lead to the normalisation of detention for Indigenous people.

2.1.5.2 The Council for Reconciliation – 1991-2000

The report did contribute to the reconciliation movement which spanned the 1990s and 2000s. The final recommendation was for political leaders to launch a process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Based on this, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR)³⁴ was created in 1991. It was composed of twelve non-Indigenous and thirteen Indigenous community leaders.

The object of the establishment of the Council is to promote a process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community, based on an appreciation by the Australian community as a whole of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements and of the unique position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the indigenous peoples of Australia, and by means that include the fostering of an

³³ Indigenous people make up 27 percent of the national prison population while representing 3 percent of the Australian population. They are 13 times more likely to go to prison than non-Indigenous people. Between 2000 and 2010, the Indigenous imprisonment rate increased by 51.5 percent compared to 3.1 percent for non-Indigenous Australians.

“‘A National Crisis’: Indigenous Incarceration Rates Worse than 25 years On”, *SBS website*, 15 April 2016, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/04/15/national-crisis-indigenous-incarceration-rates-worse-25-years>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

³⁴ Now known as *Reconciliation Australia*.

ongoing national commitment to co-operate to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.³⁵

The Council therefore aimed at putting forward a more positive vision of Indigenous people and culture through the promotion of better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and at achieving reconciliation by 2001 – the centenary of the Australian Federation. This move towards a better knowledge and understanding between both groups in the present echoed Prime Minister Paul Keating's wish to acknowledge the damage done to the Indigenous population in the past, and to accept responsibility for its consequences, as he explained in his famous Redfern address in December 1992.

[T]he starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us. If we needed a reminder of this, we received it this year. The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody showed with devastating clarity that the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice.³⁶

Keating's speech approached the issue of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships from an emotional point of view, emphasising the deep bonds between both groups. This approach resonated well with the Australian public, and in the 1990s, a process of coming to terms with the history of dispossession and violence committed towards Indigenous people started. The report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was the first of several high-profile events which brought Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations to the front of the stage.

³⁵ "Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act", *Australasian Legal Information Institute* website, 1991, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/cfara1991338/s5.html, accessed on 5 March 2015.

³⁶ KEATING, Paul, "Redfern Speech: Year of the World's Indigenous People, 10 December 1992", *Official website for the Honourable Paul Keating*, 1992, <http://www.keating.org.au/shop/item/redfern-speech-year-for-the-worlds-indigenous-people---10-december-1992>, accessed on 5 March 2015.

2.1.5.3 The Mabo Judgements

In 1982, Eddie Koiki Mabo and four other Murray Islanders took the Queensland government to court and asked for the restitution of their land. The High Court ruling in 1992 overturned the principle of *Terra Nullius* for the first time by declaring that Native Title³⁷ was not automatically extinguished by the acquisition of land by the British Crown or the Commonwealth. Despite the fact that it turned out to be difficult for populations previously removed from their lands to demonstrate ongoing connection to it and therefore claim their traditional land back, this decision had a major symbolic impact in that it recognised that Australia never was an un-inhabited continent, but that it was taken from its original population at the time of colonisation.

Alan was 14 at the time of the second Mabo judgement. He already identified as Indigenous and recalled the reconciliation era and specifically the High Court historic decision as an important moment for Indigenous people which confirmed his pride in his Indigenous heritage.

Adam *A lot of stuff was going on. It was just such a big change in Aboriginal-white relations. This idea that an Aboriginal person was actually fighting for their rights, and for someone like me: I had never seen that before. I wasn't around in the 70s when Aborigines were protesting.*

2.1.5.4 Bringing Them Home

The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report was another major milestone in the recognition of the wrongs committed against Indigenous people by previous governments. After having heard evidence from 777 individuals and organisations, the report revealed the impact of the removal of 'half-caste' children from their families between 1910 and 1970. Many victims described a loss of identity and belonging after having lost their connections to Indigenous families and cultures but never been considered 'white' by the non-Indigenous community in which they were supposed to blend. The inquiry found connections between

³⁷ With the concept of Native Title, Indigenous people's right to their land as original inhabitants of the Australian continent is recognised. Conversely, the concept of *Terra Nullius* posits that the continent did not belong to anyone when the British took possession of it in 1770.

removal and a poorer health or likelihood to be arrested as an adult.³⁸ The stealing of children had major negative impacts on the ways Indigenous people came to regard their identity as I will explain in the second part of this chapter. The report strongly affected the non-Indigenous Australian community and led to the organisation of the first *Sorry Day* on 26 May 1998. On that day in 2000, 250,000 people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of reconciliation. Sorry books received messages of apology from 24,763 Australians.³⁹

2.1.5.5 The 2000 Sydney Olympic Games

Following these demonstrations of goodwill from the non-Indigenous community, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games also featured Indigenous history and culture, and the theme of reconciliation. By showcasing to the world an image of an Australian nation ready and proud to embrace its Indigenous past and present culture, the Olympics were the answer to the controversial 1988 celebration of the founding of the first colony – also in Sydney – which had featured a re-enactment of British settlement. The famous image of young non-Indigenous Nikki Webster walking hand in hand with traditionally-clad elder Djakapurra Munyarryun⁴⁰ celebrated the coming together of ‘white’ and ‘black’ Australia and sent a strong message of reconciliation. At the same time, Cathy Freeman became the face of Indigenous Australia when she won a gold medal at the 400m final and was cheered by all Australians.

Nevertheless, the depiction of Indigenous culture during the Games was a non-threatening one. This depiction could gain approval from the entire community and promote an idea of reconciliation, but it also carefully avoided any sensitive and still

³⁸ “Underlying Issues”, *Bringing Them Home*, Australasian Legal Information Institute website, <http://www3.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/stolen/stolen58.html#Heading245>, accessed on 25 November 2016.

³⁹ Australian Government website, *Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations*, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/sorry-day-stolen-generations>, accessed on 5 March 2015.

⁴⁰ The opening ceremony featured a traditional and un-problematic vision of Indigenous Australia which Australians as well as foreigners are familiar with but which hardly represented the diversity of the Indigenous population in twenty-first century Australia, or the ongoing issues faced by the Indigenous community.

unresolved issues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, such as the debate around an official apology from the Australian government. The Olympic Games are one example of what some people saw as a tokenistic recognition of Indigenous Australia and an appropriation of Indigenous symbols for national purposes. Nevertheless, Indigenous Australians also benefitted from the Games in several ways, showcasing the vitality of their culture on the Australian and world stages. Some members of the Indigenous community like Geoff Clark, the chairman of ATSIC, praised the Games when he described them as “a powerful healing statement for Aboriginal Australia”, a “celebration of our survival” and the opening ceremony as “a unifying point in our history, a milestone on the road to reconciliation from which there should be no turning back”.⁴¹

2.1.5.6 The Apology to the Stolen Generations

The reconciliation movement culminated with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s 2008 official apology to the Stolen Generations – an act former Prime Minister John Howard had refused to perform, arguing that the policy of removal belonged to the past and that today’s Australian government and people should not feel guilty or feel they needed to take responsibility for other people’s actions. This apology had been one of the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report and was widely supported by the Australian public. Not only was it an acknowledgment of the mistreatment of the first Australians, but also a strong commitment to equality in the future, as this extract from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s speech reveals:

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. (...) A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. (...) A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. (...) A future where all Australians, whatever their

⁴¹ CLARK, Geoff, “ATSIC Final Report”, *Australasian Legal Information Institute* website, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/finalreport/quotes.htm>, accessed on 11 March 2015.

origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.⁴²

The movement of Reconciliation allowed non-Indigenous Australians to start interacting with Indigenous Australia in a symbolic and non-threatening way. Saying 'sorry' was a way for non-Indigenous Australia to alleviate some of the guilt accumulated since colonisation while allowing things to essentially remain the way they were. As David Mellor *et al.* explained: "What seems to be missing is any discussion of the possible response of the Indigenous community to these actions, particularly its capacity and willingness to enter forgiveness."⁴³

In the 1990s, a lot of non-Indigenous Australians developed a greater knowledge of and interest in Indigenous culture through education or art. For example, Sally Morgan's autobiography, *My Place*, which recounts the discovery of her Indigenous past, became an instant classic and featured on many high school reading lists, as Michelle recalled. Nevertheless, for a lot of non-Indigenous Australians, this did not mean interacting with Indigenous people directly.⁴⁴

2.1.5.7 The History Wars

In 1993, John Howard's criticism of the 'black armband' view of history came as a response to the focus on alternative histories written in the 1970s and 1980s and which were at the centre of Keating's vision of Australia. These histories of Indigenous people in Australia and around the world put more emphasis on the effects of colonisation, on dispossession and exclusion of native populations. The 1988 bicentenary of Federation was an opportunity for historians to review Australia's history and to wonder about the degree to which Australians should express remorse about the past. John Howard gave the debate a high profile when, as Prime Minister, he repeatedly rejected the emphasis on a negative account

⁴² "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples", *Australian Government* website, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>, accessed on 5 March 2015.

⁴³ MELLOR, David, BRETHERTON, Di, FIRTH, Lucy, "Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Australia: The Dilemma of Apologies", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 13, issue 1, 2007, p. 12.

⁴⁴ See 4.2.3.2.

of Australian history and warned against teaching Australian students about a “racist and bigoted past”:⁴⁵

I profoundly reject the black armband view of Australian history. I believe the balance sheet of Australian history is a very generous and benign one. I believe that, like any other nation, we have black marks upon our history but amongst the nations of the world we have a remarkably positive history. (...) I think we have been too apologetic about our history in the past. I believe it is tremendously important that we understand (...) that the Australia achievement has been a heroic one, a courageous one and a humanitarian one.⁴⁶

Echoes of the ‘history wars’ can be found in the major 1990s events previously mentioned: the High Court of Australia relied on these new histories to deliver its verdict in the Mabo decision and two justices referred to “a national legacy of unutterable shame”.⁴⁷ The debate was somewhat reignited in 2014 when Education Minister Christopher Pyne expressed his wish to see “the benefits of Western civilisation” at the heart of the national school curriculum.⁴⁸

2.1.5.8 Fears of a Divided Nation

National unity was another strong argument surrounding these debates: the special rights and unique Indigenous identity put forward in the previous decades became more and more criticised during the Howard years. His government reaffirmed the egalitarian vision of Australia and the need for ‘practical reconciliation’, that is to say dealing with present disadvantages within the Indigenous community instead of dwelling on past wrongs committed against Indigenous people. At the same time as Pauline Hanson, leader of the right-wing populist party One Nation affirmed that “to survive in peace and harmony,

⁴⁵ HOWARD, John quoted in MCKENNA, Mark, “Different Perspectives on Black Armband History, Politics and Public Administration Group”, 10 November 1997, *Parliament of Australia* website, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/RP9798/98RP05, accessed on 6 February 2014.

⁴⁶ HOWARD, John quoted in MCKENNA, Mark, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ High Court Justices DEANE and GAUDRON, quoted in MCKENNA, Mark, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ CULLEN, Simon, “Teachers Warn of ‘Culture Wars’ as Christopher Pyne Announces Back-to-Basics Curriculum Review”, *ABC News* online, 10 January 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-10/pyne-calls-for-national-curriculum-to-focus-on-benefits-of-west/5193804>, accessed on 19 July 2016.

united and strong, we must have one people, one nation, one flag”,⁴⁹ athlete Cathy Freeman was strongly criticised for carrying both the Australian and Aboriginal flags after her victory in the 1994 Commonwealth games.⁵⁰

The land rights legislation also brought about fears among the Australian public of deeper divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. While the public developed an irrational fear of Indigenous Australians reclaiming their ‘backyards’, historian Geoffrey Blainey warned the country about the implications of lands rights: “To extend land rights is to weaken (...) the real sovereignty and unity of the Australian people.”⁵¹

Miriam was one of several participants who recalled experiencing the ‘Mabo Fear’:

Miriam *One of the first things I remember being scared about as a young person was the passage of the Mabo decision. I think it was about 1996 or 1997 that those legislations went through Parliament, about Land Rights and Native Title, and for some reason, I must have taken some of that information in just hearing on the news (...) that Aboriginal people are going to take Australians’ lands. I remember saying to my dad, “What’s going to happen, Dad?” and he said (...) – and now I know that he was probably joking, “Oh, you never know, blackfellas could come and take our house.” (...) So that was the narrative when I was growing up, surrounding Land Rights. It was like white Australians where I was living were opposed to that.*

With the Land Rights and Native Title debates, Indigenous rights which had been widely supported in 1967 became a threat to ‘white’ Australia. The “Mabo Madness”⁵² is a good example of the limitations of the support for Indigenous rights in Australia during the reconciliation process. While most Australians were ready to say ‘sorry’ for the injustices of the past, fewer were ready to let go of their privileged position as ‘white’ Australians and to question the meaning of Australian-ness. The government responded to this general fear with the 10-point plan released after the Wik decision about pastoral leases limiting the

⁴⁹ HANSON, Pauline, “Maiden Speech” (1996), *One Nation* website, http://www.onenation.com.au/Pauline_Hanson/maiden_speech.html, accessed on 9 March 2015.

⁵⁰ See detailed analysis in 5.3.2.3.

⁵¹ BLAINEY, Geoffrey quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 178.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

possibility of claiming Native Title. Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer promised “bucket loads of extinguishment”⁵³ of Native Title as a result of the amendments.

2.1.5.9 The Northern Territory Intervention

The 2007 Northern Territory National Emergency Response (known as ‘the Intervention’) set up in 2007 as a response to growing denunciations of child sexual abuse and neglect in the Northern Territory was seen as another controversial government action. The measure received bi-partisan support but was also criticised, particularly for bringing back a similar kind of control on Indigenous people by the government than what was previously done in the past. The Intervention implied a suspension of the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act guaranteeing legal protection against racial discrimination. Opponents to the Intervention complained about how the way the debate around the Intervention was framed: it was deemed impossible to decry the suspension of rights without being accused of refusing to rescue abused Indigenous children. The measure was renewed by following governments and is still in place today.

2.1.5.10 Conclusion to 2.1.5

The 1990s and 2000s can be seen as ambiguous decades. It was a time during which the majority of Australians developed a stronger understanding of Indigenous history and culture and through this, a sense of guilt and a willingness to become involved in the process of reconciliation. In spite of the public’s good will, however, reconciliation still fails to move beyond symbolic events like the apology to the Stolen Generations, and it can be argued that Indigenous people are still expected to become reconciled with the rest of Australian society.⁵⁴ The desire for reconciliation clashes with fears about land rights and about a national unity threatened by Indigenous demands for self-government.

⁵³ KEATING, Paul, “The 10-Point Plan that Undid the Good Done on Native Title”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 1st 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/the-10point-plan-that-undid-the-good-done-on-native-title-20110531-1feec.html>, accessed on 19 July 2016.

⁵⁴ See 5.3.2.

In the same way as the meaning of reconciliation is often defined by non-Indigenous people, as the following chapters will show, whether positive or negative, the representation of Indigenous people in Australia is still largely influenced by non-Indigenous Australia.

While the 1990s and 2000s influenced the participants more directly (changes in school curricula, reconciliation events across the country etc.), the discriminatory policies of previous decades had an impact on their families and were responsible for a lack of knowledge about their Indigenous heritage. I will now explain how the treatment of Indigenous people in the past is directly linked to the participants' current situations.

2.2 The legacy of Past Policies on the Participants' Families

2.2.1 Being Stolen

As a result of the removal policy in place until the end of the 1970s, many Australians are still unaware of their Indigenous heritage.

Michael Peachey, Students' Services Manager at Nura Gili, the University of New South Wales' Indigenous centre, explained that it was common to welcome students who only learnt about their Indigenous ancestry late in their lives:

Michael *A lot of people don't get told until their grandparents are on their deathbed, or, you know, they're passing away, or they had passed away, and then they'll be told why their parents, or their uncles and aunties... So a lot of students do find out late, and that's from, you know, past histories. We see a lot more now. Yeah, it's because of the Stolen Generations, you know, people changing their names, from an Indigenous name to just another name so that they could get work.*

Displacing children from their communities and traditional lands not only had psychological consequences, but also makes it very complex for their descendants to trace their heritage today. While some of the stolen children managed to come back to their families and reconnect with their culture, some of them, as a result of the assimilation

policy portraying Indigenous culture as dying and inferior, ended up rejecting it and hiding it from their close ones. Others were and still are unable to locate their Indigenous relatives.

Michelle who now lives in France is interested in learning more about her Indigenous ancestry but like other participants, she kept emphasising the lack of information at her disposal.

Michelle *My grandmother, we believe, is half-caste on my father's side...The thing is, we don't really know much about it because the birth was never recorded. Her parents' birth was never recorded. (...) She passed away (...) and we can't find any birth or death or marriage record (...) past that to my great grandparents. It's not possible because until 1967, the Aborigines were considered to be part of flora and fauna.⁵⁵ (...) And when my grandmother died, (...) they just put (...) in the obituary "thought to be 87 years of age".*

Associations like Link-Up⁵⁶ help families reconnect and offer counselling and support. But as a coordinator working at the Indigenous Students' Services at the University of Technology of Sydney (UTS) told me, the process of finding your family and having your Indigeneity confirmed can be a long one:

Damita *You get a lot of older people, more mature students that come in in their 30s, 40s, 50s. Same sort of thing: they're from a generation where people were removed, and later on in life, they're starting to reconnect with people, and it can take a lifetime to do that; it doesn't just happen overnight. We've spoken to a lot of people that are in that position.*

Out of the eleven participants, Casey is the only one who has clear evidence of his ancestors being victims of the removal policy. Casey's grandfather and his two great aunts

⁵⁵ This is actually not true but it is an enduring myth. Ron Sutton explains why: "Several states did, indeed, often manage Aboriginal affairs through departments that also handled flora, fauna and wildlife. But there is nothing to show Aboriginal people were ever classed as one and the same, despite the fact they were not being counted in the official human population."

SUTTON, Ron, "Myths Persist about the 1967 Referendum", SBS website, 11 March 2014, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/03/10/myths-persist-about-1967-referendum>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

⁵⁶ Link-Up was created to "establish a national network of family tracing and reunion services" (AIATSIS website, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/finding-your-family/link-services>) following a recommendation from the *Bringing Them Home* report. There is a Link-Up association in every State and Territory in Australia.

were members of the Stolen Generations. Casey's grandfather's story illustrates the trauma of removal and its lifelong consequences which include a loss his sense of belonging, a denial of his heritage and identity, and the need to escape the impossible in-between position members of the Stolen Generations were often left in, no longer 'black', but not 'white' either.

Casey *Three days before [my grandfather] passed away, my dad called up from here [Australia] back to New Zealand and asked – he was just doing a bit of research – “Dad, (...) were you part of the Stolen Generations?” [My grandfather] said, “Oh, you don't know what you're fucking talking about”, and threw the phone at my grandmother. So he pretty much denied that part of his identity until the very end. (...) My grandfather managed to keep, to hide from all that pain and suffering, loss of identity, loss of belonging and all that for more than thirty years.*

The last time his black family ever saw him was in 1969, which was at the Empress Hotel in Redfern, in Sydney. (...) It was always like a central place to go and find your family, Aboriginal people. (...) So his sister was there. She said, “What are you doing here?” (...) “Why don't you come and see our mum out in Surry Hills?” It's a suburb in Sydney. They went out there and their mother wasn't there. So he got a piece of charcoal out of the fireplace, wrote, 'Norman was here' on a piece of cardboard, left it there and then next morning flew to New Zealand. It was the last time they saw him, ever.

The removal and assimilation policies did not only affect their direct victims but also had a long-lasting impact on Indigenous people's trust in the government. Several participants mentioned the necessity of hiding one's Indigenous heritage in order not to have one's children taken. When he was little, Josh remembered his grandmother calling herself 'English' in spite of her Indigenous heritage being known within the family. Josh explains her choice of identity in these terms:

Josh *My grandmother – I don't know how – she was raised during the Stolen Generations. But she was born white. (...) She didn't know that she was Indigenous. And that was because of the Stolen Generations. Because otherwise she would have been taken.*

The strong expression “born white” indicates the impact of the removal policy on two generations: his grandmother's family felt they needed to hide their Indigenous heritage from her, and Josh's grandmother later found it impossible to acknowledge this heritage.

Many families lived with the fear that their fair-skinned children would be taken to be raised in the 'white' society. Vanessa explained that her mother hid their heritage from her children for this reason. Even though the removals completely stopped at the end of the 1970s, when her daughter was growing up in the 1990s, Vanessa's mother was still worried about the potential intervention of child care services.⁵⁷

Vanessa *She said when we were growing up she was worried that if she told people, that child protection services would check up on us, because we were a low-income family. So, she was quite worried about that stuff. She had heard too many stories when she moved down from Queensland about what's happening.*

Vanessa's mother's feelings are echoed in Gamilaroi⁵⁸ writer Kelly Briggs' article about contemporary removals of Indigenous children by the government:

In the back of my mind, I always hear the voice that says "don't ever let anyone know you're doing it tough, because they will take your kids from you". (...) [My mother and I] spoke about [my grandmother]'s obsession with cleanliness, which sprang from her fear of the dreaded "welfare man", a government employee who could come to your house and demand to be let inside to ensure your house was clean, that there was adequate food available, that the children were going to school. (...) The fear I carry and the aversion I feel towards governmental departments is due entirely to inter-generational trauma. My mother carries this fear, my grandmother carried this fear, my great-grandmother carried this fear.⁵⁹

Vanessa's experience shows how even children born at the start of the reconciliation process were likely to still suffer from the consequences of the removal policy. Indeed, Vanessa's mother only decided to let her and her brother know about their Indigenous heritage when they were both teenagers. Even today, when she is unsure about who she is

⁵⁷ "A Special Commission of Inquiry into the Department of Community Services found that in March 2008 there were 4,458 Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, 4 times as many Aboriginal children as were in foster homes, institutions or missions in 1969, during the Stolen Generations."

KORFF, Jens, "A guide to Australia's Stolen Generations", *Creative Spirits*, 26 June 2016, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/a-guide-to-australias-stolen-generations#>, accessed on 18 July 2016.

⁵⁸ The Gamilaroi people come from northern New South Wales and are one of the major group of Indigenous people in Australia.

⁵⁹ BRIGGS, Kelly, "Aboriginal Mothers Like Me Still Fear that Our Children Could Be Taken Away", *The Guardian*, 21 January 2014.

dealing with, Vanessa does not quite trust people to accept her Indigenous heritage and follows her mother's advice to remain cautious.

Vanessa *In tense situations, (...) I just don't acknowledge what I am. I just stay quiet. I think that's what my mum has taught me.*

2.2.2 Passing and Exemptions: Denying One's Indigenous Heritage

Josh *We went out to Brewarrina, we went out to the Aboriginal museum and they sort of had like a family tree, and they sort of could fill in the blanks of where we sat in, and they had written (...) on the family tree, 'Gone white'.*

When Josh and his family visited their Indigenous family's community, they realised that their relatives had, in a way, crossed them out of the family tree because Josh's ancestors passed into 'white' society.

Miriam recounts another story of passing which illustrates how, sometimes, little is known about the reasons why Indigenous people chose to "[go] white".

Miriam *There's this family back home in Forbes (...) who identify as Aboriginal now, not really dark-skinned, but (...) quite dark-skinned. And there is a rumour in the town that I heard my mum's friend once say. She said, "You know that family; they were Indian, and all these Aboriginal benefits came out and then they said they were Aboriginal." And this old lady said, (...) "The grandmother even used to have that red dot, and when the Aboriginal benefits came out, they changed." (...) And I found out (...) that a lot of Aboriginal families (...) would identify as Indian to the extent that they'd wear the red dot to stop the gubbah⁶⁰ from taking their children. (...) It was true that they did do that, and it was not that they removed the dot when the Aboriginal benefits came out; it was that they removed the dot when they felt safe to be able to do that!*

Miriam's quote shows how the reasons for passing – something many families chose in order to avoid discrimination – are still misunderstood by a lot of non-Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous family in Miriam's story pretended to be Indian to avoid falling under the government's policy of assimilation for 'half-caste' (or as she says "quite dark-

⁶⁰Aboriginal English term for 'white man', probably short for 'government man'.

skinned”) children. The family also made this decision to avoid the stigma associated with Indigeneity which was still prevalent in the 1960s and which, as the quote shows, still exists today although it has evolved. Indeed, fairer-skinned Indigenous people used to pass as ‘white’ or as foreigners because Indigenous people were treated as inferior. Today, this family is accused of not being Indigenous enough to claim benefits. This criticism is not a non-Indigenous prerogative. The experience of ‘passing’ can be found in many Indigenous families. But now that claiming one’s Indigenous ancestry has become somewhat easier, it is not unusual to hear Indigenous voices raised against these ‘newcomers, “Johnny-come-latelys” as Casey was once called, who are seen as ‘riding the gravy train’ and taking advantage of the benefits now granted to Indigenous people by the government.⁶¹ This decision was usually made out of fear and shame, or as a means of survival in a society which did not value Indigenous identity. When an Indigenous person’s skin was light enough, he/she could pretend to be of European descent in order to move freely in ‘mainstream’ Australian society, get a job or live anywhere he/she wanted. The consequences of ‘passing’ should not be underestimated as Jean Boladeras explains.

A person who is of Aboriginal descent but who does not look like an Aboriginal person may choose to pass as white. It is not an easy decision to make, and the cost can be very high. On the one hand there is an attachment to family and to culture, the acceptance of and adherence to a minority group that is often marginalised and held in contempt by a wider society, and racial economic and social disadvantage. On the other hand, denial or ‘passing as white’ may cause alienation and identity confusion, and it may involve potential psychological damage for oneself, or for family and friends, by the repudiation of one’s own history.⁶²

Indigenous people who chose to ‘pass’ and pretended to be ‘white’ had to reject previous connections with their Indigenous communities. This led many of their descendants, such as those of Josh, Vanessa or Casey, unaware of their Indigenous heritage.

In the 1940s, following the implementation of the assimilation policy, exemption certificates were created. In a segregated country where Indigenous people were under the

⁶¹ This issue is analysed in chapter 6 and above all in chapter 8.

⁶² BOLADERAS, Jean, “The desolate loneliness of racial passing” in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, Bern: Peter Lang AG: International Academic Publishers, 2007, p. 59.

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control of non-Indigenous protectors and were denied basic rights – from the right to vote to that of buying alcohol – a ‘dog tag’, as it was referred to by Indigenous people,⁶³ meant that a ‘part-Aboriginal’ person was deemed to have enough ‘white blood’ to be able to assimilate into non-Indigenous society. This process implied a renunciation of most connections to the Indigenous community. In order to be granted an exemption certificate, the Indigenous person had to agree to integrate the ‘white’ Australian society, thus disowning his/her Indigenous culture.⁶⁴ Exempted Indigenous people gained advantages which others were denied such as welfare payments, schooling for their children or assurance that the said children would not be removed.⁶⁵

Passing and denial are common features in the participants’ stories. This phenomenon happens at different levels and across generations.⁶⁶

Shame, which is common in previous generations, among children who did not grow up with a consistent Indigenous upbringing, and with a mostly negative vision of their Indigenous heritage, is another major reason why Indigenous connections are too often kept quiet in families until it is sometimes too late to retrieve them.

Casey explained how his stolen grandfather never talked about his Indigenous background to his Pakeha wife or to his children.

⁶³ KORFF, Jens, “Aboriginal History Timeline (1900-1969)”, *Creative Spirits* website, 9 August 2016, <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/aboriginal-history-timeline-1900-1969>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

⁶⁴ Moruya elder Aunty Dorrie Moore talks about her grandfather’s certificate and its meaning: “It was a licence that stripped us of our culture, our language, our family. (...) You couldn’t speak the language, or practise the culture.”

MILTON, Vanessa, “Remembering the Days of the ‘Dog Licence’”, *ABC* website, 5 February 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/01/31/3935994.htm>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

⁶⁵ “An exemption certificate entitled the holder to open a bank account, receive certain Commonwealth social service benefits, own land and purchase alcohol. All of these were denied to Indigenous people under the Act. On the other hand, holders of exemption certificates were not allowed to live with their families on reserves and even had to apply for permission to visit them. (...) The system put Aboriginal families in a double-bind. If they wanted to receive Commonwealth social security benefits to assist them care for their children, they had to leave their homes and extended family on the missions.”

“Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families”, chapter 8, *Australian Human Rights Commission* website, 1997, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-chapter-8>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

⁶⁶ For an analysis of the concept of passing in the participants’ lives, see 6.3.

Casey *Whenever his wife or his kids would ask, he'd be like, he'd shut them down and say, "I don't want to talk about that. None of your business. Mind your own business. Bugger off". This sort of thing. He was always very secretive. (...) My dad said that he and his sisters used to tease my pop saying, "Oh, when are we getting our land back, Dad? When are we getting our land back? Like, all the Aborigines are", even though they didn't know he was Aboriginal, so he did look a bit Aboriginal. But they never knew. And he'd get very angry when they said that sort of stuff.*

Casey interpreted his grandfather's refusal to acknowledge his Indigenous heritage – which the later traced back – as an attempt to escape a harsh past of displacement resulting in a loss of identity and belonging. Because he never felt completely at home in Indigenous or non-Indigenous societies, his grandfather chose to build a new life in a different country, hiding from his Indigenous relatives and keeping his heritage secret in his new family.

Similarly, in spite of having clear evidence that his grandmother had Indigenous heritage, Adam's great aunt still refuses to acknowledge the family's Indigenous heritage.

Adam *The controversy's still there. (...) My grandmother fully accepts that she is Aboriginal. Her sister doesn't. (...) We have all the documents, but she insists that there was a slave ship that went to New-Zealand that had an African guy on it, and that the African guy ended up coming back to Australia, and... As far as I know, New Zealand never had any slave ships, so... (...) But according to her, we're African, not Aboriginal. According to another part of the family, we're Indian. (...) We went to a family reunion recently, and (...) she gave that whole story about, "We're not Aboriginal" (...) and my mum just wrote back saying, "That doesn't make any sense. For starters, they don't look African." We've got pictures: they're not African! (...) You just have to look at the family: it's clear – well to me it's clear. I might not look Aboriginal, but if you look at my great aunties...they are!*

Adam's story is yet another example of older generations of Indigenous people refusing to own up to any Indigenous heritage. The reasons, as we saw, are varied but it is quite clear that a strong sense of shame was associated with Indigenous identity for a long time, and this feeling was probably stronger among children raised outside of their Indigenous community, in a non-Indigenous assimilationist environment where 'black' was both a colour and a culture to be eradicated. As Adam's story shows, it is not uncommon for Indigenous Australians in these situations to have grown up believing that any heritage was better than Indigenous.

2.2.3 A Legacy of Shame, Silence and Uncertainty

As we saw with the example of Casey's grandfather or Adam's great aunt, one of the legacies of the policies aiming at assimilating Indigenous people into 'white' society is a sense of shame associated with being Indigenous. A lot of the participants pointed out the embarrassment their parents often felt when their Indigenous heritage was mentioned.

Adam *They were brought up with it being such a shame, (...) thinking of Aboriginal people as dirty, and uncultured. It was like having a taint on your blood.*

Andrew *It was seen as something to be ashamed of, for a white woman, to have been with a black man.*

Adina *Even in the early 80s, (...) everyone just kept quiet about it and you told everyone you had a really good tan.*

Kate *Because of the generation [my mother] grew up in (...), it was better to keep it under wraps than talk about it.*

All of these participants link this feeling of shame to a different era in which being Indigenous was something which was better kept quiet. They explain that any heritage was better than Indigenous which was at the bottom of the hierarchy in Australia, in spite of the civil rights movement and gradual recognition of the damage done by colonisation and past policies. I asked several of the participants whether they thought there was a difference in the way Indigenous culture and people were perceived in Australia by different generations. All of them responded positively to this question even though they thought identifying remained difficult.

Adina *I said to Mother, "What's wrong with all of you?" She said, "It's not like these days. These days you can say whoever the hell you are, and everyone accepts it. In those days, you shut up about it."*

Adam *[My father] struggles with the idea of telling people, and with admitting that that's who he is. And my auntie does the same thing. So that's why I suspect that's a generational issue. They just found out too late. They had all these attitudes about Aboriginal people and what they were... It was like they were trying to accept a bad side of themselves, I guess.*

To the 'generational issue', Michelle adds the idea of place. Michelle spent a part of her childhood in regional Victoria. She told me that she could not go back and tell her old high school friends about her Indigenous connections in a place where she heard people of her age call Aborigines "fucking coons"⁶⁷ (...) causing so much trouble in the town". She reflects on the fact that the level of racism would have probably been even higher when she was growing up, preventing her father from acknowledging his heritage.

Michelle is one of the participants who grew up with hints pointing to Indigenous heritage. For example, she was taken to special Indigenous classes at school and sometimes met her extended Indigenous family. In spite of obvious connections with his Indigenous family, Michelle's father never mentioned the fact that he had Indigenous heritage himself, and Michelle grew up ignorant of the signs. As an adult, she interpreted her father's silence and denial as the result of being brought up in a place and time where admitting that one was Indigenous was impossible. Just as Casey described his grandfather as neither 'black' nor 'white', "sitting on the fence" all his life, Michelle interprets her father's behaviour as symptomatic of the conflict he always had to live with.

Michelle *My dad would make jokes like, (...) "If you could send a ute with twenty Aborigines off a cliff, what do you call it?" and he says, "A waste, cause you could have fit in at least another fifteen in the cabin." They were really offensive jokes.*

Eventually that's how he died when I was 18. (...) He could never handle alcohol and he actually got extremely drunk. (...) He killed two people and killed himself. (...) I was able to find that he had a hard life growing up – he must have because of all the problems with his own identity; (...) it must have been hard for him, knowing that he couldn't say that he had any Aboriginal background, or history, or heritage.

I had two younger brothers – one of them actually committed suicide when he was 24, and a lot of it because he wasn't sure about everything in his background, identity, who his father was, and wondered if he was not going to be like his father.

⁶⁷ A "coon" is an insulting term for a black person.

Part I

In Michelle's opinion, the effects of her father's 'decision' to hide his heritage also hurt her brother. To her, the treatment of Indigenous people leading to denial and anxiety was perpetuated across several generations.

Casey's grandmother also told him that his grandfather who lived in New Zealand was very racist.

Casey *She said he became very racist. He didn't like Maoris. He said to his daughters, "Don't you ever bring one of those Maori boys home, these black bastards", even though he was black!*

For both Michelle and Casey, it is difficult to reconcile their family members' obvious connections to Indigenous culture and people with the persistent denial of their heritage, even leading to racism towards their own people. Casey and Michelle's grandparents are the illustration of the psychological effects the negative vision of Indigeneity in Australia could produce. Many Indigenous people who were not raised within their community and culture had to devise ways of living with a confusing sense of identity and belonging.

This confusion and uncertainty about identity can still be observed a generation later. Several participants mention their parents' reluctance to embrace or even to talk about their Indigenous heritage, or their alternating between acknowledgement and denial.

Vanessa *My mum was always very vague about where we were. Because my brother and I (...) can pass as South-East Asians, and her family lived in Malaysia. So she was always like, "Oh well, you know, I grew up in Malaysia." She would never talk about culture. [I'd ask,] "Do we wear saris?" and she'd always be really vague.*

Michelle *When I went to tell [my mother] on the phone about this project, I hesitated, (...) and thought, "I'll just tell her it's about identity in general, and not mention the Aboriginal part of it", because I just think she would either say, "Do you really think it's a good idea to talk about that?" (...) or "Is it really true that you have Aboriginal heritage? We can't prove it, so you probably don't." (...) Sometimes she will say, "Yes, there is", and other times, "No, there isn't."*

Andrew *The fact that my mum's questionable in regards to her heritage (...) ... It's a strange one for me, because at one time she will openly say at 100 percent, "Yeah, this is your heritage", and then later on will be kind of wavering in that thought.*

These three examples show how even though the participants' parents are aware of an Indigenous heritage in their families, they would rather ignore it than claim it. Looking South-East Asian or of Anglo-Celtic-European descent in the case of Michelle's or Andrew's family allowed them to continue a history of passing and denial. The emphasis is on vagueness, wavering and a tendency to turn doubts into 'Nos'.

Adam told me a story to illustrate why so many Australians from his parents' generation struggle to consistently acknowledge their Indigenous heritage. According to him, rejecting the Indigenous part of one's heritage is not always a conscious decision. With this story about his father, he wished to show how, for people who had grown up during the assimilation years, shame, secret and denial were deeply anchored feelings and habits.

Adam *There's one great story, for me, about my dad and Aboriginality. It just shows exactly where he stands, and why he struggles with it so much. Because it's so subconscious: he doesn't understand how Aboriginal he is. (...) It's a really bizarre thing. Do you know the Sculptures by the Sea?⁶⁸ He was walking down there (...) and he saw a picture of two old Aboriginal people hugging each other – an older woman and an older man – and he just looked at my mum and he goes, "That's such a beautiful picture. But I don't know why." And my mum just looked at him and was like, "Really? You don't know why?!" And he was like, "No. It's just a beautiful picture; I really love that." And then my mum came home and said, "He honestly had no idea. He (...) sees these two Aboriginal people, and he knows that he feels connected, and he knows that that's part of him, but he just can't see it. He can't recognise it. (...) He is so blocked in his brain."*

I think there's a kind of subconscious racism that comes along with being of certain ages, and especially when it comes to Aboriginality.

Adam and his mother believe that to be Indigenous is to have a special connection to the Indigenous community as a whole, but that the negative images surrounding Indigeneity can cloud this connection. Adam believes that because of the time his father

⁶⁸ Sculptures by the Sea is an annual festival organised in Sydney and showcasing sculptures along the coastal walk going from Coogee to Bondi beach.

grew up in, the prejudice against Indigeneity is too ingrained in his mind to give way to recognition and acceptance.

2.2.4 The Possibility of Reconnection

However, if this conflict often appeared in the participants' stories, other families or family members did not have as much trouble accepting their Indigenous heritage. Furthermore, within families, the reactions were sometimes very different. Casey explained how the three children who were removed – his grandfather and his two sisters – all reacted differently to being taken from their families.

Casey *[My grandfather] was in the Catholic boys' home for about five years, I think. So his sister always said that he didn't really know whether he was black or white because of that division that was created through the assimilation process in the Catholic boys' home, and the way they conditioned him. But his (...) younger sister, (...) she would not talk about it at all. She said, "I'm not Aboriginal. They're not my people", that sort of stuff. The other sister was the youngest, and she said her spirit was very strong and she managed to keep her black identity and when she went back [to her community]. She felt at home even though they lived in humpy, little sort-of-shacks things. She felt really at home with those Aboriginal people who were living out there. So you can see the spectrum from complete denial, to on the fence, to keeping that spirit, keeping it alive.*

Similarly, and contrary to her sister who claims their ancestors are Indian, Adam's grandmother and her sister returned to work with their community, as Adam explained: "[My grandmother] had joined the Land Council when she was older to make decisions and that sort of stuff. She was starting to really push the Aboriginal culture." As explained earlier, Adam's grandmother grew up identifying as Indigenous and therefore learning to deal with her identity being denigrated. Many Indigenous people today unite around this history of discrimination.⁶⁹ They gather strength from and take pride in the survival of their people and culture in the face of enduring belittling by non-Indigenous Australia. Adam believes there is a difference between his grandmother's and his father's experiences. Partly because she was married to a non-Indigenous Australian who did not

⁶⁹ See chapter 8.

respect her Indigenous culture, Adam's grandmother rejected her heritage for a long part of her adult life. Nevertheless, and contrary to Adam's father, she had grown up knowing that this was a part of who she was. Adam thinks that his father growing up without this knowledge and in a familial environment and Australian society where being Indigenous was regarded as shameful makes it very difficult for him to embrace his heritage today. As I will show in chapter 8, the lack of experience of racism is considered a problem for many participants who find that this experience would legitimate their Indigeneity.

In spite of the prejudice many Australians from the participants' grandparents' or parents' generations grew up with, reconnecting with one's Indigenous heritage can happen in the next generations. The people I interviewed grew up during the reconciliation era, at a time when the Australian government was starting to promote a better understanding and recognition of Indigenous people. This translated, as I will see, in revised school curricula, in the adoption of Acknowledgements of and Welcome to Country ceremonies, or Indigenous events across the country.⁷⁰ In 1995, then Prime Minister Paul Keating made the Aboriginal flag a national flag.

Therefore, the participants grew up in an Australia which was officially more accepting of Indigenous culture, the symbols of which were now visibly acknowledged. For some parents, seeing their children interested in exploring their heritage and sometimes embracing it triggered a change in their way of perceiving their own heritage. Several participants talked about this phenomenon.

Vanessa and her brother now identify as Indigenous, after having learnt about their Torres Strait Islander heritage from their mother when Vanessa's brother started university. Vanessa works with Indigenous students while her brother is a political advisor. Vanessa explains how her mother is becoming more enthusiastic about her heritage now that her children embrace it.

Vanessa *My brother and I actually ran into someone at a conference once, and they were from the same island as us. And we said Mum's maiden name. (...) We showed a*

⁷⁰ See chapter 5.

picture of my mum and they were like, "She looks like she's from that island." (...) We just sent Mum a photo of them. And Mum was like, "That's really exciting!" But Mum has a bit of a shame I think. Yeah, she's not as open with it (...)

Delphine So what changed her mind?

Vanessa *Me and my brother being so excited, and learning about it. And she wanted to learn even more with us. (...) She gets really excited about it... She's so cute! (laughs) She has a Facebook now, and she shares everything my brother's doing. (...) She identifies now, and she's completely happy and, you know, she's very happy that we both identify.*

Adina was born in 1982. She has a 12-year-old son who has always identified as Indigenous. She explained to me how she kept learning from her son who, every day, brings back knowledge and enthusiasm from his teachings at school. This is something which helps her reconnect with her Indigeneity.

For his part, Casey told me about his non-Indigenous grandfather who approves of his grandson's choice to identify as Indigenous.

Casey *My mother's father, I was talking to him on the phone – he lives in the UK – and he said, "Yeah, we've just read this article in the National Geographic about how these mining companies are destroying Aboriginal people's lands in Australia. It's terrible what they're doing to your people." And I was like, "Wow!"*

This example shows that it is not only the Indigenous members of a family who can trigger reconnection with one's Indigenous heritage. In many cases, the non-Indigenous parent was more accepting of Indigenous culture than the Indigenous one. This is easily understandable considering that they would not have had to endure any racism or to grow up with shame, silence or denial in their families. It can be easier for the person without Indigenous connections to find interest in Indigenous culture since it does not put their identity at risk. As we saw before, Adam's mother seemed to understand better than her husband did his connection to the photograph he saw at *Sculptures by the Sea*. In fact, Adam explained that his mother was always adamant that her children should know about their heritage and be raised with some knowledge about Indigenous culture, so much so that she was the one taking them to family reunions and teaching them about Indigeneity.

Adam *My mum was a social worker who had studied how bad Aboriginal people had been treated. And so she understood how important it was for Aboriginals to get their identity back. To her...it was probably way, way more important than it was for my dad. (...) Even though she's not the Aboriginal person, (...) she was the one who put a lot of effort into giving us that knowledge, into buying books and taking us to Aboriginal cultural events, just to instil in us that it was a good identity.*

Likewise, Josh's father was the one who took a special interest in his wife's Indigenous heritage, did some genealogical research and took her, Josh and his three sisters to the Indigenous community in Brewarrina to meet their extended family.

As he explains, Andrew's father was also more comfortable with his wife's heritage than she was.

Andrew *My dad was probably more a force that encouraged her to explore it more. He was probably the most interested in our family. He said, "It's nothing to be ashamed of. You should explore it more."*

The interest Indigenous people and culture generate today is increasing. A lot of Australians have grown accustomed to Indigenous elements being part of their everyday lives. As I explained, Welcome to Country and Acknowledgements of Country ceremonies are regularly performed; Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander flags are visible across Australia; Indigenous art motifs are used by mainstream Australian brands such as Qantas.

Michael Peachey, Students' Services Manager at the UNSW Indigenous centre Nura Gili told me that he believed the number of identifications as Indigenous was growing now that families could talk about their heritage.

Michael *In my own community, I know a lot more people who are identifying, whether it's...their grandparents now saying, (...) "I'm going to tell you something", and they start to tell their friends, and a few others. So, yeah, I think more people are starting to say that they're Indigenous, or acknowledging that they're Indigenous, which is...a good thing.*

Kate believed that this was due to a greater acceptance of this heritage. However, she had reservations.

Kate *I think it's more accepted nowadays. It used to be something you were embarrassed of or had to hide, and I think, now, because we are in a more civilised, or knowledgeable society, you don't have to hide it as much. But the other problem is, because it was hidden for so long, people don't know how to bring it back. (...) But I think it's also hard because (...) everyone is so focused on spotlighting the fact that you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. (...) And I think it's something that holds people back. (...) I don't want to be seen as, you know, identifying just to get extra benefits, or whatever.*

Michael and Kate both agree that there are now more opportunities for people with Indigenous heritage to become interested in it and claim it. The evolution in the way Indigenous people are perceived in Australia since the 1970s has slowly allowed the participants in this study to move away from the shame their parents or grandparents often felt. However, Kate points out one of the new difficulties raised by the new status of Indigenous people. The official will to 'close the gap' between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians and the benefits now granted to the latter have created new tensions.⁷¹ The need to define who is Indigenous and who is not is still very present and although the participants may be freer to acknowledge their heritage, they are also aware that in the present context, their identification may not be so easily accepted by all, Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarised the main evolutions in the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This chronology will help us understand the contexts in which the representations of Indigeneity used by the participants were constructed. These representations have evolved in the last decades of the twentieth century, but the discourses about Indigeneity I will study in the next chapters are a blend of images built across the years since the beginning of colonisation. An ambivalent relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people still exists.

⁷¹ The question of benefits will be explored in chapter 6 and in chapter 8.

Chapter 2

This chapter also presented the consequences of past policies and perceptions of Indigeneity on the participants' families. The negative representations of Indigeneity throughout history explain why the participants in this study remained partially or fully unaware of their Indigenous heritage and culture for many years of their lives, and why it is now complex for them to embrace or simply deal with their Indigenous heritage.

Conclusion to PART I

In this first part, I outlined the methodological and historical backgrounds supporting this research project.

In **chapter 1**, I started by describing the process of collecting the data which forms the basis of this project, and the subsequent process of analysis. I explained that in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out, and that a thematic analysis, allowing for flexibility, was chosen as a method to analyse the data.

In this chapter, I also explained my choice to carry out a qualitative study of people learning about their Indigeneity. I described the constructionist view adopted in this research project, and its general affiliation with the Foucauldian links between discourse, knowledge and power. I also presented some of the major theories used to make sense of the interviews I conducted. Identity, in many forms, is the central concept in this thesis. It is analysed in the specific context of Australia, a settler colonial, and now post-colonial country where whiteness – as analysed in chapter 3 – is still a dominant concept structuring Australian society. Considering the participants' positions, mixed-identities are at the heart of this study. Therefore, theories allowing a better understanding of in-between-ness, such as the theories of postmodern identity or of hybridity are also used to analyse the participants' experiences of identity construction.

In **chapter 2**, I presented a factual, chronological description of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from 1770 to the present. I then

showed how past policies and treatments of Indigenous people affected the participants' families and the participants themselves in several ways, for example by depriving them of knowledge about their family history and about their Indigenous heritage, thus creating a lack which laid the foundations for a complex relationship with Indigeneity in the present.

PART II

Constructing Whiteness and Indigeneity

The second part of this thesis is dedicated to analysing the construction of two concepts, whiteness and Indigeneity, in relation to each other and to Australian-ness. Indeed, as explained in chapter 1, this thesis is based on the premise that ‘white’ and ‘Indigenous’ identities are built through discourses. The representations built through these discourses are more or less powerful depending on the status of those controlling the discourses. Therefore, it is also relations of power that I will study in the next three chapters.

In **chapter 3**, “Constructing whiteness”, I will examine how whiteness was constructed in Australia, first as superior, and later as a norm. Whiteness not only refers to the colour of someone’s skin, but is also linked to what is referred to as ‘mainstream Australian culture’. This culture based on an Anglo-Celtic inheritance has become representative of Australian-ness, to the detriment of other cultures, be they Indigenous or ethnic. The enduring dominant status of whiteness in Australia is an important factor in understanding how the participants position themselves in society and understand their identity. Indeed, most participants identified as ‘white’ Australians, or at least said they were brought up as such.

In **chapter 4** and **chapter 5**, I will analyse how the concept of Indigeneity was itself constructed following the arrival of British settlers in 1788. Because I will have established the dominant status of 'white' Australians, I will focus on their role in creating discourses about Indigeneity, the lasting influence of which is visible in the participants' discourses. Part of the impact of colonialism is the dominance of non-Indigenous world views in today's Australia. Indeed, the discourses created by non-Indigenous Australians about Indigeneity were of particular significance to the participants' understanding of Indigeneity considering their education as 'white' and links to 'white' Australian society. When they were growing up, these participants were not often privy to Indigenous stories and world views.

The perception non-Indigenous Australians have of Indigenous people has been, and still is, characterised by ambivalence. That is why **chapter 4** will look at constructions of discourses rejecting the Indigenous 'Other' while **chapter 5**, a counterpart to the previous chapter, will look at constructions of discourses embracing the desired 'Other'. Feelings of rejection and desire are recurring features of the relationship non-Indigenous Australians have with Indigenous people and culture. The different shapes these feelings take but also the repeating patterns found throughout history are the object of these two chapters.

CHAPTER 3

Constructing Whiteness

3.0 Introducing Whiteness

3.0.1 General Introduction

Critical Whiteness studies, the analysis of whiteness as a privileged status in Western societies, comes from the United States where the field originated in the last decades of the twentieth century. According to Belinda McKay, whiteness started to be studied in Australia at the end of the 1990s.¹ Critical Whiteness studies fall within a constructionist outlook on race and identity. Indeed, within this field, whiteness is not only a skin colour, but also a position in society. The need to study whiteness is born from the realisation that it is invisible. As Richard Dyer explains, “This assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture.”² For a long time, white people were not part of critical race studies. As Dyer explained, other people are raced, while white people are only white.

¹ She mentions the first Australian conference on whiteness, organised in 1998 at the Queensland Studies Centre of Griffith University.

MCKAY, Belinda, “Making Whiteness Visible” in MCKAY, Belinda (ed.), *Unmasking Whiteness: Race Relations and Reconciliation*, Nathan, Queensland: The Queensland Studies Centre, Griffith University, 1999, p. 3.

² DYER, Richard, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 2.

Critical Whiteness studies look at the evolution of the concept of whiteness, at how it was constructed. From signalling clear superiority, whiteness came in more recent times to be a norm. As I will show in the Australian context, this does not mean 'white' people are no longer at the top of the racial hierarchy, but rather that the power given by whiteness is now subtler and masked by discourses embracing equality and diversity.

Steve Garner explains that the invisibility of whiteness is linked to the privileges it is attached to.³ The notion of privilege associated with whiteness is a central feature of its definition, as the following writers demonstrate.

The American feminist author Peggy McIntosh reflected on the links between white and male privileges, arguing that both are invisible because they are considered normal.⁴ She therefore tried to make a list of the everyday privileges her whiteness guarantees and which often go unnoticed.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege. (...) I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.⁵

McIntosh's study reveals that being white no longer necessarily entails feeling superior or wanting to assert one's superiority over others. However, people with a white skin enjoy privileges they are not even aware of because they are the norm.

This is something Becky Thompson also highlighted in her definition of whiteness.

³ GARNER, Steve, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, London, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 34-35.

⁴ Ann Curthoys explains that this was not the case at a time in Australian and other settler societies when whiteness was associated with superiority: "Far from being unmarked and invisible, whiteness in settler societies has been explicitly named and highly visible, as evident in the White Australia policy and its counterparts in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, and especially in South Africa with its policy of apartheid. From the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th, whiteness became something to be proud of, protected, and asserted, from official discourse to popular culture."

CURTHOYS, Anne, "White, British and European: Historicising Identity in Settler Societies" in CAREY, Jane, MCLISKY, Claire, *Creating White Australia*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009, p. 6.

⁵ MCINTOSH, Peggy, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies, Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women", *Working Paper* No. 189, 1988, pp. 2-3.

Whiteness identifies those who are light-skinned with Western European features. (...) The experience of whiteness (...) is one of unearned privileges which all white people receive in various ways due to racism. A light-skinned 'white' person who experiences race privileges may or may not buy into the ideology of whiteness as a system of exploitation based on white supremacy. However, that person cannot separate her/himself from the experience of being white, since we live and breathe the privileges every day.⁶

Thompson identified the link constructed between a physical feature – a fair skin – and “the ideology of whiteness as a system of exploitation”. Belinda McKay points to the colonial origins of the superior position of whiteness in today’s post-colonial societies, while adding that the common experience of whiteness and of privileges does not erase differences in status within the large group white people represent.

Although whiteness is a complex and fragmented identity, all white people in Australia benefit from racial privilege. Not all whites share equally in these benefits – some are disadvantaged by their class, gender or sexuality – but all receive unearned social benefits as the inheritors of a racially based system of wealth and privilege. In Australia, as in North America, this system is built upon the European invasion of Indigenous lands.

As McKay’s analysis reveals, the experience of whiteness in Australia is similar to that of white people in North America. The general characteristics outlined in this introduction – whiteness as invisible, as the norm, and associated with privileges – apply to a variety of places where whiteness and the Western culture it is attached to prevail.

Having delineated these general characteristics, I will now focus on the historical and current meaning of whiteness in the Australian context.

3.0.2 Whiteness in Australia

As explained in the introduction, this project was born from a desire to study the relationship between what I originally called ‘white culture’ and Indigenous heritage and

⁶ THOMPSON, Becky and White Women Challenging Racism, “Home/Work: Antiracism Activism and the Meaning of Whiteness” quoted in CAREY, Michelle, “From Whiteness to Whitefella: Challenging White Race Power in Australia”, *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 6, August 2004, p. 10.

culture in today's Australia. The participants targeted for this study were described in my initial project as "having received a white Australian upbringing" before discovering their Indigenous heritage. As I explained in chapter 1, when I began this project, I did not particularly reflect on the implications of using the term 'white' un-problematically. It seemed to me that it referred to a 'mainstream' Australian culture which I saw as a blend of Western, historically British-and-Irish-based, and yet, in the eyes of the participants, distinctly Australian, way of life. This way of life was described by several of the participants. Adam mentions what are now considered clichés about Australia to define the Australian identity.

Adam *There's all the stereotypical stuff, and I'll go through it because everybody does: meat pies, barbecues, prawns on the barbie, the accent, mateship.*

My understanding of Australian culture as 'white' and as opposed to Indigeneity⁷ is supported by Aileen Moreton-Robinson's statement that "Being Australian has always entailed the (mostly) implicit understanding that any person so labelled is white. Today, this is still the assumption in popular usage."⁸

Indeed, somehow, it is still often the case that a 'white' Australian will first appear in people's minds – and probably even more so in foreigners' – when the stereotypes of Australian culture Adam used are mentioned.⁹ Old images advertising the Australian lifestyle featured 'white' Australians as lifesavers, surfers or barbecuers. Some of these pictures are still very famous: an advertisement by British Airways and Qantas released in 1935 and featuring a young blonde woman in a red swimming suit carrying a surf board was re-enacted by Australian actress Naomi Watts in 2015 to celebrate the airline flying to

⁷ This is what the flyer I used to recruit participants implies as it opposed "people who were raised in a white Australian culture" to having Indigenous heritage.

⁸ TONKINSON, Myrna and Robert, "Embracing difference: Australia's changing self-image", in HASKELL, Dennis (ed), *Tilting at Matilda: Literature, Aborigines, Women and the Church in Contemporary Australia*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994.

⁹ Catriona Elder claims that "dominant narratives of Australian-ness presume a real Australian to be someone with British ethnicity." She shows that images of what are considered typical Australians always represent 'white' people while other Australians, while seemingly being accepted, are not perceived as quite as Australian as 'whites'.

ELDER, Catriona, "White Australia Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnicity and Nation" in *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2007, p. 115.

Australia for eighty years.¹⁰ Another famous but non-urban representation of Australian-ness is Paul Hogan's Crocodile Dundee, the ocker¹¹ hero inspired by the Australian bushman and exemplifying a laid-back and good-humoured attitude to life. Today still, the main Australian television channels offer a very 'white' picture of Australian society, as Randa Abdel-Fattah explains in a denunciation of the lack of 'colour' and diversity in contemporary Australian television and advertising:

I was flicking through the morning programs on offer on television. What greeted me was a montage of white faces. (...) White faces and bodies dominating advertisements and billboards for all manner of banal products and services. (...) If we take our popular cultural content as a microcosm of the kind of society producers, media executives and directors envisage as normative, a projection of the kinds of people whose stories, opinions, values and world views matter, then it is virtually impossible not to come to the conclusion that what matters most is white history, white culture, white experience, white "values." The remainder of narratives and voices are either invisible or consigned to the periphery: as supporting characters, celebrated as exotic deviations from an otherwise white norm. And so the mythology of a White Australia persists, resolutely ignoring the reality of our multicultural society, and even more obscenely failing to include indigenous Australians in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways.¹²

Abdel-Fattah's analysis shows that the over-representation of whiteness not only means that white people are regarded as typical Australians, but also that "white history, white culture, white experience [and] white values" are still dominant despite the policy of multiculturalism. Indeed, although Indigenous and multicultural Australia also partake in the general image of Australian-ness, they are not naturally associated with the Australian

¹⁰ See the original and new versions of the ad here: <http://australianaviation.com.au/2015/04/ba-celebrates-80-years-of-serving-aust-with-special-naomi-watts-poster/>

"BA Celebrates 80 years of Serving Aust with Special Naomi Watts Poster", *Australian Aviation* website, 28 April 2015, accessed on 3 December 2016.

¹¹ 'Ocker' is an Australian word describing someone rather uncultured with a broad Australian accent. The term can be pejorative but is also, like the word 'bogan', quite affectionate as it represents a form of rough, 'white' Australian-ness still regarded as genuine (or 'fair-dinkum'). This description from the 1957 novel *They're a weird mob* illustrates this: "This grumbling, growling, cursing, profane, laughing, beer drinking, abusive, loyal-to-his-mates Australian is one of the few free men left on this earth."

O'GRADY, John, *They're a Weird Mob*, Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 251-252.

¹² ABDEL-FATTAH, Randa, "I See White People! The Racial Politics of Australian Television", *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 21 October 2013.

I will further study "exotic" and "tokenistic" representations of Indigenous people in chapter 5.

lifestyle.¹³ Michelle who grew up in a small country town of Victoria described how her Indigenous father used to take her and her brothers to the bush, looking for plants and witchetty grubs. However, this activity was not associated with Indigenous culture in her father's mind, but rather with a cherished national image of the Australian bushman who is traditionally 'white'.

Delphine You did all these Aboriginal things, but your parents never brought you up saying "you're Indigenous"?

Michelle *No, no. In fact, my dad would have considered himself a bushman, more the Australian idea of – romanticised idea – of the Banjo Paterson¹⁴ bushman.*

Delphine Like a country guy...

Michelle *Yeah, exactly.*

According to Michelle, her father denied his Indigenous heritage and instead, chose to embrace the typical Australian, 'white' male figure of the bushman. Michelle uses the word "Australian" to refer to a 'white' person, as opposed to an Indigenous one.

These examples reveal the invisible link between whiteness and Australian-ness Moreton-Robinson mentioned. In the same way Michelle or Adam link Australian stereotypes of symbols to whiteness without thinking twice about it, I used the expression 'white Australian' quite naturally, in spite of the problematic association of quintessential Australian-ness with whiteness.

¹³ An example quoted by Catriona Elder is the film *The Wogboy* in which a young Greek-Australian boy is teased by other children for bringing a Greek lunch to school instead of a regular sandwich.

Among the stereotypical elements Adam mentioned was the meat pie, inherited from the British.

ELDER, Catriona, "White Australia Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnicity and Nation", p. 142.

¹⁴ Banjo Paterson (1864-1941) was an Australian poet, journalist and author. He is most famous for poems such as *The Man from Snowy River*, or *Waltzing Matilda* which was turned into a song known by all Australians and often described as the unofficial Australian anthem.

The poem describes the tribulation of a swagman (itinerant worker) who steals a sheep to eat and sits down to boil his tea when policemen come to arrest him for his theft. He drowns himself in a waterhole which his ghost still haunts. The song is full of Australian words such as 'billabong' (waterhole), 'jumbuck' (sheep), 'billy' (steel pot to brew tea), or 'tucker' (food). It is seen as capturing the spirit of life in the bush and as celebrating the bushman's free spirit and disregard of the law which are still perceived as Australian characteristics today.

What exactly is meant when we mention 'white' Australian culture? How did a skin colour become representative of a specific culture? What does growing up and living as a 'white Australian' mean today? In spite of the ease with which these two terms come together in most of the participants' speeches, the association between whiteness and Australian-ness is one that was constructed through history, not an inherent one.

The historical and present reasons for the predominance of whiteness in the representation of Australia, and the meanings attached to this concept as well as its links to Australian-ness are the object of this chapter. I will first study the historical construction of whiteness and its links to the creation of the Australian nation, before looking at the association between whiteness and the Anglo-Celtic core culture. Finally, I will analyse the evolution of whiteness in the multicultural era.

3.1 Whiteness, Race and Western Colonialism in Australia

The concept of whiteness is derived from the biological classification of races which developed in Europe during the nineteenth century. At a time when race was regarded as a valid scientific criterion used to separate human beings, different characteristics were attributed to different races which were distinguished by physical attributes such as the colour of the skin or the size and shape of the cranium.¹⁵ Along with the classification of race came the idea that some races were superior to others. Works such as that of French author Arthur de Gobineau¹⁶ claimed the superiority of the white race over all others.

At the same time, the process of colonisation which brought the British to Australia and many other parts of the world spread these beliefs about race to new conquered places.

¹⁵ CRUICKSHANK, Joanna, "Darwin, Race, and Religion in Australia", *ABC Religion and Ethics* website, 11 April 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/04/11/3187793.htm>, accessed on 30 November 2016.

¹⁶ Arthur de Gobineau published *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* in 1853 in which he divided humanity into three main races (white, black and yellow) with the Aryan race among white races at the top of the hierarchy.

Ghassan Hage explains the impact of European colonisation on the development of whiteness:

‘Whiteness’ is an ever-changing, composite cultural historical construct. It has its roots in the history of European colonisation which universalised a cultural form of White identity as a position of cultural power at the same time as the colonised were in the process of being racialised. Whiteness, in opposition to Blackness and Brownness, was born at the same time as the binary oppositions coloniser/colonised, being developed/being under-developed. (...) In this sense, White has become the ideal of being the bearer of ‘Western’ civilisation.¹⁷

Although ideas about racial classification and ‘white’ superiority existed prior to the process of colonisation, Hage argues that a ‘white’ identity was formed as Europeans encountered Others and had to define themselves vis-à-vis them. Thus, Hage once again emphasises the idea that whiteness is a construct, and that colonisation helped define it. Hage does not only describe whiteness in terms of skin colour or blood but stresses that it is a cultural construct. In the classification of races established in the nineteenth century, race was not only biological but also cultural. Whites did not only regard themselves as physically superior¹⁸ but also as culturally so. The treatment of Indigenous people as uncivilised savages (see chapter 4) is evidence of this. Thus begins the conflation of colour and culture which is still very much present in today’s Australian society.

The colour white came to represent Western culture or, as Hage wrote “Western civilisation”,¹⁹ something Indigenous people were described as lacking (see chapter 4). Despite a later disappearance of race from official discourse in favour of ethnicity, and therefore the promotion of a discourse of identity based on culture rather than biology (see 3.4.1), this association remains prevalent today. The term ‘white’ remains associated with Western culture as this quote from Andrew shows:

¹⁷ HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press Australia, 1998, p. 58.

¹⁸ The belief that Indigenous people were either doomed to extinction or would eventually become biologically assimilated (an idea promoted by A.O. Neville) into white Australian society is evidence of this.

¹⁹ This is another vague term which encompasses a great diversity of elements which can be cultural, political, religious etc. The participants still mention the word ‘Western’ to distinguish their way of life, way of thinking from that of the Indigenous community.

Andrew *Where I grew up, (...) through a Western view at the time – sorry not a Western, a Caucasian²⁰ or White Australian view – this is what it meant to be Indigenous.*

Andrew's hesitation proves it is difficult to disentangle the concepts of race, colour and culture. Andrew uses the word "Western" to talk about a non-Indigenous representation of Indigeneity. But the words "Caucasian" and "White", which both refer to physical appearance, are put on the same level as "Western" and used to describe a cultural attribute. Culture and colour are conflated if not in Andrew's mind, at least in everyday discourses about race, ethnicity and identity in today's Australia.

3.2 Whiteness and the Building of the Australian Nation

Historically, race has been a central concept in the formation of the Australian nation. It has operated here, as it has in other 'Western' countries, as a marker to exclude those who were not considered to be eligible to be members of the nation. Simultaneously, it has worked as a guarantor of a particularised homogeneity. Homogeneity, of language and culture as well as race, was, throughout the nineteenth century and up until very recently, the most basic concern of the nation.²¹

3.2.1 Pre-Federation Australia: the Myth of White-Only Settlers

As mentioned in the previous section, Australia's settlement was part of the expansion of the British Empire and of the colonisation process. Nevertheless – and leaving aside for now the place of Indigenous people in the Australian colonies – the white homogeneity mentioned by Stratton was not the reality of Australia at the beginning of colonisation. Stratton wrote about "the myth that, with the exception of the Chinese in Australia, the population of the Australian colonies before Federation was (...) white and drawn from Britain and Ireland. This myth is reinforced by the myth that, in the convict period, the convicts also came from these primordial origins for the Australian nation."²² It is now

²⁰ "Caucasian" is another term derived from the classification of races and first used in biological anthropology by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in the eighteenth century.

²¹ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press Australia, 1998, p. 9.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

known that the convicts who first settled in Australia were of various origins: "The convicts were made up of 27 ethnicities and 10% at least were black."²³ In the 1830s, with the number of convicts decreasing, some pastoralists petitioned the colonial governments and asked for permission to bring indentured servants from India to supplement the Australian workforce.²⁴ However, their request was denied as the young Australian colonies refused to rely on slavery or indentured labour. The aim of the colonies was to create a unified British, and predominantly Christian, society based on democratic and egalitarian values.²⁵ Equality between all Australians could only be achieved without the hierarchy which 'coloured' slaves or labourers would bring.²⁶ A controlled, white-only immigration was the key to create and maintain homogeneity within the colonies.²⁷ At the same time, however, the state of Queensland used indentured labourers from the Pacific Islands to work in the sugar cane industry. Many of them were deported after the passage of the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1901.²⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century, a great number of Chinese workers settled in Australia, especially during the gold rushes. It is the fear of the 'Yellow Peril'²⁹ which led to the

²³ GRASSBY, Al, quoted by GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Queensland, 2006, p. 105.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 78

²⁵ The egalitarian discourse is still prevalent in Australia. In 2006, a poll showed 91 % of Australians put 'the right to a fair go for everyone' as their most important value for the country.

GOUGH, Deborah, "Australians Value a 'Fair Go' Highest", *The Age*, 12 November 2006.

²⁶ Nathan Ganley argues that such an argument was also at the heart of the White Australia policy. He explains that there is a debate about what motivated its adoption, itself linked to the assimilation policy and the desire to keep whiteness at the heart of the Australian project. While some argue that the eugenic reasons prevailed, others mention the threat posed by non-white migrants to the Australian standard of living. "For example, it was argued that the presence of 'lower races' in Australia could only degrade the population as a whole, and the establishment of a society of masters and servants would prevent the development of the egalitarian society that Australia was destined to become."

This shows that the two arguments were however intrinsically linked since culture was understood as being inherent to race.

GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

²⁷ KAYNE, John, "Racialism and Democracy", in STOKES, Geoffrey (ed.), *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 122.

²⁸ "Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901 (Cth)", *National Archives, Australian government website*, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs269.aspx>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

²⁹ In Australia, as in other countries, the fear of an Asian invasion developed in the nineteenth century and was relayed in books or films depicting wars between Chinese people and Australians protecting their country and women's morality from Asian contamination.

passage of the first pieces of legislation limiting immigration to Australia: the Victorian government was the first to adopt one of these in 1855, followed closely by all the other colonies³⁰. The White Australia policy adopted at the time of Federation sprang from these growing fears that Australia would lose its racial and cultural homogeneity.

3.2.2 Federation and the White Australia Policy

In 1901, the six colonies of Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia, decided to unite to form the Commonwealth of Australia. Several reasons brought the colonies together but, according to Ganley,

the threat of non-European immigration was (...) a strong motive for federation. (...) [Following the rise against Chinese immigration], [t]here was a strong feeling amongst federalists that the ‘problem’ of non-white immigration could only be dealt with if the colonies united and acted as one to prevent non-white immigration. Consistent legislation to govern the whole continent was considered the most effective way to deal with the issue of immigration but this could not emerge until Australia became a nation. The White Australia Policy motivated the federation of the Australian colonies.³¹

Ganley’s analysis shows how the already existing link between whiteness and Australian-ness was cemented at the time of Federation. Preserving an Australian identity based on whiteness and Britishness was the main concern which led the new federal government to adopt the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, more commonly known as the White Australia Policy. The act was passed in a time and place where social Darwinism³² had led to believe in a hierarchy of races and in the supremacy of the ‘white’ race. As I mentioned in 2.1.3, the exclusion of Indigenous people from the Constitution in

Catriona Elder explains that racism against Chinese workers on the gold fields in the north of Australia was particularly strong given their physical and cultural distinctiveness. Because it was believed “by most Anglo-Australians that Asian peoples were not civilised compared with Western Europeans”, Chinese miners were considered a threat to the homogeneity of the nation.

ELDER, Catriona, “White Australia Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnicity and Nation”, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³⁰ GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 107.

³² Social Darwinism is a sociological and political application of Charles Darwin’s biological theory of the survival of the fittest and of natural selection.

Article 51 confirmed the will to prevent non-white people – whether from the outside or from the inside – from belonging to the new country.

Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis explain that upon arrival, migrants could be examined to detect traces of colour. Whiteness is the absence of colour, and it is associated with purity in Western culture. It is this purity – of colour, of blood and of culture altogether – that assessors were looking for when examining potential migrants. Schech and Haggis who talked to British migrants arriving in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and subjected to a screening, reported Bernadette's story: "I remember the health checks, (...) I remember them looking at our hands". (...) "[T]here were guidelines (...) when they were assessing migrants for immigration, and part of it was to make sure that there was no sign of colour in the creases in your hands."³³

The dictation test imposed to anyone desirous of moving to Australia was the main means devised to keep undesirable migrants from settling in Australia. Although fair in appearance, the test was only applied to non-white prospective migrants and could be dictated in any European language, making it virtually impossible to succeed.³⁴ Preserving cultural whiteness was the aim of the test. It was clearly not, as I have explained, only a matter of skin colour. A culture, a set of moral values, and a way and standard of living were what the federal government was trying to keep homogeneous. All these things, however, were deemed to be inherent to anyone whose skin looked fair and whose physical features looked European enough.

Nathan Ganley explained how the test existed because the link between colour and culture, between a pale skin and a Western culture, was unquestioned.

What was whiteness? Whiteness was a given. A shared understanding of whiteness was assumed. However, more specifically, whiteness was the characteristic of not needing to be tested. Whiteness was a marker of

³³SCHECH, Susanne and HAGGIS, Jane, "Terrains of Migrancy and Whiteness: How British Migrants Locate Themselves in Australia", in MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004, p. 182.

³⁴GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

welcoming; or, welcoming was a marker of whiteness; if you were identified as other than white you were marked by the Test and excluded. Thus the Test functioned effectively because whiteness was a given. The Test's effectiveness relied upon whiteness being knowable without being questioned.³⁵

Ganley's analysis brings us back to one of the main features of whiteness mentioned in the introduction: it is regarded as normal and is therefore left unquestioned. In the context of the White Australia policy, the migrants' degree of whiteness – both physical and cultural – was constantly questioned, but what exactly the concept of whiteness encompassed was not. This feature of whiteness is still very present today and apparent in the participants' discourses in which the word 'white' is used un-problematically and in which whiteness often appears as the default identity in Australia.

Even after the White Australia policy was officially dismantled in 1973, old procedures designed to judge if potential migrants would be suitable were left in place, as a former Australian ambassador working in Manila in the Philippines declared that year: "Mixed-race applicants could be approved if they were 75 percent European in appearance. We had some guidance on what to look for but measurement was difficult. You had to measure their noses, check the skin colour, gaze into their eyes and try to calculate the percentage of European appearance."³⁶ Thus, physical measurements used in the nineteenth century to compare races continued to be used well into the twentieth century in Australia. With this example, whiteness once again appears to be a vague concept, and yet a very powerful one since belonging to the Australian nation rested entirely upon it.

3.2.3 The Evolution of Whiteness

"The White Australia policy never designed, in a limiting way, who was considered to be white. Certain national groups were preferred as migrants, that was all. In this way, whiteness was preserved as *a naturalised quality*."³⁷ With this statement, Jon Stratton

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁶ HOGUE, Gavan quoted by MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, "Witnessing Whiteness in the Wake of Wik", *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 12.

³⁷ STRATTON, Jon, "Multiculturalism and the Whitening Machine, or How Australians Become White", in HAGE, Ghassan, COUCH, Rowanne (eds), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the*

expresses the idea that part of the vague quality of whiteness may have existed on purpose. By shifting the meaning of whiteness across the years, the Australian government was able to accept more migrants without giving up its goal of keeping Australia 'white'.

As explained earlier, Australia was never an entirely white country. Nevertheless, it is still claimed today that in 1901, 98 percent of the Australian population was British, and therefore 'white'. Al Grassby questioned this percentage in his 1984 book *The Tyranny of Prejudice*³⁸ and explained that this number was "calculated by including everyone born in Australia, or who was naturalised citizen, or who had come from any of the thirty-three countries of the then British Commonwealth of Nations".³⁹ It appears from this explanation that the will to keep the country white was so strong that the concept of whiteness was stretched from early on to include in this group people who were not from British or Irish stock and whose skin might not have been completely 'white'.

After the Second World War, the discourse about race changed from a biological one to a cultural one. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in 1945 and its constitution declared that, "The great and terrible war which has now ended was made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races."⁴⁰ The worldwide movement against racial prejudice following the Second World War, and the recognition of the concept of human rights was accompanied, in Australia, by a widening of the definition of whiteness and by the arrival of a new wave of immigrants from countries other than Britain and Ireland. In 1958, the Migration Act replaced the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act and abolished the dictation test, although immigration remained strictly

Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's 'The Migrant Presence', Sydney, NSW: University of Sydney, 1999, p. 175. Emphasis added.

³⁸ GRASSBY, Albert Jaime, *The Tyranny of Prejudice*, Melbourne: AE Press, 1984, p. 53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴⁰ UNESCO constitution, 1945,

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, accessed on 28 June 2015.

controlled.⁴¹Anthony Moran gives other reasons why Australia decided to open its doors a little wider:

The mass immigration program beginning in 1947 and continuing into the present, stimulated by invasion fears after the Second World War, perceptions of Australia as underpopulated, and by the need to build Australia's 'full-employment' economy', has progressively transformed Australia's post-war ethnic makeup. Determined to rapidly expand its population, government officials soon found that they could not attract enough Britons to reach the targets, but had to look elsewhere for alternative white immigrants. This competition for immigrants only intensified as the century wore on.⁴²

The 'Populate or Perish' policy set up in 1945 by Minister of Immigration Arthur Calwell was meant to increase the Australian population by 2 percent every year. It brought more British immigrants to Australia under the 1945 Assisted Passage Migration Scheme which became known as the Ten-Pound Poms⁴³, followed by the 1957 'Bring out a Briton' campaign. Adam explained that this is how his mother came to settle in Australia as a little girl with her family.

Adam *I have two English grand-parents because my mum is an English immigrant. She came here when she was five, on the one-pound travel, or whatever it was at the time. It was something that they were doing for English people at the time. You could come to Australia on one pound and they'd give you a job and a house. They needed extra immigrants.*

But what this program also did was to open immigration to non-British migrants. Southern, Northern, and Eastern Europeans (most of them refugees fleeing persecution in the Soviet bloc countries) arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and forced a redefinition of the concept of whiteness. Although the government officially continued implementing the White Australia policy, it was impossible to reach the immigration quotas without broadening the definition of whiteness. 'Marginal Europeans'⁴⁴ were now

⁴¹ GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, op. cit., p. 164.

⁴² MORAN, Anthony, *Australia: Nation, Belonging and Globalization*, p. 106.

⁴³ This scheme allowed British migrants to travel to Australia for 10 pounds (children travelled for free) with the promise of employment and housing upon arrival.

⁴⁴ STRATTON, Jon, "Multiculturalism and the Whitening Machine, or How Australians Become White", op. cit., p. 177.

welcomed in Australia and the meaning of whiteness shifted from British and Irish to European.

An example of this redefinition is the case of Turkish migrants who were accepted in Australia because under President Ataturk (1920s and 1930s), the country had experienced a process of Westernisation and democratisation. Democracy is a core Western value which allowed Turkish migrants to enter Australia in spite of their religion. Although skin colour was still a signifier of culture, the concept of whiteness could be expanded to include people outside the limits of Europe, whose cultural and moral values were deemed close enough to Australian ones to allow them to assimilate into Australian society. Stratton therefore talked about a “move away from an emphasis on phenotype, ‘white’, to an emphasis on culture signalled by European”⁴⁵ (or even Levantine).

3.2.4 Assimilation: Whiteness and Australian-ness

As I explained, a white skin is associated with a particular idea of Australian-ness. It represents a certain way of life based on Anglo-Celtic values which all migrants were expected to adopt at the time of assimilation. The policy of assimilation was set up to encourage every Australian to merge into the ‘white’ Australian society (see 2.1.3).⁴⁶ Migrants were expected to fully embrace the Australian culture so as to blend into a homogeneous and egalitarian society. Once again, ‘white’ was a skin colour reflecting a set of cultural values acceptable in Australia. To be Australian, one had to be white, of colour if possible, of culture imperatively. The famous comical novel *They’re a Weird Mob*, written in 1957 by John O’Grady under the pseudonym of Nino Culotta, describes the adventures of an Italian migrant settling in Sydney in the 1950s. The final pages – now often read as satirical although they were not meant to be – perfectly reflect the assimilationist spirit of the time.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁴⁶ One of the initiatives was the creation of the Good Neighbours Councils which relied on volunteers to go and meet new Australians and help them integrate Australian society.

“Achievements of the Good Neighbour Movement 1949-72”, *Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs*,

http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/deptimm_3.pdf, accessed on 30 November 2016.

There are far too many New Australians⁴⁷ in this country who are still mentally living in their homelands, who mix with people of their own nationality, and try to retain their own language and customs. Who even try to persuade Australians to adopt their customs and manners. Cut it out. There is no better way of life in the world than that of the Australian. I firmly believe this. (...) Learn his way. Learn his language. Get yourself accepted as one of him; and you will enter a world you never dreamed existed. And once you have entered it, you will never want to leave it.⁴⁸

Under the White Australia policy, it was believed that to assimilate, one needed to look white: "An equation was made between whiteness and assimilation. (...) If one looked white, and could merge visually into the general population, then it was thought one could assimilate."⁴⁹ Here the assumption that if a person looked white, their values would be similar to those of 'old Australians' appears clearly. If other Australians saw your white skin, they would assume you were one of them, and this was the first step towards assimilation, as O'Grady wrote. This conflation between whiteness and Australian-ness is still very much present in today's Australia as I will later show. Despite a relaxation and progressive dismantling of the White Australia policy from the 1950s onwards, assimilation continued and the focus on racial and cultural homogeneity was maintained. Ganley described the policy of assimilation as a "non-policy" in the sense that "new Australians" were expected to conform to 'old Australians' cultural norms, and discard their language and other 'cultural baggage'.⁵⁰ The same policy applied to Indigenous Australians. The removal of 'half-caste' children to be raised in a 'white' Australian lifestyle, the certificates of exemption creating a separation between 'civilised' Indigenous people who were allowed to mingle with 'white' Australians, and the rest of the Indigenous population, are examples of a will to create a homogeneous Australian society supposedly

⁴⁷ The phrase "New Australians" shows that a difference – and to a certain extent, a hierarchy – is created between 'old Australians' – who still represent the 'real Australia' for many people – of Anglo-Celtic heritage and 'European' migrants. It also implies that these migrants are expected to assimilate and become Australians as soon as they settle in the country in order to stop being "new". Interestingly, European migrants who came to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s are now considered part of the 'old Australians' group, which shows the evolution of the meaning of whiteness and Australian-ness.

⁴⁸ O'GRADY, John, *They're a Weird Mob*, op. cit., pp. 251-252.

⁴⁹ GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, op. cit., p. 177.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

based on equality but in reality forcing everyone to adopt the dominant Anglo-Celtic core culture of 'old Australians'.

Ultimately, the policy of assimilation based on the promotion of a white Anglo-Celtic core culture standardised this particular culture and made it synonymous with 'true' Australian-ness, thus rendering Indigenous or ethnic⁵¹ migrants' cultures un-Australian, or at least, in more recent years, less authentically Australian.

Stratton summarises the demands of this policy and its consequences on the meaning of Australian-ness.

More pressure was put on white residents to assimilate by speaking English rather than other European languages and by adopting 'Australian' habits. (This assimilatory pressure (...) peaked in the period between the two world wars.) Ultimately, this process, and the naturalisation of the ensuing culture in the 1940s and 1950s, produced the cultural formation which Howard and Hanson⁵² describe as the culture of mainstream.(...) By the 1950s this ideology ("an Australian inflection of 'British' culture, an exemplification of the racial continuities between Britain and Australia") had become naturalised, as in the assumption that migrants from Britain would be able to fit seamlessly into the Australian 'way of life', because there was a fundamental racial and cultural continuity.⁵³

The cultural formation described by Stratton has become synonymous with Australian-ness. Even after the policy of assimilation was abandoned, it remained so. This is visible in the participants' association of elements of this culture with Australian identity.

⁵¹ The word 'ethnic' has been used in Australia to refer to more recent waves of migrants who did not come from Britain, Ireland or Europe. More generally, ethnicity is now the preferred term to talk about Australian diverse cultures, as the vocabulary of race has been erased from the official discourse. For a more detailed analysis of this shift, see 4.2.1.

⁵² John Howard is a conservative politician who was Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007. Pauline Hanson is the co-founder of the far-right One Nation party which gained momentum in Australia at the end of the 1990s. She was a Member of Parliament from 1996 to 1998 and was re-elected in 2016.

⁵³ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

3.3 Whiteness and the Anglo-Celtic ‘Core’ Culture

Despite the fact that Australia never was a completely ‘white’ country, whiteness gradually came to be synonymous with Australian-ness. Until the beginning of the multicultural era in the 1970s, whiteness was also intrinsically linked to Britishness – and Irish-ness, although the Irish were originally regarded as lower in the hierarchy than the British,⁵⁴ and their culture and religion were different. This link to the ‘motherland’ shaped most aspects of Australian culture from the first years of colonisation onwards.

3.3.1 When Australia was British

Andrew *I just assumed I was a standard Caucasian Australian, pretty much. I understood my dad’s heritage came from...England, or Australia.*

Andrew’s comment signals two important aspects of whiteness: first of all, in his description of his heritage, Andrew draws on the common discourse of whiteness as the Australian norm, which I outlined in the first part of this chapter, and as something not worthy of being emphasised, as the adjective ‘standard’ shows.⁵⁵ The second notable aspect in this quote is the link made between England and Australia. Andrew’s mother has Indigenous heritage while his father’s family originally comes from England. The fact that Andrew places “England” and “Australia” on the same level reveals how having English (or British or Irish) heritage has become synonymous with being Australian. As Myrna Tonkinson pointed out: “[t]he unmarked label ‘Australian’ usually denotes a person of Anglo-Celtic background; all others are usually marked further.”⁵⁶ More than any other, Anglo-Celtic heritage has come to be associated with Australian-ness because the first and now oldest Australian settlers came from Britain and Ireland. Whether having English, Irish or Scottish heritage is regarded as something to be proud of, or something lacking in originality, it still represents Australian identity, both at home and abroad.

⁵⁴ Irish people were even regarded as ‘black’ compared to British citizens, the same as southern Europeans later on.

ELDER, Catriona, “White Australia Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnicity and Nation”, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁵⁵ This feature of whiteness will be analysed in 5.2.4.

⁵⁶ TONKINSON, Myrna, “Is it in the Blood? Australian Aboriginal identity” in LINNEKIN, Jocelyn and POYER, Lin (eds) *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

There was a time, however, when English (or British, or Irish) was not conflated with Australian because the idea of an Australian identity did not yet exist. The country regarded itself as British, even after the 1901 Federation, as Ganley explains.

In the early decades of the 20th century, Australia was culturally very British. (...) The King of England was Australia's Head of State; laws had to receive Royal Assent; Australia had no foreign policy, no defence forces, and no national anthem. (...) Before 1949 nobody could be an Australian citizen – there was no Australian citizenship. (...) Before 1973 there were no Australian passports and Australia had no national anthem until 1984!^{57 58}

The following comment from Sir Robert Menzies, prime minister of Australia from 1949 to 1966, stresses the importance of the original ties between the British motherland and its old colonies: "The boundaries of Great Britain are not on the Kentish coast, but at Cape York and Invercargill."^{59 60} In the mid-twentieth century, Menzies still did not envisage Australia as an independent country, but only as a part of the British empire.

In the 1950s, when British people were very much encouraged to settle in Australia, many migrants pictured their new country as a place similar to their homeland, as Schech and Haggis explain.

Despite the long journey, moving to Australia felt to many like moving next door. None of our respondents who were adults at the time of migration recall fear or trepidation commonly associated with migration to an unknown place, even though few had detailed information on Australian life and environment. (...) Australia was 'like home', only with more space, sunshine, and a somewhat better standard of living.⁶¹

The idea that Australia was an extension of Britain, and Australians' attachment to the 'motherland' was echoed in one Josh's story about his Indigenous grandmother who refused to acknowledge her heritage. It is not only whiteness which she sought – since

⁵⁷ *God Save the King/Queen*, the English national anthem, was used.

⁵⁸ GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁵⁹ Cape York is located in far North Queensland while Invercargill is the southernmost city in New Zealand.

⁶⁰ MENZIES, Robert, quoted by STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁶¹ SCHECH, Susanne and HAGGIS, Jane, "Terrains of Migrancy and Whiteness: How British Migrants Locate Themselves in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 183.

being Indigenous was regarded as something to be ashamed of – but Englishness which, for a long time, represented the sophistication a country founded by convicts felt it lacked.

Josh *[My grandmother] calls herself English. If you ask her about her heritage, she'll tell you that she's English, but she's partly English – I think her mother might have been English, but her father was Aboriginal. (...) She doesn't talk about it, and she just tells everyone that she's English.*

Australia's identity was British. The British legacy is easily visible everywhere in Australia, from the presence of the Union Jack on the Australian flag, the names of some of its states – Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, or main cities bearing the names of influential British men (Lord Melbourne or Viscount Sydney⁶²) and where old building replicate European architecture – to the love for cricket or meat pies, as Adam pointed out earlier. Australia's political system is based on the bicameral Westminster system, and the Queen of England is still the Head of the country after Australians rejected the possibility that Australia become a republic in a 1999 referendum.

Australia's ties to Britain remained strong for a very long time, so much so that the country lacked a specific Australian identity⁶³ – something which is sometimes reflected in the participants' way of seeing Australian-ness, and which explains their desire to explore their Indigenous heritage.

Nevertheless, Australia's ties to Britain have gradually become symbolic. As Britain turned towards Europe by joining the European Union in 1973, Australia turned to the United States after the Second World War, and later on towards Asia for new economic ties.⁶⁴ With the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism in 1973, the importance of Britishness decreased for many Australians and the majority of the participants in this study called themselves Australians before adding their English, Scottish or Irish heritage.

⁶² The city of Sydney was originally meant to be called Albion, an old name for Great Britain.

⁶³ For example, Anthony Moran writes that, "At one point during the 1990s (...) it seemed that everyone in Australia was talking about the 'problem' of Australian identity: it was weak, spiritually bankrupt, in need of renovation, reinvention or defense, in crisis, and under threat from one thing or another." *Australia: Nation, Belonging and Globalization*, p. 80.

⁶⁴ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

As Josh's story about his grandmother showed, the Australian identity is one their grandparents were more unlikely to embrace so naturally.

Miriam further explains why she identifies as Australian rather than as English.

Miriam *If someone actually asked me like, "What's your background?", I'd probably say Aboriginal and Australian. I wouldn't say English because it's not part of my cultural identity, really... (...) I see the white cultural part of my identity as Australian, rather than English.*

Andrew put "English" and "Australian" on the same level, implying that someone with English heritage was now considered simply Australian. Miriam, on the other hand, suggests that out of the Anglo-Celtic heritage, a new Australian identity was formed which is now separate from the British one. Miriam does not feel that her English heritage forms part of her identity the way many Australians from previous generations did, despite the fact that many of them had never set foot in Britain.

In the same way, Michelle who is ten years older than Miriam, considers that the Scottish part of her ancestry is a legacy from her parents, but not part of her identity.

Michelle *My first identity would be Australian-French,⁶⁵ and then my parents have given me Aboriginal and Scottish.*

For a majority of young Australians, being Australian could no longer be equated with being English, Scottish, or Irish.

Until 2011, Britain still provided the largest number of migrants to Australia.⁶⁶ Furthermore, according to Stratton and echoing Schech and Haggis's previous remarks, "Migrants from Britain (...) continue to be thought of as seamlessly and unproblematically assimilating to the dominant culture."⁶⁷ Whether this is a reality for new British migrants or not, it seems that the British culture is still thought of as very close to the Australian culture, and part of what is seen as 'true' Australian-ness. This culture has been said to be

⁶⁵ Michelle now lives in France and has Australian and French citizenships.

⁶⁶ CHRISTIE, Joanne, "Britain No Longer Top Source of Australia Migrants", *The Telegraph*, 25 July 2012.

⁶⁷ STRATTON, *Race Daze*, op. cit., p. 39.

that of 'mainstream Australia' and called the "core Anglo-Celtic culture".⁶⁸ I will now examine the meaning of this expression.

3.3.2 The Meaning of 'Anglo-Celtic' and Its Link with Australian-ness

Miriam *If someone (...) listened to my voice, asked me where I'm from, they'd probably be like, "Yeah, she's Australian, and probably of English, or, you know, English/Irish/Scottish descent." So if they were like, "What's your background?" – which, when you look like me⁶⁹ and talk like me you never get asked anyway! – I'd probably say I'm Aboriginal and Australian.*

This quote from Miriam illustrates how skin colour, Anglo-Celtic descent and Australian-ness are naturally connected. As I showed, Australians whose heritage is from Britain or Ireland and whose families have been among the first to migrate to Australia are commonly referred to as simply 'Australians', whereas other heritages are more frequently mentioned for all others. I also explained previously how whiteness, throughout history, has come to be synonymous with quintessential Australian-ness. Therefore, white, Anglo-Celtic and Australian are generally associated in many people's minds to form a category understood as 'mainstream Australia' and often left unquestioned. The following conversation with Vanessa illustrates this.

Delphine I started this research thinking (...) that people would be proud of [having Indigenous heritage] and find it a bit exotic (...)

Vanessa *That is true when you go overseas, when you see other cultures, or even in Australia when it's another culture that's not white Australian culture. (...)*

Delphine When you say "white' Australian', you mean 'Anglo-Celtic heritage'?

Vanessa *Yeah.*

In spite of having strong historical connections with Britain, for young Australians, having Anglo-Celtic heritage does not mean that one feels attached to the United Kingdom's

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Miriam has got a fair skin.

or to Ireland's history, culture, geography or to the British monarchy, for example. As Miriam expressed earlier, Australians no longer try to replicate British or Irish cultures in Australia in the way the first settlers did. This is not to say, as I showed, that the significance of these core cultures has disappeared. David Carter explains how, despite the absence of references to Britishness by younger generations, its presence is still felt in Australia.

If explicit references to Britain or Britishness are now rare in Australia, certainly the ghosts of *whiteness* live on; with the difference perhaps that they are now our own ghosts, not ghosts imported from elsewhere. The ghosts stayed on, but we took away their British passports. (...) Australia remains fundamentally a "post-colony" but the symbolic power of Britain and Britishness (...) has almost entirely evaporated.⁷⁰

These 'ghosts' which Carter mentions are the inheritance left by the British in Australia. They are visible in this Anglo-Celtic culture which, today, is more Australian-made than British or Irish. With the help of Australian historian Ken Inglis, Jon Stratton attempted to define this expression which started to be widely used in Australia in the 1980s.

As Ken Inglis has pointed out, 'it is a word unknown outside of Australia.' (...) 'Anglo-Celtic' was an emendation of 'Anglo-Saxon', an enlargement of that term by Irish Catholic Australians in order to proclaim that here they were insiders.⁷¹ (...) [T]he term Anglo-Celtic has become commonplace since multiculturalism became the official population management policy. (...) The term describes the so-called core culture of Australia, the culture that is claimed to have existed before the European and Levantine migrations of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.⁷²

As Stratton demonstrates, the white Anglo-Celtic Australia whose culture is now perceived as the core culture of 'mainstream' Australia is a myth: many of the first settlers came from places which were not Britain or Ireland. According to Stratton, the myth of a completely 'white' Australia before the post-World War II migrations has led to the

⁷⁰ CARTER, David, "The Empire Dies back: Britishness in Contemporary Australian culture", *Pacific and American Studies*, Vol. 9, 2009, p. 42.

⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, it is not a natural thing to associate British and Irish people or cultures elsewhere considering their difficult history and religious differences.

⁷² STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

creation of a uni-linear history focusing on a 'mainstream' Anglo-Celtic core culture.⁷³ The expression 'mainstream Australia' and 'Anglo-Celtic core culture', he argues, began to be used recurrently by former Prime Minister John Howard and far-right politician Pauline Hanson in their criticism of the policy of multiculturalism.⁷⁴ In the 1990s, new histories written to account for the massacres and resistance of Indigenous populations in the eighteenth century (see 2.1.5.7) were criticized by Howard, among others, as going too far and as denying the importance of the 'white' Anglo-Celtic heritage in Australia, while Hanson feared an Asian invasion of the country. Both Howard and Hanson denounced the fact that, because of a new focus on Indigenous and ethnic Australians, 'mainstream Australians' were being forgotten.

Stratton explains how vague the category of 'mainstream Australians' actually is. There is no doubt, however, that in the minds of people like Howard or Hanson, these are 'white' people – neither Indigenous nor ethnic – with an Anglo-Celtic or European heritage. Here is an extract from one of Hanson's speeches in which she explains what it means to be Australian.

What are these things that Councillor Seng⁷⁵ values about Australia? The same things that Australians of Anglo-Celtic and European origin value: a fair go, fighting against corruption and community spirit. Along with these goes a commitment to Judaeo-Christian values and ethics, an honest system of justice and government, and education based on English law. (...) Australia is a uniquely tolerant society. Most Australians do not care where you come from as long as you fit in and act like an Australian.⁷⁶

According to Hanson, the Australian society should reflect the values and culture inherited from the country's British, Irish and European heritage. "Act[ing] like an

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Howard's vision for a united Australia was detailed in a Liberal-National Party Coalition document entitled *Future Directions: It's Time for Plain Thinking*. It promoted the celebration of "those core values which unite us as Australians, (...) a code of ethics which is derived from European civilisation (...) [and] the values of Australian mateship."

Quoted by Ganley, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁷⁵ Ted Seng is an Australian of Malaysian descent and mayor of Randwick, NSW.

⁷⁶ HANSON, Pauline, *Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (N.3)*, WEEKLY HOUSE HANSARD Database Date, 10 December 1996 (02:37).

Australian” means adopting and upholding this heritage no matter where you come from. Thus, Hanson promotes an assimilationist model.

According to Stratton, Hanson's, as well as Howard's visions for Australia are based on a nostalgic and mythical idea of an all-‘white’ and Anglo-Celtic country before the era of multiculturalism. However, the addition of “European” to the description of this core culture in Hanson's speech already signals that this Anglo-Celtic culture claimed to be that of ‘real’ Australians is open to different interpretations. Stratton exposes the different issues linked to the phrase ‘Anglo-Celtic’:

Just as it is unclear who, precisely, forms the mainstream, so there is an analogous problem with the idea of an Anglo-Celtic culture. For example, are there Anglo-Celts whose culture this is, or is ‘Anglo-Celtic’ the name given to Australian culture formed through the history of migration to Australia until, say, the European and Levantine migrations of the late 1940s onwards?

We would also need to recognise that the descendants of non-British or Irish, pre-1940s migrants, that is some Italians, Dutch, Germans and Scandinavians mostly, should now be considered Anglo-Celts if they are members of this Anglo-Celtic, mainstream culture. Finally, we must ask what meaning does Anglo-Celtic culture have for the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish migrants who have arrived since, say, the 1950s, and for their descendants?⁷⁷

It appears from this analysis that the expression ‘Anglo-Celtic’, which is now often used un-problematically in Australia, is actually almost as problematic as ‘white’.

The phrase ‘Anglo-Celtic’ rarely, if ever, appeared in the interviews I conducted. It remains a formal way of referring to a British, Irish or European heritage. However, as the conversation with Vanessa revealed earlier, it was often comprised in the word ‘white’ which was used a lot by the interviewees. As I demonstrated, ‘white’ is rarely used to evoke a skin colour only, but signals a culture which is often equated with ‘Australian’, which is itself equated with ‘Anglo-Celtic’ or ‘mainstream Australia’. ‘White’ can also refer to a more general Western way of life or culture which is the inheritance left by Anglo-Celtic and European migrants, as well as the heritage of the later post-World War II American

⁷⁷ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

influence on Australia. When the participants described themselves or their education as ‘white’ or ‘Australian’, this was in part the culture they were referring to (multiculturalism also played an important part in most people’s definition of Australian-ness as I will later explain). The following examples illustrate this.

Vanessa *People who just say, “I’m Australian. That’s it. I’m nothing else.” That could be European, sort of migrated earlier.*

Andrew *I just assumed I was a standard Caucasian Australian, pretty much.*

Miriam *I see the white cultural part of my identity as Australian.*

Megan *I’ve been brought up in Western, middle-class, white experience. (...) When I meet people from the Northern Beaches, we understand each other straight away – for better or for worse! It is a really white-bread⁷⁸ upbringing.*

Adam *All this Aboriginal stuff’s there, and it’s definitely around me, but I’m still in white culture. I’m still growing up in a white school.*

Vanessa who said earlier that ‘white’ Australian culture was synonymous with Anglo-Celtic culture now also adds the word ‘European’ to the equation, confirming the links between whiteness, Australian-ness, Anglo-Celtic and European cultures, but also the uncertainty in the definitions of these terms. As Ganley wrote about whiteness, these associations are a given for most people and are rarely questioned.

Andrew and Miriam associate the white skin colour with Australian culture, a culture that they and other participants link to the Australian lifestyle described by Adam at the beginning of this chapter. It is based on Anglo-Celtic, or more broadly on what Megan calls ‘Western’, culture. To her, ‘white’ also symbolises privilege: a comfortable and uncomplicated life, as the expression ‘white-bread’ indicates. Finally, Adam contrasts his ‘white’ upbringing in a nuclear family with the more communal way of life of his Indigenous extended family. Here “White culture” is also linked to a Western lifestyle which is not that of Indigenous people.

⁷⁸ ‘White-bread’ refers to a sheltered upbringing, in a comfortable environment.

3.3.3 Anglo-Celtic Country Australia and Urban Multiculturalism

The Anglo-Celtic culture Howard and Hanson defended against an overpowering multicultural and Indigenous influence was associated in their speeches to “ordinary Australians”⁷⁹ or to “the Anglo-Celtic lower-middle-class ‘mainstream’”. It is these people, with their ‘self-denying virtues of thrift, honesty, financial rectitude and hard work’”.⁸⁰ Stratton went on to describe this portion of ‘white’ Australia as opposed to the cosmopolitan middle-class who enjoys the diversity resulting from multiculturalism in their everyday lives through ethnic food or festivals for example. On the contrary, the image of the ‘ordinary Australian’ is closer to the description John O’Grady gave in *They’re a Weird Mob*: a ‘white’ Australian (often male) with Anglo-Celtic heritage belonging to the working class and living in the country. As Anthony Moran reports,

Australians frequently comment on the difference between the city and the country when it comes to national character or identity. Australian cities are seen as (...) less distinctively Australian than rural and regional areas. (...) Despite being one of the most urbanized nations in the world, there remains a cultural tendency among Australians to see the ‘real’ Australia as emanating from and residing in the bush rather than the cities.⁸¹

As I explained, ‘the real Australia’ is often associated with a rough, ‘white’ and masculine way of being Australian. This difference between country and urban Australians was mentioned by several participants. Michelle’s description of her father as a bushman out of a Banjo Paterson ballad is the illustration of this vision of Australian-ness. Having grown up in a small country town in Victoria, she describes the difference between country Australia and what she saw as a more educated portion of the Australian population which she encountered when she went to university in Melbourne:

Michelle *There’s two different streams of culture in Australia, almost. There’s university educated, or well-educated Aussies, (...) white Australians, but who empathize with the cause of the Aborigines. And then you’ve got white Australia in country Australia, that thinks the Aborigines are all just – excuse the language – pieces of*

⁷⁹ ‘Ordinary Australians’ is a phrase which was used repeatedly by Pauline Hanson, including in her famous maiden speech in the House of Representatives in March 1996.

⁸⁰ HOWARD, John quoted in, STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁸¹ MORAN, Anthony, *Australia: Nation, Belonging and Globalization*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

shit who drink and fight and take money that they shouldn't from the State, etc.

Michelle also later mentioned “people in Sea Lake or Swan Hill that I know [who] are very country Australian and right wing.” In the same vein, Megan talked about “a country mentality” when mentioning an uncle in Mudgee⁸² who joked about ‘white’ people in the area having “got rid of [Aboriginal people] a long time ago.” The gap between main cities and country also appeared in Adam’s description of Australia.

Delphine There’s also a big difference, I think, between country and cities.

Adam *Oh, very, very big difference! Wow! Cities are not the same at all in Australia! (...) The truth of it is that there is such a big difference between the country and the city, and there’s such a big difference in attitudes towards multiculturalism and all those types of things.*

Miriam emphasised the importance of being from the country in the way she identified. It is interesting to see how she also described herself as a ‘bogan’, which is how many Australians perceive these Australians living in the country (whether positively or negatively as explained earlier). A typical bogan – even though anyone, regardless of their origins can claim to be so if she/he displays the right characteristics – would be a ‘white’ Australian with little education and displaying little interest for other cultures. Miriam then qualified her statement and explained that she felt like a bogan because she enjoyed going to football matches or wearing very casual clothes although she is a law student.

Miriam *Also a big part of my identity is living in the city, and being from the country as well, being a country person.*

Delphine Why?

Miriam *Oh, because it's so different, (...) in a good way for me. I'm proud of that. But definitely, I think when you grow up in the country, you think differently and things like that. It's become less and less because I've lived in Wollongong and Sydney for almost five years now. And being a bogan, as well!*

Delphine *(laughs)* You would describe yourself as a bogan?

⁸² Mudgee is a town in central west New South Wales.

Miriam *Yeah, definitely.*

These examples signal how the differences between country and urban Australia are perceived by the participants. Some of them have grown up in country towns. Josh has worked as a jackaroo⁸³ in the Northern Territory in his early twenties. Nevertheless, at some point in their lives, they have all attended university or a tertiary education institute and lived in a major Australian city. This has certainly shaped the way they perceive 'country Australia', as well as their relationship with their Indigenous heritage as we will later see.

The way country Australia is viewed is not necessarily negative, perhaps because it is attached to the idea of a more genuine way of being Australian. However, it is often implied that country Australians are often less educated, less open to people with non-'white' cultures – Indigenous or other – and even quite racist towards them. Adina who confessed her love for the inner-west suburb of Newtown⁸⁴ and its diversity told me she would never leave the city because she thought the degree of racism present in the country was much higher.

Just like the 'white' and rather uncultured Australian can be looked at with affection or contempt, so is country Australia either perceived as the locus of a genuine 'white' Anglo-Celtic Australian-ness where "ordinary Australians" live, or as a bigoted place where multiculturalism and Indigeneity are unwelcome.

These extracts from the interviews reveal that in the minds of university-educated and urban young Australians, the country is associated with a 'whiter' and more racist Australian-ness whereas cities are multicultural and more tolerant places where the importance of the so-called Anglo-Celtic core culture seems lessened.

⁸³ A jackaroo is a young person training on a cattle station.

⁸⁴ The Sydney suburb of Newtown is famous for being an eclectic place, home of a mix of different cultures.

3.3.4 Conclusion

The phrase ‘Anglo-Celtic’ did not come naturally to the participants. Yet, this heritage was present in their uses of the words ‘white’ or ‘Australian’. As Andrew showed, the standard Australian is ‘white’ (or Caucasian), with this skin colour referring to British, Irish, or European origins. Growing up with this heritage and core culture in the background means being part of the Australian norm that is whiteness. It therefore means growing up privileged – receiving a ‘white-bread’ education – without ever really questioning one’s Australian-ness. This is something Josh expressed when I asked what being Australian meant to him.

Josh *Part of being Australian is that you don’t think about that sort of stuff.*

This easy identity may only be the privilege of ‘white’ Australians of Anglo-Celtic-European heritage who are still often called ‘mainstream Australians’.

Nevertheless, having been raised in the era of multiculturalism and having lived in major cities, the participants often linked the word ‘white’ to negative things such as racism, narrow-mindedness and lack of substance. Associating a white skin colour with an Anglo-Celtic heritage – Josh has red hair and an Irish last name – in his use of ‘Australian’, Josh explains how people could be prejudiced and assume what his character was like simply by looking at him, thus confirming the growing negative associations coming with a ‘white’ and Anglo-Celtic Australian identity.

Josh *I live in a country where most people who are Australian are very much like me, so I get stereotyped as potentially a racist person who only likes white, straight people.⁸⁵*

⁸⁵ Jan Larbalestier expresses a similar idea when she writes that being fair-skinned, she can be automatically associated with colonialism and regarded as “a marked woman, one who is positioned as someone with a ‘white European face’ representing ‘generations of genocide’. I am dumped into a cultural space of unrelenting sameness.”

LARBALESTIER, Jan, “What Is This Thing Called White? Reflections on ‘Whiteness’ and Multiculturalism” in HAGE, Ghassan, COUCH, Rowanne (eds), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin’s ‘The Migrant Presence’*, Sydney: Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney, 1999, p. 152.

This negative vision of whiteness can be understood as resulting from the move from the White Australia policy to that of multiculturalism at the beginning of the 1970s. I will now explain how this policy changed the concept of whiteness and yet how whiteness remains central in today's Australian society.

3.4 Whiteness in the Multicultural Era

In 2014, “a quarter of Australia’s 22 million people were born overseas, and over 40 percent were either born overseas themselves or ha[d] at least one parent born overseas.”⁸⁶ The opening up of the Australian borders to migrants from all around the world and the adoption of multiculturalism as the official policy for Australia’s future redefined the way racial difference was perceived in the country. However, multiculturalism may not have replaced whiteness as the norm in Australia.

3.4.1 From the White Australia Policy and Assimilation to Multiculturalism

Contrary to the White Australia policy which was designed to control immigration to Australia, the policy of multiculturalism was adopted firstly to manage the ethnic diversity created by the arrival of migrants from places other than Britain and Ireland, and help them ‘become Australians’.⁸⁷ However, the idea that becoming Australian meant leaving one’s culture behind was gradually abandoned: “Assimilation, many argued, had failed, and had inflicted unnecessary suffering on members of Australia’s ethnically diverse population. Australia needed a new ethic to unite it as a country.”⁸⁸

The word ‘multiculturalism’ first appeared in a 1973 paper written by the Minister for Immigration Al Grassby in which he promoted ethnic pluralism as a desirable aim for the future of Australia. In April 1978, a commission led by Frank Galbally concluded that the

⁸⁶ FOZDAR, Farida and PERKINS, Maureen, “Antipodean Mixed-Race: Australia and New Zealand” in King O’Riain, Rebecca C., SMALL, Stephen, MAHTANI, Minelle, SONG, Miri, SPICKARD, Paul (eds) *Global Mixed Race*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2014, p. 124.

⁸⁷ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁸⁸ MORAN, Anthony, *Nation, Belonging and Globalization*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

government needed to help new migrants settle in Australia while allowing them to retain their cultures. The report asked for the development of English and orientation courses on housing, education or employment and for more interpreters in the law, education or health areas. It also encouraged the creation of multicultural resource centres and of a multicultural television service.^{89 90} At the same time, through food or festivals, 'white' Australians were encouraged to enjoy the cultural diversity of their country.

The movement towards multiculturalism stemmed from a redefinition of the concept of race. While the White Australia policy was based on a hierarchy between migrants, multiculturalism was founded on a tolerant approach recognising racial differences but also a common humanity. The adoption of multiculturalism as an official policy coincided with the passage of the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act, signalling a clear departure from the previous policies and discourses based on racial discrimination. The change of discourse saw the word 'race' practically banished from the official language, to be replaced by 'ethnicity'.⁹¹ While race was associated with a biological component which had by then been rejected as a scientific way of discriminating between races,⁹² 'ethnicity' established differences based on culture. Multiculturalism was adopted with the belief that different cultures could coexist and be treated equally in Australia. Nevertheless, multiculturalism was still based on the understanding that all cultures would share core moral Australian values, as Stratton explains.

In the discourse of multiculturalism the rhetoric of race, which has always suggested some fundamental and possibly insurmountable difference between

⁸⁹ SBS, the Special Broadcasting Service, is a government-funded radio and television network: "The multiple language programs available through SBS Television, Radio and Online ensure that all Australians, including the estimated three million Australians who speak a language other than English in their homes, are able to share in the experiences of others, and participate in public life." *SBS website*, <http://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/our-story/>, accessed on 10 July 2015.

⁹⁰ CLAYDON, Leslie F., "Australia's Settlers: The Galbally Report", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2, Refugees Today, 1981, pp. 110-111.

⁹¹ See 3.4.1.

⁹² UNESCO constitution, 1945, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, accessed on 28 June 2015

people, was replaced by the rhetoric of ethnicity which has been used to emphasise culture rather than biology.⁹³

Ethnic implies membership of a group, called an ethnic group, whose cultural difference is an accepted part of the fabric of Australian multicultural society; that is to say people who are thought to share the same moral understanding as that which dominates and determines the Australian social order.⁹⁴

Therefore, although tolerance of different cultures is advocated under the policy of multiculturalism, the people whose culture is not that of 'white' Anglo-Celtic Australia are perceived as 'others' while whiteness remains the norm and the centre around which ethnic cultures gravitate.

3.4.2 From 'White' Domination to 'White' Normality

In the 1970s, when multiculturalism was adopted as an official policy, migrants to Australia were still coming mainly from countries whose populations were considered to be 'white', both in terms of skin colour and culture. The arrival of non-'white' migrants with non-Western cultures created a disturbance in a policy designed to manage migrants from different backgrounds but who could form a community thanks to shared core values. The policy of multiculturalism may never truly have adapted to deal with the new array of cultures present in contemporary Australia, leaving 'white' Anglo-Celtic-European values still at the centre and ethnic cultures on the periphery, as Stratton argues.

The policy of multiculturalism is organised according to a metaphorical spatial structure in which migrant, 'ethnic' cultures are peripheral to a core culture, named these days as 'Anglo-Celtic', which is privileged. We should also note the rhetorical distinction which has become pervasive in Australia between 'migrants', who can be people who have been born in Australia but who are from non-British or Irish backgrounds, and Australians, sometimes identified as 'real Australians'. These are the people whose ancestors, it is implied, settled Australia. These people may themselves only be second, or even first, generation

⁹³ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁹⁴ STRATTON, Jon, "Multiculturalism and the Whitening Machine, or How Australians Become White", in HAGE, Ghassan, COUCH, Rowanne (eds), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's 'The Migrant Presence'*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

residents in Australia. The people who live this Anglo-Celtic culture, those in the first place of British and Irish descent, are presumed to be white.⁹⁵

This analysis of the policy of multiculturalism recalls the links between whiteness and Australian-ness. As the interviews with British migrants conducted by Schech and Haggis showed, a new migrant from Britain, Ireland or Europe will probably be regarded as more Australian than someone who appears visibly different from this norm. This is still often the case, for example, with Asian Australians, some of whose families have lived in Australia for years: an Asian-looking friend of mine is sometimes assumed to speak Chinese rather than English even though she identifies as Australian, since her family have been in this country for four generations. Similarly but in a reversed situation, one of the participants' mothers came to Australia from South Africa and married her father who has Indigenous heritage and 'olive' skin.

Megan *My dad, you can tell he's got...something in him! That's what we say. It's a real Aussie thing. (...) My mum's South African. She came to Australia when she was about 22 I think, and quite quickly after, she met my dad. And I think she has both Dutch and English South African heritages. (...) It was complete segregation in South Africa. She would have been educated and brought up in a completely white⁹⁶ environment... (...) And I asked her, "What did you think when you met Dad?", because he's pretty...yeah! (...) I think she was not turned off by the fact that my dad looked different. And she clearly wasn't turned off by the fact that we look different to her brother's and sister's kids who are blond.*

Even though Megan's mother was a foreigner who came to Australia as an adult while her father's family has old Anglo-Celtic and Indigenous Australian heritages, her father is the one Megan describes as 'different'. Being a 'white' South African in Australia, her mother could fit in easily and be thought of as Australian right away, whereas Megan who inherited her father's complexion was often called a 'wog'⁹⁷ at school and was often asked 'what she had in her'. This is an example of the privilege a white skin confers, and which is

⁹⁵ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁹⁶ Note how here, again, 'white' stands for a skin colour and a particular culture (referring here to 'white' South Africans under the apartheid).

⁹⁷ 'Wog' is a derogatory term referring to non-Anglo-Celtic migrants, especially from southern or eastern Europe, or even from the Middle-East (people with 'olive skin').

still unquestioned in Australia and assumed to be linked to Anglo-Celtic-European heritage when this is not specified.

Nathan Ganley argued that with the shift from the White Australia policy to multiculturalism, whiteness went from being dominant to being normal.⁹⁸ According to his analysis, whiteness before the 1970s was explicitly superior, and the desire to exclude non-‘whites’ from Australia was no secret. It was believed that physical as well as cultural whiteness was a prerequisite to assimilate into Australian society. In the multicultural era, a discourse of tolerance replaced that of racial hierarchy, and ‘white’ Australians were encouraged to embrace other cultures. Therefore, ‘white’ Australians continued to be regarded as the ‘true’ Australians while ethnic Australians and Indigenous people were and are still being ‘othered’, awaiting ‘white’ Australians’ decision to include or exclude them from Australian society. The hierarchy between ‘white’ Australians and others is thus maintained in an insidious way, even though this was not a conscious aim of the multicultural policy.

An example of this dynamic of normalising whiteness while othering ethnicity is the creation of a specific television and radio network, SBS, dedicated to showcasing and encouraging Australian multiculturalism. The multilingual programs on SBS are separated from the main programs, which are still predominantly ‘white’, and therefore acquire a different status: they are regarded as art-house programs while others programs are seen as normal television.⁹⁹ Another example is a celebration of multiculturalism organised every year and called Harmony Day. It was created in 1999 and involves activities in schools or within local communities to celebrate diversity in Australia.

Harmony Day is held every year on 21 March to coincide with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The message of Harmony Day is *everyone belongs*. It’s a day to celebrate Australia’s diversity – a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ GANLEY, Nathan, *The Construction of Whiteness in Australia: Discourses of Immigration and National Identity from the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁹⁹ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ *Harmony Day* website, <http://www.harmony.gov.au/about/>, accessed on 13 July 2015. Emphasis added.

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The creation of a booklet of recipes from all around the world entitled *Recipes for Harmony* was part of the 2015 celebration. Each recipe was accompanied by a person representing a country and a culture, a map from the country of origin, as well as a few facts about its traditions. Recipes from countries such as Vietnam, Greece, Georgia or Lebanon, among others, sat alongside an Aboriginal recipe, and an Australian one. Tiffany's cultural heritage was described as "Outback Australia" and she explained that she is a seventh-generation Australian. In comparison, other ethnic Australians featured in this booklet had been born from parents who migrated to Australia, or they had themselves come to Australia at a young age. The fact that Tiffany's family had been in Australia for more generations made her simply "Australian" while others were what Jon Stratton called "hyphenated Australians".¹⁰¹ As he explains, these "ethnicised individuals and groups are thought of as only *in part* essentially Australian."¹⁰²

Paradoxically, in the booklet of recipes, Alan, who identified as "Aborigine", obviously has older ties to the land than Tiffany, but he was not the one labelled "Australian". It is therefore implied that Indigenous people who are the original Australians¹⁰³ form part of the 'other' cultures which gravitate around 'Australian' culture – a 'white' Anglo-Celtic Australian culture.

It is also interesting to see that to represent Australian culture, the booklet featured an Australian who grew up in the country – Tiffany detailed how growing up on a farm was very different from her subsequent life in Perth, "the big smoke".¹⁰⁴ It is therefore implied that real Australian-ness resides in the outback rather than in cities where most Australians live.¹⁰⁵

A more general conclusion to this brief analysis is the confirmation that although, as the website claims, "everyone belongs", as Myrna Tonkinson explained earlier, all

¹⁰¹ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰³ The word 'Aboriginal' comes from the contraction of two Latin words: *Ab* (from) and *origine* (the origin).

¹⁰⁴ *Harmony Day* website, *op. cit.*, accessed on 13 July 2015.

¹⁰⁵ This is something I will study chapter 7.

Australians apart from those with an Anglo-Celtic background are still 'marked' in today's Australia.

3.4.3 Whiteness as Privilege

There is some continuity in processes of inclusion of previously excluded collectivities into an imaginary core of Australianness as 'white'. Objections to further immigration have come from former immigrants themselves as well as native-born descendants of immigrants – many of them being moved from a supposedly non-white ethnic category to a white one. (...) What remains stable, however, is the constitution of 'whiteness' (irrespective of any particular embodiment) as signalling superiority, cultural compatibility and privilege.¹⁰⁶

Vanessa *Currently in the hierarchy you've got white Australia, multicultural Australia, first Australia, in that kind of...preference.*

As Larbalestier wrote, and as we saw, the category of whiteness is evolving. Australian-ness is not only represented by Anglo-Celtic migrants and their descendants. It also includes all the populations who joined the field of whiteness and who have progressively become part of 'mainstream Australia'. As I explained previously, the Australian culture is not truly British, Irish or European, but it is based on the understanding that the inheritance from these cultures is the cement of Australian identity. Richard Dyer described why, according to him, whiteness remains a powerful category in spite of its unstable nature: "Because whiteness carries such rewards and privileges, the sense of a border that might be crossed and a hierarchy that might be climbed has produced a dynamic that has enthralled people who have had any chance of participating in it."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Ghassan Hage evoked a yearning to be 'white'. Since becoming 'white' is an ideal, individuals always have to accumulate more whiteness in order to become part of a privileged group Hage calls the "governors of the nation".¹⁰⁸ Hage argues that no matter which position 'white' Australians adopt – a friendly or unfriendly attitude towards multiculturalism – since 'white' culture is

¹⁰⁶ LARBALESTIER, Jan, "What is this Thing Called white? Reflections on 'Whiteness' and Multiculturalism", in HAGE, Ghassan, COUCH, Rowanne (eds), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's The Migrant Presence*, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁰⁷ DYER, Richard, *White: White: Essays on Race and Culture*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 17.

privileged and regarded as the real Australian culture, they feel entitled to pass judgements on all 'others', ethnic Australians who are perceived as "national objects".¹⁰⁹

Coming back to the example of Indigenous athlete Cathy Freeman carrying both the Aboriginal and the Australian flags after having won a race, Michelle gave an example of this right people who consider themselves Australians seize to judge what Australian-ness is about.

Michelle *When [Cathy Freeman] ran, everyone was behind her and supported her, but when she carried the two flags, that caused a shit storm to be honest. (...) I do remember there being a bit of distaste in the family that you're either, like you're Australian; you're not carrying a flag for Aborigines, or carrying a flag for Irish-Australians, or German-Australians. We're one Australia, so you carry the Australian flag.*

Michelle's family – like many others at the time – had a clear idea of what it meant to be Australian and of the proper way of representing the nation. A hybrid – or as Stratton wrote, hyphenated identity – was considered un-Australian.¹¹⁰ The right way to be Australian was to wave the Australian flag even though, to many Indigenous people, it remains a symbol of colonisation and of the destruction of their cultures. The vision of Australia defended by Michelle's family is close to that of the assimilation era, when all new migrants were required to adopt the Australian way of life and were discouraged from displaying their original cultures in order to be accepted.

Another example is the story Megan told me about her experience at school, growing up with olive skin, being called a wog and asked "what she had in her".

Megan *It's not considered really rude to say that here [in Australia]. I went to England and I think I even said to someone, "What have you got in you?" and they were like, "What do you mean by that?! And why would I tell you anyway?" Yeah, it's almost like a conversation starter at a barbecue, "Oh you're quite dark; what have you got*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ This is a word which was found in the media at the time of these Commonwealth Games and then during the Olympics when Indigenous people staged protests which were deemed 'un-Australian'. ELLIS, Cath, ELDER, Catriona, PRATT, Angela, "Whiteness in Constructions of Australian Nationhood: Indigenes, Immigrants and Governmentality" in MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen (ed.), *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004, p. 190.

in you?" (...) I'm pretty sure in most parts of Australia that would be considered normal conversation. It's a bit like, "What's your background?"

Megan tends to minimise the discriminative potential behind such a question although she realises that asking someone 'what they have in them' is not perceived as a harmless thing in other countries. In Australia, however, she acknowledges that it is normal to ask people about their background in such a way and to pass judgements based on the colour of their skin. The innuendo behind such a question is that people whose skin is not white have got something 'other' in their blood, something which does not come from Australia – even though Anglo-Celtic blood does not come from Australia either. This opinion is once again based on a conflation of skin colour and culture and on a deeply anchored idea that quintessential Australian-ness can only be 'white'. After many years of multiculturalism as the country's official policy, it seems clear that 'white' Australians are still privileged since they are the only ones entitled and able to decide who belongs to the Australian category or not.

3.4.4 Multiculturalism in the Eyes of the Young Generations

What follows from Dyer's and Hage's theories about 'white' privilege in Australia is that, whether or not multiculturalism is genuinely embraced by Australians, a 'white' core culture continues to represent Australian-ness while all other forms of this identity – whether Indigenous, ethnic Australian, part-Australian etc. – remain on the margins. It is interesting to look at the way the participants who grew up surrounded by the multicultural discourse, with multicultural activities at school, and who then lived in multi-ethnic Australian cities perceive this policy and its link to Australian-ness.

3.4.4.1 Multiculturalism is Australia

For many of the young Australians I interviewed, multiculturalism represents Australia today: the richness created by the diversity of cultures in the country is valued by many of them as the following statements reveal.

Kate *I think by saying you're Australian, it actually signifies that you're multicultural. Everybody here comes from somewhere else. So I think in this day and age, for people to keep asking about your ethnicity is completely useless. (...) You're Australian if you are just accepting of everyone.*

Josh *Being Australian is about being accepting. (...) I don't think being white makes me more Australian than Chinese guys. I don't think what makes me Australian is being born in Australia. It's just sort of accepting the good lifestyle we have here, and I don't think it's a race or religious thing.*

For Josh and Kate – both in their late twenties – Australian-ness is attached to cultural diversity. It seems that multiculturalism is what best represents their country. The word “accepting” is used by both participants to describe what it means to be Australian, a word which belongs to the discourse of tolerance adopted in the early 1970s when multiculturalism became the country’s official policy. An “accepting” Australia is the image the country has been promoting for more than forty years to erase images from the previous era of racial discrimination defined by the rejection of non-‘white’ migrants under the White Australia policy.

An example of this discourse of tolerance are the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. The Games were an opportunity for Australia to showcase its new identity built around acceptance of Indigenous people and ethnic Australians alike. During the opening ceremony, a section entitled ‘Arrivals’ was devoted to multicultural Australia, with representatives from all continents coming together to form the shape of Australia, standing with their arms outstretched towards the audience to symbolise a country welcoming diversity.¹¹¹

Both Josh and Kate strongly reject what Australia used to be built upon, that is to say distinctions between races, ethnicities or religions. The fact that Josh points out that his white skin does not make him more Australian than a Chinese man signals two things: like Kate, he was born and raised in an Australia where multiculturalism is strongly endorsed.

¹¹¹ “The Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games: A Sydney Celebration”, Sydney: Warner Vision Australia, 2000.

It also shows that even though he detaches himself from this vision, Josh is aware that whiteness still represents Australian-ness to a certain extent.

Adina is another fervent defender of cultural diversity. She explained how, according to her, it is now something which is natural in Australia. One of the oldest participants – in her mid-thirties – she did not grow up with programs about multiculturalism at school which exist today. Adina recalled that in the Catholic school she attended, “while they were starting to get into the multicultural thing, it wasn’t at all entrenched.” However, she explained that to her son who was born in 2003, multiculturalism came very spontaneously.

Adina *[My son's] school, it's sort of a community school. (...) His school [is] so multicultural. (...) My son has a Chinese best friend. His absolute best friend Adrian comes from Croatia – and he just came back from there – Mervin, he's an Indian kid, he loves him too. This is not an all-white school. Maybe if he was in an all-white school, it would be different. But he's not. He's got so many colours; it's like the rainbow.*

Whiteness is the counterpart to Adina’s description of a multicultural school. She associates the idea of an “all-white school” with a potential for more racism towards her son who identifies as Indigenous. Here again, tolerance belongs to the realm of multiculturalism while whiteness is linked to narrow-mindedness.

We can conclude from these extracts that the three concepts I have linked – whiteness, Anglo-Celtic culture and Australian-ness – are today joined by that of multiculturalism for some of the young and urban Australian participants. Josh still hinted at the idea that whiteness, for some people, represents quintessential Australian-ness but refuted it. As we saw earlier, he is aware of the negative connotations associated with whiteness in today’s Australia. These negative connotations are echoed by Adina who clearly links whiteness to racism. Therefore, to these participants, Australian-ness is both associated with and dissociated from whiteness. But most importantly, multiculturalism now comes into play to describe the Australian identity.

3.4.4.2 Safe and Unsafe Multiculturalism

3.4.4.2.1 The Persistence of the 'White'/Ethnic Hierarchy

Michelle *Generally we're pretty laid-back and down-to-earth. We get along with everyone. (...) As an Australian, I consider Australia to be a non-offensive nation.*

Michelle and Adam who are about ten years older than Josh and Kate also think that what best represents Australia is how inclusive it is. Michelle now lives in France and describes her country of origin as "non-offensive". However, as I will show, this benevolent vision of Australia may be the prerogative of privileged 'white' Australians, rather than that of Australians whose identity is more often questioned.

Adam *Being Australian is still being Australian. If an Asian Australian person comes up to me, they're Australian. (...) Just because I'm Aboriginal doesn't mean that I don't see them as Australian, and it doesn't mean that I would exclude other people from being Australian. They have a right to be Australian just the same as I do. (...) Australian identity is quite inclusive. (...) When I'm Australian, I connect with all of these people from all different cultures, from all different backgrounds. They're all just as Australian. I've met Chinese guys with the thickest Chinese accent who are as Australian as I am! The way they talk, the things they talk about, the way they live their life: there's virtually no difference between me and them, and so Australian is Australian.*

Despite the strong defence of multiculturalism in his discourse, Adam still appears ambiguous. First, I asked Adam if he thought that his Indigenous heritage gave him a sense of being more Australian than others. He objected to this idea and went on to defend his vision of Australia as welcoming and egalitarian. To analyse this quote, let us come back to Ghassan Hage's theory about governmental power.

Governmental power is the feeling that one is legitimately entitled in the course of everyday life to make a governmental/managerial statement about the nation – to have a view about its foreign policy, for example, or to have a governmental/managerial attitude towards others. (...) [G]overnmental power

(...) is the power to have a legitimate view regarding who should 'feel at home' in the nation and how.¹¹²

Adam does not feel that being Indigenous gives him more legitimacy to be Australian than "a Chinese guy". However, he may not be able to express this idea and his vision of which people "have a right to be Australian" were it not for the fact that his skin is white. If he does not disclose his Indigenous heritage, Adam's Australian-ness is not questioned in today's Australian society because white skin is still perceived as a norm (as I will explain in chapter 6, it is his identification as Indigenous while he has white skin which raises questions). For some of the participants whose skin is not as fair as Adam's, like Vanessa, Australian identity becomes less of a given. As Vanessa explained, being "un-identifiable" caused her problems in the past.

Vanessa *I could be anything. And I caught everything in Australia. (...) So that's the thing, I notice that...my ethnicity... (...) that's a part of my identity, but it's not just Indigenous. It is being un-identifiable to anyone else, and coping the flak for the unknown.*

I went to a wedding with my partner, and we were sitting across this couple, and the partner (...) said, "Oh, what's your heritage?" I'm like, "Oh I'm just Australian." And then he said, "Oh, no, but you know..."

As Megan said earlier, it is normal in Australia to ask identity questions to a person whose skin is not white, and therefore to imply that 'Australian' is not a good-enough description and that this person is not a 'true' Australian. Unlike Adam, Vanessa's Australian-ness is being questioned because she looks like she's got "something in her", to use Megan's turn of phrase. Having her Australian-ness questioned in this way makes it difficult for Vanessa to assert who has the right to be Australian in the way Adam did. Therefore, it appears that it is safe for a fair-skinned person to declare that multiculturalism represents Australia, but a person who looks more ethnic still runs a risk of having her/his identity as Australian questioned.

¹¹² HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 46.

Another impression coming from Adam's quote is the lack of clarity in his definition of 'Australian'. It is an inclusive identity which embraces differences. At the same time, the "Chinese guys" are described as just as Australian as he is because they do things the same way Adam does. As I explained before, the policy of multiculturalism values diversity but only as long as the different people who live in Australia adhere to core Australian values. In the same way, Adam also values diversity and makes it the basis of Australian-ness, but he emphasises similarities at the same time. What then is this Australian way of life that he, a 'white' Australian with Indigenous heritage, has in common with Chinese Australians? Jon Stratton mentioned the issue of "whether ethnic groups are expected to accommodate to an unchanging mainstream culture or whether the mainstream culture [would] itself syncretically transform through its interaction with the cultures of the ethnic groups".¹¹³ It is perhaps the case that this syncretic Australian culture is now a reality and corresponds to Adam's vision of the Australian lifestyle, shared by all no matter where they originally came from. It can also be that the "Chinese guys" Adam mentioned have adapted to Stratton's description of an "unchanging mainstream culture", which allows Adam to include them in the category Australian without realising his 'white' superiority as a "governor of the nation". By mentioning the thick Chinese accent and then saying that it does not matter and does not make these Chinese men less Australian, Adam is, in a way, giving them his approval. It is not up to them to decide if they belong to the Australian category. Thus, Adam, albeit unbeknownst to himself, perpetuates the dynamic of 'white' privilege and ethnic marginality.

The power to claim that multiculturalism is quintessentially Australian, therefore, is dependent upon the person articulating this idea. It seems to me that as much as they may want to regard themselves as partaking in this egalitarian multicultural Australia, 'white' Australians are still separate from it and more privileged and legitimate as Australians than the actual multicultural or ethnic Australians they describe as their equals.

¹¹³ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

3.4.4.2.2 A Tokenistic Multiculturalism?

"We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to –but we aren't there yet."¹¹⁴

Kate *I mean when somebody asks you, "What nationality are you?", I always say, "I'm Australian". I was born here. But then I might go on to say, "I'm actually half-Lebanese: my father is Lebanese. (...) My last name is Thursday in Arabic." (...) My dad always hated people thinking he was Lebanese. So he always said he was Australian. (...) He would say, "I was born here. I'm Australian." So I think that he sort of taught us that, you know, that's what we are first and foremost. He was embarrassed of his Lebanese heritage, whereas, you know, I like it. I think it's...it's cool that my grandparents grew up in a different time and a different place and, you know, they moved here to get away from things and made a great life for themselves. Like, I don't see any shame in it.*

Kate's statement shows the ambivalent relationship to multiculturalism existing in Australia and expressed by Richard Dyer. Whereas her father, following the dictates of the assimilation policy, taught his children that they were Australians first and decided to leave behind his Lebanese heritage in order to truly belong, Kate, who grew up with the policy of multiculturalism, is happy to embrace her origins, and values differences. The tolerant discourse of multiculturalism allows her to reclaim her Lebanese heritage. At the same time, there are limits to tolerance, as we just saw: Kate will not always reveal this information (she "might go on to say 'I'm actually half-Lebanese'"). Despite her conviction that Australia is multicultural, it seems that Kate hesitates and that it may not always be safe to disclose everything about her heritage. Her hesitation may reveal the hazardous status of multiculturalism.

In the following quote, Vanessa described the way multiculturalism was dealt with in the Catholic school she went to.

Vanessa *I came from a really racist, white, privileged school where they had all the illusions of having ethnicities by posting the nine of us on every single flyer...*

Delphine Where were the others from?

¹¹⁴ DYER, Richard, *White: White: Essays on Race and Culture*, op. cit., p. 4.

Vanessa *I think you had two from China, one Greek, or an Italian, a Turkish...*

According to Vanessa's account, in some sections of the Australian society – like the “all-‘white’” Australian schools described by Adina –, multiculturalism is only an “illusion”. Vanessa remembered being close to the other eight ethnic students, and facing racism from some of the other students together. Multiculturalism in the way she experienced it was merely tokenistic, while ‘white’ Australia was still considered the norm and was privileged. Similarly, several participants claim to strongly support multiculturalism and associate it with Australian-ness, but only in what seemed to me to be a risk-free manner. This is not to say that any of them is not convinced that cultural diversity is actually enriching and representative of Australian identity. However, as I explained, multiculturalism is easily and uncritically enjoyed by those whose Australian identity is rarely, if ever, questioned, or in circumstances where no harm can come from expressing one's support for diversity or one's ethnic heritage. For example, when Kate talked about her Lebanese origins, she mentioned that her last name meant Thursday in Arabic, a harmless, uncontroversial fact about her Lebanese culture.

The enjoyment of multicultural Australia in a safe way was analysed by Sneja Gunew: “Sneja Gunew has remarked that ‘Multiculturalism in Australia is acceptable as a celebration of costumes, customs and cooking’”.¹¹⁵ When multiculturalism was adopted as the country's official policy, Australians were encouraged to enjoy the diversity of cultures on offer, and this was most easily done through food or cultural traditions, and incited by the government through the organisation of festivals¹¹⁶ for example (the food booklet produced for Harmony Day is an example of this promotion of multiculturalism). Several participants referred to these enjoyable aspects of multicultural Australia.

¹¹⁵ GUNEW, Sneja quoted in STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Multicultural festivals are omnipresent in Australia (at least in Sydney where I lived). They can be film festivals from every country, food festivals or celebrations of national days such as the French Bastille Day or the Italian Ferragosto.

Josh *To me, really, the best part about Australia is the fact that we have, like, a million different people, with all their different foods, and languages, and cultures, and dance, and clothing.*

Adina *On the Coast, we've had an explosion of multiculturalism. I think it's the food. It used to be just fish and chips or really, really appalling and crappy Chinese. And now... (...) I just think it's awesome because the world's not white.*

Again, these quotes may not reflect everything that multiculturalism is for these participants, nor does it diminish their belief that it represents Australian identity. Nevertheless, it shows that these participants grew up in a society which taught them to enjoy multiculturalism as “a celebration” of exotic cultural features.

Andrew told me he felt very much at ease with the idea of embracing all his different heritages, and that he encouraged his girlfriend to do the same.

Andrew *I'm kind of proud of having a mix of heritage, whether it's English, Indigenous, whether it's – and it's not confirmed, but – our gipsy heritage, I really love the idea of kind of bringing it all together. Like my girlfriend has got Persian heritage, and she's been very negative towards it and stuff, but her dad cooks these incredible meals, and I've been working with her to try to make her feel more comfortable. (...) This is more so during a period...probably similar to White Australia or earlier, that kind of fear of Middle-Eastern or people from those areas being pigeonholed. She's starting to realise she can pick and choose what parts of her identity she wants to stand out.*

Andrew is aware of the potential danger of experiencing racism when coming from a Middle-Eastern country, but according to him, this is a thing of the past. To him, multiculturalism is here to be enjoyed. This position shows through the argument he brought in to counter his girlfriend's negative feelings towards her Persian heritage: “her dad cooks incredible meals”. In this quote, food is the positive aspect Andrew associates with his girlfriend's heritage and which should make her proud of it. Food is a safe aspect about any culture, and Australians certainly enjoy the culinary variety on offer in their country. Enjoying ethnic foods or cultural festivals is a risk-free way of engaging with multiculturalism. In the same way, Andrew's vision of multiculturalism is a safe one: he is happy to “bring it all together” and encourages his girlfriend to “pick and choose what parts

of her identity she wants to stand out.” It seems that, to Andrew, one can create a multicultural identity by claiming the positive aspects of each cultural heritage which best resonate with one’s personality.¹¹⁷ There does not seem to be a need to engage deeply with all aspects of one’s culture to claim it as part of one’s identity. Thus, Andrew only sees the enjoyable aspects of multiculturalism. However, this symbolic ethnicity, which allows someone to play with their cultural heritages without having to really engage with them, is only available to people for whom ethnicity is a choice and not something that is written in the colour of their skin or other physical features. Indeed, Vanessa’s earlier story reveals that the “picking and choosing” which, in Andrew’s case, is seen as his right – and is in fact his privilege as a ‘white’ and therefore ‘Australian’-looking person – is for Vanessa a matter of safety.

Vanessa *In tense situations, if I read that there’s potential danger (...) sometimes I play the South-East Asian card.¹¹⁸ (...) I just don’t acknowledge what I am. I just stay quiet. I think that’s what my mum has taught me: in certain situations... [Once, someone told me], “Oh, what’s your heritage?” I’m like, “Oh I’m just Australian.” And then he said, “Oh, no, but you know...”, and I went, “My mum grew up in Malaysia.” I don’t lie. It’s just...I’m very specific about what I say. Or, you know, I’m like, “And I’m half-Scottish” or...I feel like I have to...frame it in a different way.*

Vanessa’s “picking and choosing” is a way for her to avoid revealing her Indigenous heritage to people she senses could then judge her negatively based on this knowledge. On the other hand, she does not hesitate to reveal her Scottish heritage which is unproblematic and will not be questioned in Australia. It is therefore a very different way of playing with multiculturalism. Here again, it looks as if multiculturalism is more easily enjoyed by the privileged people whose Australian-ness is never questioned – ‘white’ Australians.

¹¹⁷ I will study this understanding of identity in chapter 10.

¹¹⁸ Vanessa does not have any South-East Asian heritage but her mother grew up in Malaysia and Vanessa looks like she could come from there.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the origins of the concept of whiteness and its links with the Anglo-Celtic core culture and with Australian-ness. I have highlighted the fact that whiteness has been constructed over the years and that it was formed through its confrontations with Others, both Indigenous and ethnic. From a defining aspect of the Australian nation until the 1970s, whiteness has now become a norm. Although the superiority of whiteness which was clearly visible at the time of colonisation or during the White Australia policy is no longer so obvious, the privileges granted by a fair skin in Australia still exist, as well as the belief that the Australian culture is based on an Anglo-Celtic cultural inheritance. With the advent of multiculturalism in Australia, the country took a radical turn, rejecting the hierarchy of races privileging whiteness as a colour and culture, to welcome people from all around the world and make diversity the key feature of Australian identity. The discourse of inclusiveness which came to complement that of egalitarianism had a strong impact on the participants in this study since most of them likened Australian-ness to multiculturalism without hesitation. Having said this, we need to take into account the fact that these people come from educated and urban backgrounds and have therefore been in greater contact with multicultural Australia, and learnt to see it as a positive aspect of their country's identity.

Whiteness, which I associated with Australian-ness and the old Anglo-Celtic-European cultural basis on which the country was mostly built – and which has acquired a mythical status – has naturally evolved under the multicultural era. The participants' recurring negative comments about whiteness – then opposed to an enriching ethnic variety – tend to show that the concept of whiteness went from signalling superiority and quintessential Australian-ness to indicating narrow-mindedness or racism – again, for educated urban young people. Whiteness seems to be associated in the minds of most of the participants to the negative parts of Australian history while multiculturalism is regarded as the country's redeeming feature: Australia has now become an inclusive, welcoming nation. However, a closer look at the participants' discourses revealed that the comfortable way in which they enjoy multiculturalism may be their prerogative as 'white' Australians. This group of

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Australians went from being superior to being normal. In the process of learning to tolerate others, 'white' Australians have kept their primary position and created – if not a hierarchy – at least a centre which they inhabit, and a periphery where ethnic and Indigenous Australians dwell. This legitimacy as 'true' Australians often remains unnoticed until it is compared to the experience of an Australian whose skin is not quite as fair as theirs.

CHAPTER 4

Constructing Indigeneity: The Rejected Other

4.0 Introducing Indigeneity

Who are Indigenous people? What are the characteristics defining them? Who has the right to call themselves Indigenous? Who controls the definition(s) of Indigeneity? Can settlers eventually become Indigenous people? Are Indigenous people treated as one of the ethnicities composing multicultural societies or is their status recognised as special and unique? These are some of the questions surrounding the concept of Indigeneity today. In order to comprehend how the participants in this study understand Indigeneity and position themselves vis-à-vis their representations of it, it is necessary to try and explain the evolution of the complex relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. It is one which has evolved into a combination of feelings of opposition and ambivalence. This chapter and the following aim at unravelling the many answers to the previous questions.

4.0.1 General Introduction

4.0.1.1 Constructing Representations

Like whiteness, the concept of Indigeneity will be treated here as a construct based on discourses emanating both from Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It is these discourses that accumulate to form the representations the participants in this study have of Indigeneity.

Within this constructionist outlook, Indigeneity is understood as being built as a result of the process of colonisation. The 'Other' was famously conceptualised in 1978 by Edward Said in *Orientalism* in which he argued that the West constructed a distorted, prejudiced and at the same time romanticised discourse of Orientalism which "bore little, if any, relation to the actuality of its putative object, 'the Orient.'"¹ Despite this, Said argued that it did not matter if the content of texts produced by the West strayed from reality:

[S]uch texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.²

Said's concept is in line with the constructionist understanding of the production of knowledge and reality presented in chapter 1. Indeed, the representations of Indigeneity the participants rely on to position themselves result from the influence of several of these discourses, which have gained currency over the years. Beyond representations from the West, in response to colonialism, Indigenous people have also created their own discourses of identity. In the process of creation of discourses about Indigeneity, essential characteristics and stereotypes are developed, feelings of opposition and ambivalence are experienced. These features are constantly both maintained and challenged in a struggle between groups for control over definitions.

¹ YOUNG, Robert J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, London, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 152.

² SAID, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books Editions, 1979, p. 94.

4.0.1.2 Elements of Definition

Defining Indigeneity today is a complex task due to the different meanings it can hold in different countries but also within countries. The question of which characteristics should be retained to delineate the concept is further complicated if one looks at it from an individual point of view (something I will specifically focus on in the third part of this thesis). For this reason, the United Nations has never adopted a single definition of Indigenous peoples but emphasised the right to self-identify as such:

On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group). This preserves for these communities the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference.³

A working definition nevertheless includes common features of Indigenous people around the world such as “occupation of ancestral lands, common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands, culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, lifestyle, etc.), language, other relevant factors.”⁴

In a similar attempt to summarise the main characteristics of Indigenous people, Mary Louise Pratt in *Indigenous Experience Today* provided a counterpart to the list drawn by José R. Martinez Cobo for the United Nations. Whereas the characteristics previously quoted focused on positive specific attributes and rights, Pratt emphasised the effects of colonisation on Indigenous people and defined Indigeneity negatively, as her mention of “the habitual conjugation of the term *Indigenous* with the term *plight*”⁵ shows. Her list starts with the concept of “unsolicited encounter” on which the whole construct of Indigeneity is based. Pratt emphasises the fact that Indigeneity does not pre-exist

³ José R. Martinez Cobo quoted in “Definition of Indigenous peoples”, *Netherlands Centre for Indigenous People* website, 1st November, 2010, accessed on 14 May 2016, <http://indigenouspeoples.nl/indigenous-peoples/definition-indigenous>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ PRATT, Mary Louise, “Afterword: Indigeneity Today” in DE LA CADENA, Marisol, STARN, Orin (eds), *Indigenous Experience Today*, Oxford, New York: Berg, 2007, p. 40.

colonisation. Indeed, the idea of “pioriness” or “ab-originality”⁶ is produced at the moment of the encounter. This is something to keep in mind as I analyse the qualities of Indigenous people: again, whether discourses originate with non-Indigenous or Indigenous people, they are a reaction to the process of colonisation. Indigenous people did not think of themselves as such before the arrival of settlers forced them to examine their status as first inhabitants.

The second criterion Pratt retains is that of “dispossession”, an act which shaped the relationships between colonisers and colonised. Indeed, “the acts of conquest mean that equivalence between encounterer and encounteree is impossible.” The hierarchy created by conquest and reflecting on the hierarchy of human races which underpinned the Western colonial project has shaped and continues to shape the way Indigenous and non-Indigenous people relate to each other, creating divisions and struggles. This is particularly relevant when studying the place of people ‘in-between’ such as the participants in this study, who have inherited the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people generated by conquest, and which has persisted throughout the years.

“Perdurance” is the third criterion chosen by Pratt as a key defining quality of Indigeneity: in spite of being conquered, the concept of Indigeneity only exists because Indigenous people survive the process of colonisation. Again, the separation between settlers and colonised populations is stressed as colonisation “mark[s] off the exploited as a distinct, nonequivalent group.” According to Pratt’s logic, in order to “perdure”, Indigenous people must retain what made them so in the first place: their otherness, their “nonequivalence” to colonisers. The characteristics listed by Martinez Cobo (such as descent, tribal culture etc.) form the basis of the differentiation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

⁶ As John McCorquodale reminded us, “The word Aborigine in its primary etymological sense described the inhabitants of a country Ab-origine that is, from the beginning, and so means the earliest known inhabitants. A secondary meaning refers to the natives found in possession of a country by European colonists.” MCCORQUODALE, John, “The Legal Classification of Race in Australia”, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2, 1986, p 11.

Part II

The refusal to adopt a single definition for Indigeneity and Martinez Cobo's expression "other relevant factors" are attempts at circumventing the issue of deciding on fixed, essential characteristics for Indigeneity which would go against the principle of self-determination previously cited as a fundamental right. Yet the seemingly necessary difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be seen as an already limiting criterion. If Indigenous people only exist in opposition to non-Indigenous people, again, what can we make of the people 'in-between'? How can the necessary evolution and adaptation of Indigenous populations to the process of colonisation be viewed? Particular attention will be paid to these questions in the second part of this thesis which questions the notion of authenticity.

The final criterion Pratt uses is that of the "unpayable debt", "a wrong that (...) can be addressed but never righted." Again, this informs relationships between the descendants of settlers and those of Indigenous people, further widening the gap between the two groups. The demands now made by Indigenous people are sometimes perceived by non-Indigenous people as threats, or can spark feelings of guilt for past actions, thus perpetuating unequal relationships. Relevant to this project is the difficulty for people with Indigenous heritage but sharing in the history of dispossession and in the heritage of guilt (and privilege conferred by the dominant position of settlers) to embrace their Indigenous heritage.

Canadian scholars Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel added two other characteristics to those previously quoted. Sarah Maddison used them in her analysis of the effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous Australians:

[S]ince the arrival of the British, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had to struggle to regain the right to name themselves and reclaim the political identities associated with the hundreds of Indigenous nations that were usurped by the colonial presence. Indigeneity, or 'Indigenusness', has become an identity 'constructed, shaped and lived in the politicised context of contemporary colonialism' marked by both 'oppositional, place-based existence' and an associated consciousness and lived experience of 'struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonisation by foreign peoples'. The

struggle to retain an explicitly Indigenous identity has been crucial to the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.⁷

Alfred and Corn tassel, followed by Maddison, emphasise the importance of the Indigenous struggle against societies they still describe as “colonial”, thus echoing Patrick Wolfe’s statement that invasion is a structure, not an event,⁸ and Cavanagh and Veracini’s statement that “there is no such thing as neo-settler colonialism or post-settler colonialism because settler nationalism is a resilient formation that rarely ends.”⁹ If Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are evolving in environments still designated as colonial, an ongoing opposition and “nonequivalence” between the two groups seems inevitable. Maddison’s comment also emphasises the active part played by Indigenous people in the creation of discourses of identity thus countering previous depictions of Indigenous peoples as passive victims of colonialism. However, the part played by Indigenous people is described as a struggle which must therefore lead to the maintenance of the original dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Thus, Indigeneity is presented as a construct shaped by both settlers and Indigenous people, made of specific but varied attributes setting Indigenous people apart from mainstream societies made up of settlers’ descendants and migrants. During the second half of the twentieth century, the Indigenous peoples’ right to protect and develop these attributes have become more and more recognised as well as the struggles Indigenous people faced and continue to face to assert their “priorsness”.

⁷ ALFRED, Taiaiake, CORNTASSEL, Jeff quoted in MADDISON, SARAH, “Indigenous Identity, ‘Authenticity’ and the Structural Violence of Settler Colonialism”, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2013, p. 289.

⁸ WOLFE, Patrick, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era”, *Social Analysis*, No. 36, October 1994, pp. 93-152.

⁹ CAVANAGH, Edward, VERACINI, Lorenzo, “Editors Statement”, *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2013, p. 1.

4.0.2 Indigeneity in Australia

4.0.2.1 “Aboriginality As a Cultural Construction”

In describing Aboriginality as a cultural construction we are not suggesting that it is inauthentic. It refers to the ways in which Aborigines select from their experience and their cultural heritage to communicate a sense of identity to their young people, to Aborigines of different backgrounds, and to other Australians. European Australians are also engaged in the construction of Aboriginality as ‘experts’, advocates and critics. The media devote considerable space to Aboriginal affairs, constructing Aboriginality for the many European Australians who have no direct experience of Aborigines. Aborigines themselves are exposed to these influences and have come to terms with them in their dialogue with European Australians.¹⁰

In the introduction to *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Jeremy Beckett insists on the fact that the aim of the book is not to lay down criteria to define Aboriginality once and for all. Instead, he is interested in how past representations have “maintained and reproduced the notion of Aboriginality”.¹¹ Beckett also states that there were people living on the Australian continent when British settlers arrived, but that this reality does not contradict the idea of Indigeneity as a constructed concept. According to Beckett, evidence of this, for example, is the fact that throughout history, some descendants of Indigenous people have decided not to identify as such. Therefore, Indigeneity is defined as a human construct rather than purely as a biological one. This quote clarifies once again that describing Indigeneity as a construct does not make it any less real (or ‘authentic’) to the people who call themselves Indigenous.

Bain Attwood, another historian adopting a constructionist approach writes that

[T]he aboriginal peoples who lived in this continent for 40 000 years or more before the coming of Europeans in 1788 were not the homogeneous group implied by the name ‘Aborigines’; rather they were named and have named themselves ‘Aborigines’, ‘blacks’, ‘kooris’, or ‘Murris’ etc. only in the context of

¹⁰ BECKETT, Jeremy, “Introduction”, in BECKETT, JEREMY (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, p. 1 and p. 7.

¹¹*Ibid.*

colonisation and of their ensuing relationship with Europeans – who conversely, came to be ‘Australians’.¹²

Attwood’s quote complements Beckett’s as he also interprets Indigeneity as being built in reaction to colonisation: Attwood emphasises the idea that the process of differentiation Indigenous people have been setting up is an answer to the colonial will to regroup all Indigenous people under the single label “Indigenous” or “Aboriginal”. But this quote also shows that, in the same way that the existence of Indigeneity is dependent on colonialism, Australian-ness is also a concept which was built partly in relation to Indigeneity. In spite of the opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people which prevails in many discourses, both groups have informed and continue to inform each other’s definitions. This idea was expressed by Marcia Langton when she commented on the conditions of creation of the concept of Aboriginality: “‘Aboriginality’ (...) is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation, and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create Aboriginalities.”¹³

4.0.2.2 An Obsession with Definition, a Multiplicity of Voices

While Indigenous people were, and still often are, homogenised as ‘Aborigines’ by other Australians, successive governments attempted to classify Indigenous people by measuring their degree of Indigenous blood, or by comparing the colour or their skins, thus creating different divisions from those previously used by Indigenous groups. Several authors¹⁴ have commented on the obsessive non-Indigenous need to delineate Indigeneity over the

¹² ATTWOOD, Bain, *The Making of the Aborigines*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1989.

¹³ LANGTON, Marcia, “Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...”: *An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, Woolloomooloo, NSW: Australian Film Commission, 1993, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ For example: (talking about 19th century Australia) REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin Books, chapter 6.

PARADIES, Yin C., “Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity”, *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 4, December 2006, p. 355.

ANDERSON, Ian, “I, the ‘Hybrid’ Aborigine: Film and Representation”, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 1, 1997, p. 4.

TONKINSON, Myrna, “Is It in the Blood? Australian Aboriginal Identity” in, LINNEKIN, Jocelyn, POYER, Lin (eds), *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, p. 191.

years. As Indigenous academic Michael Dodson wrote: "Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling Aborigines and Aboriginality."¹⁵ John McCorquodale's analysis of 700 pieces of legislation dealing with Indigenous people or matters revealed that no less than "67 identifiable classifications, descriptions or definitions have been used from the time of European settlement to the present."¹⁶ Following McCorquodale, Beckett thus concluded his introduction to *Past and Present*:

Instead of an authorised version of Aboriginality in Australia, there has been a medley of voices, black and white, official and unofficial, national and local, scientific and journalistic, religious and secular, interested and disinterested, all offering or contesting particular constructions of Aboriginality. It is likely to remain this way.¹⁷

Whereas McCorquodale specifically focused on the role of the state in defining Indigeneity, Beckett emphasises the diversity of voices responsible for the definitions of Indigeneity. However, both authors stress the great number of definitions of Indigenous identity accumulated over the years, and the confusion resulting from this.

The reasons non-Indigenous people felt the need to define Indigeneity have varied over time – from blatant racial exclusion at the time of the White Australia policy, to the distribution of benefits reserved for Indigenous Australians today. However, after years of imposed governmental definitions and muffled Indigenous voices, the question of which criteria can be considered legitimate is one which is still constantly asked in today's

¹⁵ DODSON, Michael, "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality", in GROSSMAN, Michele (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2003, p. 27.

¹⁶ MCCORQUODALE, John, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ BECKETT, Jeremy, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Australia, and this despite the adoption in 1981 of an official definition¹⁸ approved of by many Indigenous people.¹⁹

Starting in the 1960s, with the civil rights movement and the rise of new histories²⁰ debunking the representation of passive Indigenous people in the face of colonisation, academics, among others, have debated the issue of who has the right to define Indigeneity.²¹ The imbalance of non-Indigenous over Indigenous representations of Indigeneity in the past and in the present has been noticed by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous commentators.²² In spite of this, Bronwyn Carlson, who thoroughly documented the “discursive history of the practices through which Aboriginal identities have been and still are produced”, concludes her presentation thus: “Very affirming is the significant role Aboriginal people have played in shaping the discourse, not just through activism but also through intimate relations developed between Aboriginal people and others in the course of research, industry, and administration.”²³ She also makes reference to the growing number of Indigenous authors who, in writing their personal stories,

¹⁸ “An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives.” This definition is the most used in Australia in administration, court judgements or legislation. Another still exists: ‘A person who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia’, also used in legislation. GARDINER-GARDEN, John, “Defining Aboriginality in Australia”, Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, *Current Issues Brief* No. 10, 2002-2003, pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁹ “This definition is preferred by the vast majority of Aboriginal people over the racial definitions of the assimilation era.”

LANGTON, Marcia, “*Well, I Heard It on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁰ See 2.1.5.7.

²¹ For example, Carolyn D’Cruz evoked “the problem of speaking on behalf of, and about others; the claim that knowledge can be reduced to a subject’s experience; and the claim that knowledge can be legitimated with recourse to the mere marker of an identity are often left undifferentiated when debating the matter of representation within discourses of identity politics.” She used David Hollinsworth’s 1992 article in *Oceania*, “Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia”, to show how commentators (Bain ATTWOOD, Jeremy BECKETT, Gillian COWLISHAW, Andrew LATTAS and Mudrooroo NYOONGAH) argued about their legitimacy or not to define Aboriginality by always disclosing markers of identity to position themselves: “It seems that if the investigating subject’s identity coincides with the identity of the subject in question, then the perspective from which one speaks is considered more legitimate.”

D’CRUZ, Carolyn, ““What Matter Who’s Speaking?”, Authenticity and Identity in Discourses of Aboriginality in Australia”, *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, summer 2001.

²² TAYLOR, Russel, “About Aboriginality: Questions for the Uninitiated”, *Senri Ethnological Studies* 56, 2001, p. 136.

²³ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Doctoral thesis, Sydney: The University of New South Wales, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 2011, p. 144.

influence the perception of Indigeneity.²⁴ Sally Morgan's *My Place*,²⁵ widely read in Australian schools, is an example of this.

The participants' discourses, as I will show in this thesis, are evidence of a subtler understanding of the complexity of Indigeneity among younger and educated generations of Australians. However, a lot of the representations circulating in Australian society and visible in the participants' discourses can still be traced back to non-Indigenous definitions of Indigeneity. Therefore, not only is it important to ask what the voices say but also where they come from. The latter question is tied to the notion of power: whose voices are 'louder' have more control over the definition of Indigeneity.

4.0.2.3 The Predominant Non-Indigenous Representations

From the study of historical definitions of Indigeneity previously mentioned, McCorquodale concludes that

The focus of legislative attention was that part of humanity having the singular misfortune to be born other-than-white. Australian legislation was predicated on a basis of white superiority, and white fear. (...) The legislation was variable, inconsistent or arbitrary in its formulation and implementation. But it was consistent in its identification and choice of subject. The modern expectation of and demand for human rights had no place in a fledgling democracy (...) which placed a higher faith in being white than in being democratic.²⁶

McCorquodale thus underlines the fact that many of the discourses about Indigeneity were constructed in relation to whiteness. When these were produced by non-Indigenous governments out of fear for racial contamination or following a belief in Indigenous

²⁴ In the academic world, since the 1990s, several Indigenous scholars have written about Indigenous identity. See for example:

BOLADERAS, Jean, *It's easier to be black if you're black: Issues of Aboriginality for fair-complexioned Nyungar people*, Master Thesis, Curtin University of Technology, 2002.

BOLT, Reuben, *Urban Aboriginal Identity Construction in Australia: An Aboriginal perspective utilising multi-method qualitative analysis*, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2009.

²⁵ MORGAN, Sally, *My Place*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ MCCORQUODALE, John, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 24.

people's inferiority – as McCorquodale writes – whiteness was the norm to which Indigenous people were compared and found wanting.

Indigenous people had to produce definitions of themselves in response to non-Indigenous classifications. When discourses were produced by Indigenous people, the emphasis was at times placed on specific characteristics distinguishing Indigenous culture from Western culture, for example, Indigenous people's special relationship to the Australian land, or values or visions of the world often opposed to those of non-Indigenous Australia. At other times, they focused on the effects of colonisation, and on a common history of dispossession and discrimination. Either way, as explained, since the concept of Indigeneity as I understand it in this research did not pre-exist colonisation, non-Indigenous culture became a necessary counterpart to Indigenous people's definitions of themselves. It is therefore difficult for Indigenous people to produce definitions which are free of the influence of non-Indigenous discourses about Indigeneity. Making it even more difficult is the fact that Indigenous people form 3 percent of the Australian population and still lack visibility and representation in society. This tends to shift the balance of power in favour of non-Indigenous representations. This was visible in the participants' discourses.

Indeed, for the most part, the participants in this study did not grow up influenced by discourses produced by Indigenous people, but rather by non-Indigenous Australian discourses about them. The choice I make to analyse the non-Indigenous influence in constructing the concept of Indigeneity in chapter 4 and chapter 5 – as well as more generally in this thesis – is partly due to the significant weight of non-Indigenous discourses in the creation of Indigeneity, but also to the fact that these discourses are the ones which, for a long time, have prevailed for most participants, and which still continue to influence many of them. A more complex understanding of the concept of Indigeneity often only came with adulthood and a university education. While this choice has been made according to the participants' positioning, Indigenous people's agency in constructing their identities has not been and is not underestimated.

As was visible in the participants' discourses, Langton's 1993 statement about relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in today's Australia remains

true today: “The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between ‘white’ Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists.”²⁷ These are stories of oppositions and ambivalences: Indigenous people have been simultaneously rejected and desired by non-Indigenous Australians.

Having provided a chronology of the evolution of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in chapter 2, in the following chapters, I will adopt a looser chronology. This is because I want to concentrate on the thematic continuity of some influential discourses about Indigeneity. I believe that the oppositions and ambivalences which have characterised the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be found across different periods, although in different shapes.

In her analysis of the evolution of Indigenous identity, Deirdre Jordan identifies three phases of history which I have roughly adopted. These are the remote past, which corresponds to early ‘white’ contact and which she associates with “positive Aboriginal credentials”, the past-of-the-middle-range, which covers the period of colonisation “characterized”, Jordan writes, “by oppression on the part of mainstream society, and by the creation of a negative identity and negative stereotypes”, and finally the recent past, that is to say the post-referendum and post-war era described as the time for “self-determination, self-management (...) and the construction by Aboriginal people of a positive Aboriginal identity.”²⁸

Although I agree that the past contains positive – although sometimes romanticised – representations of Indigeneity which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people adhere to,²⁹ I believe that the “negative stereotypes found today in sedimented knowledge (i.e., ‘what everyone knows about Aborigines’)” can also be traced back to the opposition

²⁷ LANGTON, Marcia, *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...”: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁸ JORDAN, Deirdre F., “Aboriginal Identity: Uses of the Past, Problems for the Future?” in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁹ I will come back to the important role of the past in chapter 7.

between representations of the Indigenous savage and the civilised 'white' man, which took root even before the arrival of British settlers.

As far as the recent past is concerned, I will study it less from the point of view of Indigenous self-determination (since most of the participants do not strongly identify as Indigenous) than from the angle of the policy of multiculturalism, an important part of the definition of Australian identity for the participants, which, therefore, they use to analyse the place of Indigeneity in Australian society. I would also like to qualify Jordan's positive description of the recent past: the analysis of the participants' visions of Indigeneity today leads me to believe that, from the perspective of many Australians evolving in non-Indigenous society, Indigeneity is still often perceived in negative terms, while claims for self-determination can be regarded with fear or scorn.

In order to analyse the ambivalent feelings I believe delineate the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship, I will first look at how Indigenous people have been and continue to be constructed as the "rejected Other", before turning to the positive counterpart, the "desired Other".

4.1 Savage or Civilised: Historical Discourses

There are several reasons why (...) the discourse which emerged in the Old World about the Rest could not be innocent. First, Europe brought its own cultural categories, languages, images, and ideas to the New World in order to describe and represent it. It tried to fit the New World into existing conceptual frameworks, classifying it according to its own norms, and absorbing it into western traditions of representation. (...) Secondly, Europe had certain definite purposes, aims, objectives, motives, interests and strategies[.] (...) Finally, the discourse (...) did not represent an encounter between equals. The Europeans had outsailed, outshot, and outwitted peoples who had no wish to be "explored", no need to be "discovered", and no desire to be "exploited". The Europeans

stood vis-à-vis the Others, in position of dominant power. This influenced what they saw and how they saw it, as well as what they did not see.³⁰

Drawing on the example of the discourse built by the West about what he called “the Rest” – populations colonised by Europeans – Stuart Hall wished to illustrate the links between discourse, knowledge and power theorised by Michel Foucault. Thus, he explains that “the knowledge which a discourse produces constitutes a kind of power, exercised over those who are “known””. The subjects of these discourses become subjected to the producers of knowledge as they “also have the power to *make it true* – i.e. to enforce its validity.”³¹ Non-Indigenous Australians, from colonisation to the present, have built discourses about Indigeneity, thus imposing on them their perceptions, and constructing Indigenous people’s identities in their absence. For a long time – and to a certain extent still today – these discourses were informed by racial divisions.

Even before the continent was colonised, or during the first years of colonisation, the natives of Australia had already been described as ‘lower’ human beings: “the miserablest people in the world; (...) they differ but little from brutes. (...) They have no houses, but lie in the open air without any covering”³² (explorer William Dampier wrote in 1697); “the wretched natives of many of those dreary districts seem less elevated above the inferior animals than in any other part of the known world”³³ (zoologist George Shaw in 1793).

The Indigenous people’s way of life, and specifically the absence of cultivation of the land reinforced this representation of Indigenous people in the minds of British settlers. The British who landed on the Australian continent in 1788 came with the objective of settling it. James Cook had claimed it for the Crown in 1770 as the continent was regarded as a *Terra Nullius*. It is not that the British did not see Indigenous people living there, but

³⁰ HALL, Stuart, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” in GIEBEN, Bram, HALL, Stuart (eds), *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies, an Introduction, Book 1*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

³² DAMPIER, William, quoted by THOMPSON, Stephen for the website of the *Migration Heritage Centre, NSW*, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime/1699-william-dampier-mariners-compass/>, accessed on 19 May 2016.

³³ SHAW, George, quoted in, SMITH, Bernard, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, New haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 171.

that their understanding of land ownership made them conclude that the local Indigenous people did not 'own' their land in the Western sense of the word, something which therefore justified its taking.

As Hall wrote, the settlers arrived with their own categories and representations, among which was the conviction of the superiority of the 'white' race over others since the concept of hierarchies between races was developing in Europe. Martine Piquet wrote about the important cultural and racial baggage that the settlers brought with them to Australia. She argues it was comprised of a complex mix of political, religious, economic and social traditions. Added to these was the fear associated with settling in a foreign, faraway and inhospitable land.³⁴ In short, the settlers, from their dominant position, were not well prepared to understand the Indigenous peoples' different worldview, and specifically the way they related to their land, which was one of the criteria leading to Indigenous people being categorised as 'savages'. As Hall explained, the belief in their superiority influenced "what they did not see".

Piquet explained the deep religious and philosophical logic of the settlers' conception of land ownership and its relationship to Christianity by reminding us of the injunction made by God to Man in the Genesis: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion (...) over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."³⁵ This divine order to master the earth was echoed by philosopher John Locke's conception of private property: "Property in land [results] from the mixing of one's labor with it to render it a more efficient provider of wealth than it would have been if left in its natural state."³⁶ The Indigenous people the settlers met were hunters and gatherers, moving across the land according to seasons in order to find the food they needed.³⁷ Consequently, the British did not find any of the agricultural systems or delimitations of land parcels they considered evidence of land ownership. According to Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, "it

³⁴ PIQUET, Martine, *Australie plurielle*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, p. 17.

³⁵ "Genesis 1:28", *King James Bible, BibleHub*, <http://biblehub.com/genesis/1-28.htm>, accessed on 18 May 2016.

³⁶ WOLFE, Patrick (paraphrasing John Locke), "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3, June 2001, p. 869.

³⁷ PIQUET, Martine, *Australie plurielle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

was the absence of cultivation among the Australian Aborigines which Europeans remarked upon repeatedly. (...) For the colonists, therefore, and as Cook – as well as [others] – stated explicitly, the country was ‘in a Pure State of Nature’, ‘the Industry of Man’ having had ‘nothing to do with any part of it’.”³⁸

Settlers also failed to understand the important spiritual relationship Indigenous people have with their land. They respect it rather than “subdue” it because it is the land their ancestors lived on and where they believe their spirits have remained. The special relationship Indigenous people have with their land is now one of the better-known aspects about Indigenous culture in Australia. It was mentioned by most participants in this study. It is also now known that Indigenous people had in fact developed a system of land management the value of which is now recognised. Vanessa told me that this is the aspect of Indigenous culture which she finds the most fascinating.

Vanessa *The simplicity, the terrible way it was conveyed to me and to my classmates. I’ve learnt a lot since then. I didn’t realise the complexity of Indigenous cultures. Because it’s often just seen as a...you know, very undeveloped culture. It’s not like Europe where they built amazing structures and that kind of things. That’s what a lot of people compare it to. (...)*

My real thing was when I learnt about the conservation. I think that’s the most complex culture of conservation, and giving people responsibilities, and regenerating the land. I think that’s probably their biggest amazing historic kind of thing. (...) [I]t’s untouched by any other civilization, that kind of maintenance of the land (...) – making sure that you had someone responsible for every kind of creature, and you know, type of land, how to regenerate it and passing that knowledge. I think it’s better than building structures.

Vanessa’s quote shows that, although they are aware of the special link between Indigenous people and their land, many non-Indigenous Australians still find it difficult to grasp how different it is to the Western perception of land. This is, as Vanessa said, echoing Hall’s quote, because it is approached from a non-Indigenous perspective, the way settlers

³⁸ WILLIAMS, G., FROST, M., quoted in, ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, “‘The Miserablest People in the World’: Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine”, *Institute for Culture and Society Pre-Print Journal Articles*, 2007, p. 7.
http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/156754/Anderson_and_Perrin_TheMiserablestPeople_ICSPre-Print_Final.pdf, accessed on 19 May 2016.

did when they first arrived. This surface knowledge of Indigenous culture and the difficulty in truly engaging with Indigeneity is recurrent in non-Indigenous Australia. This is reflected here in the teaching Vanessa received at school, which she felt lacked in complexity.

Vanessa suggests that without understanding the logic behind the Indigenous way of treating the land, it was easy to regard Indigenous people as inferior to Europeans, as less civilised. The rejection of Indigenous people at the time of colonisation was based on a discourse informed by a strong opposition between civilised settlers and savage Indigenous people. Philippa Levine explained how the condition of the savage was a construct of Europeans:

The savage, the condition of savagery, was a cipher, allowing comparison and justification, and establishing a set of criteria for modernity and civilization. The savage (...) was an imaginary but nonetheless palpable entity whose purpose was to bear the weight of discussion about those fundamentally eugenic topics: fitness and capacity for civilization.³⁹

Levine clearly expresses the link between savage and civilised, Indigenous and settler in this discourse: the figure of the savage Indigenous person was constructed to complement that of the superior 'white' settler. This distinction justified the invasion and conquest of Australia by British settlers.

David Hollinsworth quoted Charles Dunford Rowley's *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* to explain how Europeans used Social Darwinism – an extension to human beings of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and of the survival of the fittest – to justify violence:

[Social Darwinism] could be used to justify the worst offences. (...) Murder could be romanticised and abstracted; and depopulation by disease and other factors could be seen as the convenient operation of both immutable law and divine

³⁹ LEVINE, Philippa, "Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics", in BASHFORD, Alison, LEVINE, Philippa, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 46.

providence. This poor race would make way for the fine flower of British civilisation.⁴⁰

Following the first years after the arrival of the British, marked by violent confrontations between Indigenous people and British settlers, the process of colonisation was firmly established and the debate around the position of Indigenous people in the hierarchy of humanity continued. Drawing on the ideas that circulated in the racial discourse, 'white' Australians began to think that "Australians Aborigines (...) [were] descending to the grave."⁴¹ This fate was applied to those Indigenous people who were called "full-blood" and deemed unable to adapt to 'white' society.

Anderson and Perrin argued that the discussion around the notions of savagery and civilisation, when applied to Indigenous Australians, went further than the simple difference in degrees of evolution supported by monogenesist theories of race (following the Bible, there is only one human race and "racial differences [are] the product of social circumstances and geographical diversity"⁴²). The two authors believe that it is the study of these particular Indigenous people which brought about a new, polygenesist understanding of race across the world.

[O]ur central argument is that the non-cultivating Aborigine precipitated a crisis in eighteenth century ideas about what it means to be human. The Aborigines' utter lack of development posed a fundamental challenge to the assumption of human unity. And, insofar as the Aborigine could not be assimilated to the conception of race as a subdivision, or mere variety, of the human, the elaboration of polygenism in the mid-nineteenth century can be understood as a reaction to this crisis: as an attempt to account for the ontologically inexplicable difference of the Australian Aborigine. (...) Based on observations of the uniqueness of Australian flora and fauna, initial suspicions that the entire continent must have been the product of a separate creation were seemingly confirmed by the unimproved condition of the Australian Aborigines, and the ensuing problem of their ethnological categorisation. (...) [I]t was in the context of successively failed attempts to 'civilise' them that this initial perplexity turned

⁴⁰ ROWLEY, Charles, quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, Melbourne, Victoria: Thomson Social Science Press, 3rd edition, 2006, p. 80.

⁴¹ BONWICK, James, quoted in, ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, "'The Miserablest People in the World': Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine", *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴² REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book

into an outright crisis; introducing speculation not only about the Aborigines' inclination, but about their very capacity, for improvement.⁴³

The theory of the inevitable demise of the 'full-blood' remained prevalent until the middle of the twentieth century. However, it soon became clear that extinction was not to be the fate of the growing 'half-caste' population. Anderson and Perrin actually reported that it was believed that 'half-castes' multiplied because of their 'white' blood which did not condemn them to the fate of 'pure' Indigenous people.⁴⁴ As both authors write, another effect of the comparison between what were seen as superior 'white' ways and the primitive Indigenous state of development was that the Anglo-Australians felt that it was their responsibility to try and civilise Indigenous people. The creation of missions⁴⁵, and the removal of fair-skinned children to be raised 'white' are two examples of such civilising attempts. Today still, it is not uncommon to hear people express the idea that the treatments inflicted on Indigenous people were for their own good (underlying this is the notion that they could benefit from the Western more advanced way of life). For example, the scope of the policy which allowed the removal of fair-skinned Indigenous children from their families – these children became known as the Stolen Generations – is still debated today. In spite of evidence provided in particular by the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report that removals were based on racial assumptions⁴⁶, *Herald Sun* journalist Andrew Bolt still claimed recently that the children were only removed when their welfare was questioned

⁴³ ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, "The Miserablest People in the World': Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine", *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ See, for example, ATTWOOD, Bain, *The Making of the Aborigines*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ The Colonial Secretary of NSW complained in 1912 that "it is very difficult to prove neglect; if the aboriginal child happens to be decently clad or apparently looked after, it is very difficult to show that the half-caste or aboriginal child is actually in a neglected condition, and therefore it is impossible to succeed in the court". The 1915 NSW Aborigines Protection Amending Act removed the need for the board taking children to prove the necessity to do so in court. The report then quotes Peter Read 1981's *The Stolen Generations*: "No court hearings were necessary; the manager of an Aboriginal station, or a policeman on a reserve or in a town might simply order them removed. The racial intention was obvious enough for all prepared to see, and some managers cut a long story short when they came to that part of the committal notice, 'Reason for Board taking control of the child'. They simply wrote, 'For being Aboriginal'."

Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Australian government website, 1997, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf, accessed on 19 May 2016.

by the authorities.⁴⁷ Indeed, linked to the perceived lesser degree of development of Indigenous people was the idea that they were actually not much more developed than children.

In an analysis of children's books about Indigenous people across time, Clare Bradford notices discourses showing Indigenous people "as fixed in a permanent state of childhood, infants to the colonisers' adults." For example, in *A Mother's Offering to her Children* written in 1841 by Charlotte Barton, Bradford remarks that Indigenous people are presented as incapable of taking care of their children. Consequently, she states that one should derive from this that "if the Indigenous cannot care for helpless children, so the argument goes, neither are they suitable custodians of the land, which must therefore come under the benign rule of the colonists."⁴⁸ As Bradford shows, perceiving Indigenous people as frozen in a child-state, "only partially developed, and [incapable of] be[ing] instructed beyond a certain point"⁴⁹ strengthened 'white' Australians' belief not only in their superiority and in their rejection of Indigenous people as 'Others', but also in their duty to assist their passing away. Again, it was believed that 'full-blood' Indigenous people, in the face of colonialism and following Social Darwinist theories, would die out while the 'mixed-race' Indigenous population would become assimilated into 'white' society. Once again, the fate of Indigenous people was tied to their lack of development. Because they were less civilised, they were doomed to extinction. As Bradford's analysis of a second children's book dated from 1951 shows, at the time, Indigenous people "belong[ed] to the past, to a time before progress, having nothing to do with the "Australia" of modernity."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ BOLT, Andrew, "Where Are the "Stolen Children", Robert?", *Andrew Bolt blog, Herald Sun website*, 29 May 2013,

http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/where_are_the_stolen_children_robert/, accessed on 18 May 2016, in response to:

MANNE, Robert, "'Name 10': the Journalism of Andrew Bolt", *The Drum, ABC website*, 18 October 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-10-18/manne-name-10-a-journey-through-the-journalism-of-andrew-bolt/3577362>, accessed on 18 May 2016.

⁴⁸ BRADFORD, Clare, "Representing Indigeneity: Aborigines and Australian Children's Literature Then and Now", *Ariel: A review of International English Literature*, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1997, pp. 91 and 94.

⁴⁹ WOODS, J.D. quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, *op. cit.*, pp. XXXVII-XXXVIII.

⁵⁰ BRADFORD, Clare, "Representing Indigeneity: Aborigines and Australian Children's Literature Then and Now", *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Henry Reynolds mentions the ambivalent feelings experienced by 'white' Australians towards 'dying full-bloods' at the turn of the century:

Sympathy tinged with guilt was a common prescription. In the parliaments, members spoke of the full-bloods as they would of an acquaintance with a mortal illness. There was a sense of a debt owing, a need to do something to ease the passing, although it rarely found expression in significant financial commitment even to basic welfare.⁵¹

From the protection to the assimilation eras, State and government policies to manage Indigenous people were steeped in paternalism. Whether or not the intentions behind these policies were good, they were often adopted with the point of view that Indigenous people could not take care of themselves. This proved as true for the child removal policy for which the official reason was 'welfare concerns', as for the policy of assimilation, the main tenet of which was that Indigenous people could only live well if they joined the more developed non-Indigenous mainstream society. It also applies to the more recent Northern Territory National Emergency Response⁵² which, like an echo of Barton's comment on Indigenous people's incapacity to raise children, was designed to save "little children".⁵³

With the rise of the new histories in the 1980s⁵⁴ emphasising the Indigenous point of view on colonisation, the past and enduring violence Indigenous people were subjected to was exposed. However, it was also contested both by historians⁵⁵ and politicians, and most famously by then Prime Minister John Howard. Moreover, a more balanced view of the Australian colonial history did not make negative discourses about Indigenous people disappear within non-Indigenous Australian society.

⁵¹ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book

⁵² See 2.1.5.9.

⁵³ The Northern Territory intervention was brought about after the publication in 2007 of a report by the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, commissioned by the government of the Northern Territory and entitled "Little Children Are Sacred".

⁵⁴ Written by Henry Reynolds, Lyndall Ryan or Ann McGrath.

⁵⁵ Keith Windshuttle contested the level of violence during the frontier wars in his book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, and Geoffrey Blainey coined the phrase "Black armband view of history" to criticise the excess of attention he felt was given to a negative view of Australian history in which the past was mostly denigrated. See 2.1.5.7.

There is a lasting influence of the representations of Indigenous people as inferior, less civilised, lazy and unable to adapt to 'white' Australian society. These elements are still part of the discourses about Indigeneity in today's Australia. Myrna and Robert Tonkinson, echoing Langton's statement about non-Indigenous Australians' relationship to past discourses,⁵⁶ remarked in 1994 that

"the Hobbesian obverse of Rousseau's view" which prevailed in Australia "equated black skin with savagery, and later treachery, and other undesirable traits diametrically opposed to their idealised view of themselves (white, civilised). So Aborigines became objects of a mixture of fear, scorn and pity – emotions that remain palpably present in the way many white Australians talk about Aboriginal people today."⁵⁷

Many of the participants mentioned the negative representations of Indigenous people they grew up with. Racist jokes and comments were common at school and sometimes within the family.

Michelle *No, nothing good about it. (...) It was more about the fact that they were all alcoholics who spend all their time down the river drinking, fighting, waiting for their next pension cheque so they could go out and buy more alcohol, etc. etc.*

Casey *At school it was always like, "dirty abos, boongs, petrol sniffers, drugs this, that, dole bludgers". This is the type of language, the terminology that other students would use.*

Casey first became interested in activism when he tried to learn more about the Brisbane Musgrave Park Sovereign Aboriginal Embassy⁵⁸ which had led to confrontations between Indigenous people there and the police.

And then I ended up going up to Brisbane, because I'd seen all this stuff on the news that had happened. So there were all those police going to Musgrave Park,

⁵⁶ See note 27.

⁵⁷ TONKINSON, Myrna and Robert, "Embracing Difference: Australia's Changing Self-Image", *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ In March 2012, the Brisbane Sovereign Embassy was set up in Musgrave Park in south Brisbane. It is one of seven Indigenous embassies in Australia created to "raise awareness and discussion of Aboriginal sovereignty, provide sanctuary for Aboriginal people, and a place for cultural, spiritual and ceremonial activity;"

"Sovereign Embassy", *Brisbane Blacks* website, <http://brisbaneblacks.com/sovereign-embassy/>, accessed on 19 May 2016.

down the road. [The] police pretty much invaded Musgrave Park when the Tent Embassy was there, and they went and arrested everyone, and I heard from someone...I was like, "What's it all about?" and they said, "It's just a bunch of Aboriginal people, protesting in a park so they can drink there." And I was like, "What?!" (laughing)

Casey, who, at the time of the interview, worked for an Indigenous radio programme called *Smashing the Myths* (such as “All Aboriginal people are drunks”) was often angry at what he called the “racist, ignorant, arrogant” way non-Indigenous people treat Indigenous people and culture. The person from whom he asked information in the previous quote reacted in the same way as the settlers who first arrived and tried to comprehend the way Indigenous people lived through European lenses. What the person in Casey’s story saw was disturbance and alcohol, things which are already associated with Indigeneity in discourses relayed by the media⁵⁹ and by a part of the general population. Alcohol issues within Indigenous populations are a reality,⁶⁰ often witnessed by non-Indigenous Australians. Although drinking is enjoyed by a lot of Australians and often not regarded as an issue within non-Indigenous Australian society, the public display of Indigenous people’s drunkenness is. It seems as if drunkenness, when applied to Indigenous people, is linked to their inability to be productive in society, to adapt and overcome past violence, while this does not seem not to be as true when applied to non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous drunkenness is classified as an uncivilised behaviour, which perpetuates the representation of Indigenous people as uncivilised themselves. As Adam said, this behaviour clashes with what he called the “good white citizens’ model” and therefore creates unease or rejection.

Adam *One of the things that you’re always trying to avoid...One of the things that is a*

⁵⁹ “There [is] a tendency in the Australian media for the ‘perpetuation and promotion of negative and racial stereotypes, a tendency towards conflictual and sensationalist reporting on race issues, and an insensitivity towards, and often ignorance of, minority cultures.”

BULLIMORE, Kevin (quoting the 1991 *National Inquiry into Racist Violence*), “Media Dreaming: Representation of Aboriginality in Modern Australian Media”, *Asia pacific Media Educator*, Issue 6, Article 7, 1999, p. 73.

⁶⁰ “Indigenous Australians between the ages of 35 and 54 are up to eight times more likely to die than their peers, with alcohol abuse the main culprit, South Australian research has shown.”

DAVEY, Melissa, “Alcohol Abuse Behind High Rates of Early Death Among Indigenous, Study Finds”, *The Guardian*, 20 February 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/20/alcohol-abuse-behind-high-rates-of-early-death-among-indigenous-study-finds>, accessed on 19 May 2016.

struggle about saying you're Aboriginal is this idea of Aborigines being drunks.

Delphine So how did you personally deal with this?

Adam *With great difficulty because unfortunately my family didn't give the greatest example. That was always the question that I found the hardest to deal with to be honest, because my family weren't like that. My [immediate] family were good white citizens, according to that model – not saying that that's true, but according to that model – I did see Aboriginal people drunk in the street; I did see my uncles and aunties drunk all the time; I did see these things. So, it's hard.*

Josh *I don't really sympathise with racists – but you can see why people don't...like Indigenous people. And it's not because they're Indigenous; it's because the Indigenous people they deal with just happen to be...unproductive in society, and often drunk. (...) But then, I know plenty of regular and hardworking Indigenous people.*

The reality of drinking within Indigenous communities is a disturbing one for non-Indigenous Australians for whom such behaviour is not acceptable publicly. However, most of the time, little thought is given to the reasons behind such behaviours, be they linked to the negative effects of ongoing colonisation, or to different cultural habits. Because Josh does not want to reduce Indigeneity to drunkenness, he finds a way out by comparing these Indigenous people who do not act as society expects them to, to “regular and hardworking Indigenous people”. In so doing, he analyses the situation with a Western outlook – according to which a “regular” person is someone who works and does not display public inebriety – which may not be that of an Indigenous person. Having said this, some Indigenous people would probably agree that to be productive in society is something they value and that Indigenous people should try to move away from reproducing self-destructing behaviours.⁶¹ This is what Josh showed by giving the example of an Indigenous

⁶¹ For example, Rachel Perkins who directed the reality TV documentary *First Contact* said: “[W]ell, we have this historical context (...) of colonisation and, of course, that has put us at the bottom of the social scale because we have lost our economies of land, we have lost our lifestyle, racism has limited our employment and education opportunities. We know all of that. So that is the past and now we need to look to our future and we think, “How can we change that?” There is a dialogue that is going on in black Australia about do we look at the symptoms of that do we look at the current social situation and class and think about... and how we can change it. (...) [A]t a point we must break the cycle and we must think about, “OK, you know,” – as other people have said, the only person who's gonna change your life is the person who you look in that mirror every day. (...) But people come from very difficult circumstances, (...) so it's very hard to change your situation. But, personal responsibility is a thing that we need to embrace. It's part of self-determination.”

man who decried this kind of behaviour: “But *you’re* black!” “Yeah, I am black, but I’m not a black cunt. See, there’s black cunts, and white cunts. And then there’s black people, and white people. And the cunts don’t work and they just drink.”

Similarly, while Adam was told by his mother who was a social worker that “[Aboriginal people] drink in public because they don’t see [it] as a problem”, and that “when we look at the stats, there are actually less Aboriginal people who are drunk than white people”, he could not help feel ill-at-ease with members of his family behaving in a way which did not agree with his ‘white’ upbringing. Again, as Ghassan Hage wrote,⁶² it is easy not to notice the way we, in Western societies, understand the world from a Western point of view, emitting judgements while sometimes overlooking other possible interpretations.

In the following quote, Adina summarised the difficulty many ‘white’ Australians have with understanding some Indigenous people’s refusal to adopt what is seen as the ‘mainstream’ Australian way of life. Her use of the phrase “normal citizens” echoes Josh’s “regular Indigenous people” and confirms the idea that Indigenous people, when they do not conform to the rules of ‘white’ society, are regarded as abnormal, and are still rejected as Others.

Adina *There’s a lot of people who just think if they move to the city where there would be jobs, did the nice thing, went to the school, went to university, and became all prominent as normal citizens, and did not live in paper shacks in the back of who the hell cares, then they’d be more accepted within the community, and wouldn’t have a lot of the problems that we do. But their wanting to establish their own communities is where the problem is.*

Drunkenness was often part of the discourses about Indigenous people the participants grew up with. Other negative characterisations were “petrol sniffer”, “dole bludger”, “on welfare, taking from the government and wasting it on the alcohol”, “making a lot of

PERKINS, Rachel, *Insight, First Contact*, 20 November 2014, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/tvepisode/first-contact>, accessed on 28 May 2016.

⁶² HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 17.

trouble". Most participants were familiar with negative discourses about Indigenous people and quick to point out what they had heard and still hear.

In the 2014 SBS reality television documentary *First Contact*, among the six non-Indigenous participants taken on a journey to discover different facets of Indigenous people's lives in today's Australia, several started with strong prejudice, repeating the discourses I have described: "God gave black people rhythm and soul and they can all dance; they can all sing, but when it comes to brains, you know, white people have a better gene, you know, a better make-up. If you're out there and looking at fucking kangaroos jumping past, and snakes and goannas and build a fire, how much more can you learn?"⁶³ Although Indigenous people may no longer be described as "uncivilised", the recurring description of them as lazy, as drunks who are unable to adapt to life in 'mainstream' Australian society suggests that the old opposition between savage and civilised is still present, as well as the expectation that Indigenous people should assimilate into this society. As I have already briefly mentioned, this is also linked to a perception of Indigeneity as a remnant of the past, which has not managed to find its place in modern Australia.

4.2 Savage or Civilised: Rejection in the Multicultural Era

After the 1967 referendum which allowed the federal government to legislate over Indigenous matters – what Patrick Wolfe called "Aborigines' day in the sun"⁶⁴ – Indigenous people entered what Jordan called the "recent past", characterised by changing politics in favour of self-determination. At the same time, the Australian government officially adopted a policy of multiculturalism. The previous policy of assimilation was based on the expectation that minorities would adopt the Anglo-Celtic way of life and leave behind their own cultures. The multicultural ethic was founded on tolerance for other cultures, but within the unity of the Australian nation. One of the changes that occurred as part of this

⁶³ SANDY in, SHARKEY, Ronan, WEEKLEY, Dora, *First Contact*, episode 1, SBS, 2014, 5:42-6:04min

⁶⁴ WOLFE, Patrick, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race", *op. cit.*, p. 874.

redefinition of the nation's core values was the disappearance of the discourse of race in official spheres.

I will now explain this change and the evolution of racism in Australia. I have explained in chapter 3 how, despite the emphasis on cultural tolerance, the Anglo-Celtic culture nevertheless remains the foundation of today's Australian identity. With the discourse opposing savage and civilised, I have also started to show that non-Indigenous Australians tend to judge Indigenous people according to Western standards which have become unspoken norms of behaviour in society. I will now look at the place of Indigenous people in multicultural Australia to reveal the limitations of Indigenous people's right to self-identification.

4.2.1 From Race to Ethnicity, from Biology to Culture

The concept of race as a way of dividing the human species into discrete groups was fundamental to the practice of anthropology during the 19th century. Aborigines were seen as a race, and the defining characteristics were to be discovered by measuring their bodies and bones as well as by describing their customs. It was only in the mid-20th century that biologists resoundingly rejected racial categories by showing that variation within such groups is greater than variation between them.⁶⁵

As I showed, the study of Indigenous people, the policies adopted to manage them, and the race discourses that circulated in Australian society, were for a long time informed by the idea of a racial hierarchy, and by the implicit conviction of 'white' superiority over other races. As Anderson and Perrin explained, the rise of the polygenesist understanding of human races (the idea that there is not a single human race but that there are several different species) coupled with Social Darwinist theories led to the conclusion that the weakest human races were doomed to extinction while the most adaptive ones survived and thrived. This understanding of the differentiation between races was therefore a biological one.

⁶⁵ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists", *Man, New Series*, Vol. 22, No. 2, June 1987, p. 222.

Historian Henry Reynolds notes “the obsession with blood and biology”⁶⁶ which existed in Australia at the time of Federation, when Indigenous people were classified according to their quantum of Indigenous blood. Although the use of the blood quantum system of classification was gradually abandoned, the reference to blood to categorise Indigenous people is still present in some of non-Indigenous Australians’ discourses. One example is the often-cited Ruxton Resolution.

In 1988, the Victorian State president of the RSL⁶⁷, Mr Bruce Ruxton, called on the Federal Government “to amend the definition of Aborigine to eliminate the part-whites who are making a racket out of being so-called Aborigines at enormous cost to the taxpayers.” When asked to explain the Ruxton Resolution, the national RSL president, Brigadier Alf Garland, spoke of genealogical examination to determine whether the applicant for benefits was “a full-blood, or a half-caste or a quarter-caste or whatever.” Public reaction to the suggestion of a blood test included the observation that there is no blood test that establishes Aboriginality.⁶⁸

This example shows the resilience of biologically-based attempts at defining Indigeneity. Defining identity in biological and racial terms is still quite common in Australia, as Megan’s remarks already quoted in chapter 3 show:

Megan *I’m pretty sure in most parts of Australia that would be considered normal conversation: “You’re quite dark; what have you got in you?” It’s a bit like, “What’s your background?”*

At another point in the interview, she also said, “Oh, and I’ve got Aboriginal blood in me.” Similarly, when I asked Ben his opinion on the criteria chosen for the official definition of Indigeneity, he did not seem to understand the concepts of self-identification and of recognition by the community because he conflated the notions of heritage – or descent – with that of identity.

⁶⁶ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

⁶⁷ Returned and Services League of Australia, an organisation which defends the rights of Australian veterans.

⁶⁸ GARDINER-GARDEN, John, “Defining Aboriginality in Australia”, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Ben *I think a person is still Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander no matter if they identify as one or not. You can't change your bloodline. (...) I would have assumed that you would be [Aboriginal] whether you are accepted or not by the community.*

This shows the continued use of the biological component in the way people think about or at least express their identity. This tendency to refer to racial understandings of identity are inherited from the foundation of the Australian identity on racial divisions. As Gillian Cowlishaw explained,⁶⁹ however, the racial definitions progressively disappeared from official discourses during the mid-twentieth century. Several reasons explain this. First, with the end of the Second World War came the realisation of the negative effects of discourses of racial superiority and inferiority. This realisation brought about a global redefinition of national identities, and the banishment of such discourses in official language. Following the end of the war, the UNESCO also affirmed that the existence of race could not be based on any scientific evidence and that “race [was] less a biological fact than a social myth”.⁷⁰ In the 1960s, Australian government policies moved from assimilation to integration, before finally abandoning race-based policies and turning to multiculturalism as the main defining characteristic of the nation. From this point, the biological discourse receded. In government language, the biological discourse of race was changed into a cultural discourse of ethnicity.⁷¹

From the point of view of immigration, the new definitions of race associated with this cultural discourse allowed the Australian government to redesign a policy long based on racial exclusion (although, as I have explained, ‘white’ was never only a colour but also a culture) and to officially emphasise tolerance towards foreign cultures.

As far as Indigenous people were concerned, the definition of Indigeneity adopted in 1981 also reflected this change of focus. Although the criterion of descent is still present in the new definition, the other two criteria allow Indigenous people to assert the cultural and

⁶⁹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Racial Positioning, Privilege and Public Debate” in, MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004, pp. 59-60.

⁷⁰ UNESCO statement by experts on Race problems of July 1950, quoted in, REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

⁷¹ An ethnic group is based on a common culture whereas a racial group shares biological similarities.

social characteristics of their identity, as well as the right to self-identify. Therefore, the definition is now open to diverse ways of being Indigenous. A concrete example of the shift to culture as the main criterion for being Indigenous – as opposed to biology – can be found in the Land Rights procedure: in order to claim their traditional lands back, Indigenous people have to prove that they have maintained cultural links to them.⁷² The emphasis on culture is something the participants in this study were very much aware of. Beyond having Indigenous heritage, it was clear to most of them that they would not feel legitimate enough to identify as Indigenous without knowing about their Indigenous culture. This meant having not only a general understanding of Indigenous culture, but also a knowledge of the culture of the specific Indigenous group they were descended from.

Michelle *I remember my mum (...) saying that (...) if you actually said, or declared yourself as having Indigenous background, you could get into university because they'll give you those extra points, and I found that actually offensive at the time. I thought, "No, (...) I don't want to be given access to university on something I don't even feel I am. I don't know anything about it. I don't have any links to the culture."*

Vanessa *I work with a woman [with Indigenous heritage] who said that she wouldn't let her kids identify because they were so unconnected with their culture at this point in their lives. (...) I think, you know, a majority of people eventually are just going to be multicultural – my partner's German. And then there's the question of whether I'd ask my kids to identify – if they wanted to identify. Yeah...My brother and I are talking about that at the moment – he's about to have kids.*

For both Michelle and Vanessa, the cultural component of Indigeneity is more important than the biological one. As far as Michelle is concerned, who she feels she is linked to what she knows about her heritage, which differs from Ben's definition ("You cannot change your bloodline"). Vanessa's doubts about letting her children identify later are linked to the degree of Torres Strait Islander culture they will possess but also to the fact that, according to her, the effect of multiculturalism is the eventual blending of cultures and the disappearance of their individual characteristics. In any case, the cultural element remains central.

⁷² This does not make it easier for Indigenous people however, considering the frequent displacements of populations during colonisation.

“Speaking of race was feared to reproduce racial inequality, but not speaking about race did nothing to destroy it.” In this statement, Cowlshaw begins to explain how culture replaced race, notably in the academic world, because race was seen as “regressive, fixed and racist”, while culture was “progressive, malleable and politically neutral”. Nevertheless, she explains that in spite of good intentions, the nature of race was not questioned and consequently, ‘Aboriginal culture’ came to represent the same things as ‘Aboriginal race’: “heritability, primitivity and blackness”.⁷³ As we saw with the example of the references to ‘blood’ in everyday discourses about identity, erasing the concept of race from official discourses was no guarantee that discourses about race, and even beliefs about biological differences, would also disappear. Cowlshaw goes on to explain that “race is not about biology but about social and psycho-physical constructs which are both a conceptual habit and a reality experienced in social relations in language, in group identifications and in our bodies.”⁷⁴ Race, therefore, like whiteness or Indigeneity, is a construct inherited from history and kept alive mentally and physically. Following Cowlshaw, Kevin Dunn *et al.* state that:

The persistent belief in ‘race’ as a real and natural category of humankind is surprising given the academic demise of that concept. ‘Race’ is overwhelmingly perceived as a social construct rather than a biological given in contemporary social science. (...) Nonetheless, the concept has strong everyday meaning for many people, including those people who have historically been defined in racial terms, such as Indigenous Australians. ‘Race’ is a reality of life for people of colour, for those who are racialised.⁷⁵

Race is indeed a reality for Indigenous people who are subjected to it – but who also, as Cowlshaw studied, have taken the concept of race from colonial hands to appropriate it.⁷⁶ It is also a reality for non-Indigenous Australians who perceive their identity and those of others in terms of race. For example, for the participants in this study, skin colour is still

⁷³ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Racial Positioning, Privilege and Public Debate”, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 60.

⁷⁵ DUNN, Kevin M., KAMP, Alanna, SHAW, Wendy S., FORREST, James, PARADIES, Yin, “Indigenous Australians’ Attitudes Towards Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, ‘Race’, and Racism”, *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2010, p. 24.

⁷⁶ This is part of a process Gayatri Spivak calls ‘strategic essentialism’, and which I study in chapter 9.

often perceived as a clear attribute of Indigeneity which they lack.⁷⁷ Therefore, erasing the “regressive” concept of race from everyday language in Australia has not erased its influence in discourses through which the participants position themselves.

4.2.2 Racism in Today’s Australia

In this section, I will analyse the evolution of racism in today’s Australia, and the different forms it takes.

4.2.2.1 From Old to New Racism

Just as race is still part of everyday discourses, so racism still exists. However, with the shift to multiculturalism and the emphasis on ethnicity and culture rather than on race and biology, a move from ‘old racism’ to ‘new racism’ has occurred.

[Old racism], highlighting inferiority, prevailed from the time of Federation in 1901 until the early 1970s and the end of the White Australia Policy. Then this ‘old racism’ was largely supplanted by a ‘new racism’ or ‘cultural racism’ based on the ‘insurmountability of cultural differences’. Thus ethnic minorities are no longer viewed as inferior; rather they are differentiated as threats to ‘social cohesion’ and ‘national unity’, that is, to the cultural values and integrity of the dominant (Anglo-Celtic) ‘host’ society.⁷⁸

The concept of cultural racism defined by Dunn *et al.* has been applied to analyses of Australian ethnic groups other than Indigenous people. This is because, in spite of the adoption of the new definition of Indigeneity which emphasises the role of culture, Indigenous people are still also defined in terms of race. Thus, Gardiner-Garden reminds us that the definition of Indigeneity chosen in the 1970s to replace blood-quantum classifications, and which he called “tautological” is still in use today, along with the 1981 definition: “The three-part definition did not, however, completely vanquish the favourite

⁷⁷ I will later show the potency of racial identification through the study of colour and culture in chapter 6.

⁷⁸ DUNN, Kevin M., FORREST, James, BURNLEY, Ian, McDONALD, Amy, “Constructing Racism in Australia”, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 39, No. 4, November 2004, p. 410-411.

Also see JAYASURIYA, Laksiri, “Understanding Australian Racism”, *Australian Universities Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2002, pp. 40-44.

definition of the 1970's that an 'Aboriginal person' means a person of the Aboriginal race of Australia."⁷⁹

Within the Indigenous community, the link between Indigeneity and race is also present since, as Cowlshaw wrote, race is meaningful to Indigenous people in their everyday lives.

In non-Indigenous Australian society, the inheritance of racial definitions of Indigenous people is also visible. It seems to me that beyond the obvious references to physical or biological characteristics of Indigeneity like blood or skin colour, insults directed at Indigenous people still carry the old reference to inherent inferiority. The usual description of Indigenous people as 'lazy' seems to point to an essential characteristic of Indigenous people since it is linked to their incapacity to adapt to a 'more developed' society.

Adina provided another example of essentialised inferiority. She compared her parents' non-racist views to what she heard other people say about Indigenous people.

Adina *It's sort of like, "Oh, the poor black people...Yeah, they're hard done by, BUT, if they wanted their country, they would have fought harder for it."*

This comment seems to point to an inherent inferiority of Indigenous people who are described as unable to fight for their country. This usual blend of sympathy for the plight of Indigenous people, and resentment at the apparent lack of effort they make to blend into modern Australian society is quite typical of the ambivalent view non-Indigenous Australians have of Indigenous people.

But along with occurrences of old racism are racist comments based on cultural differences. Michelle provides an example of this as she recalls the way the Indigenous family who settled near her house was regarded by her family.

Michelle *We did actually live next door to an Aboriginal family when my mum and dad bought a house in Swan Hill, and this Aboriginal family, being brought down from*

⁷⁹ GARDINER-GARDEN, John, "Defining Aboriginality in Australia", *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

the northern part of Australia apparently, had slightly different ways of – a slightly different Aboriginal culture than that of northern Victoria. (...) And this family, when they moved into their house, they knocked the walls out on the west side and east side of the house, pulled all the boards of the house off, all the boards of the flooring off in the lounge room, made a fire in the corner in the dirt, and burned the walls basically, on the two sides, so that they could see the sunrise and sunset at night. And we used to talk about it at family events or when people came over: “Did you see them? How silly are they? Burning half the house off...And how terrible that we pay taxes so that they can have a housing commission house. And look at that: they’ve destroyed it all cause of their stupid beliefs of seeing the sun rise and set...”⁸⁰

Michelle’s story is, I believe, an example of cultural racism “based on the ‘insurmountability of cultural differences’” Dunn *et al.* described. Indeed, the basis for attacking the Indigenous family is their “stupid beliefs” rather than any racial characteristic. Little seems to be understood of the reasons why the family acted this way. Instead, this behaviour is indeed presented as insurmountably different from a Western way of thinking. However, there is also a hint that these beliefs are not only different, but inferior to the Western logic of keeping a house intact. Since the family’s acts are described as stupid, the reference to the “fire in the corner in the dirt” is reminiscent of primitivity, of the early comments made by British observers at the time of colonisation, pointing to the absence of comfort and of homes among the Indigenous populations they observed. Therefore, Michelle’s story can also be linked to a representation of Indigenous culture as essentially inferior. Michelle actually concluded her story by saying, “So we did talk about Aborigines in our family, but it was always (...) in a kind of condescending way.”

In primary school, Adam also experienced cultural racism that belittled his beliefs. His interpretation of this experience is that Indigenous culture was still perceived as inferior when he was growing up.

Adam *And what else would I get? Ah, being told that Aboriginal religion was ridiculous: “Why would you believe in something like a Rainbow Serpent?”, “Well, why you believe in a dude in the sky who gives commands to...What are you talking about?! To me, there’s no difference.” But that type of attitude was so instilled: Aboriginal*

⁸⁰ A very similar comment was made by one of the participants in SBS documentary *First Contact* in 2014: “You give them houses: they burn them down.” SANDY in *First Contact*, episode 1, *op. cit.*

culture was inferior; it was primitive, all those sorts of words...

I would like to give another example from Adam to illustrate how ideas of both culture and race are combined in racism towards Indigenous people in today's Australia.

Adam *Every time I was trying to say I was Aboriginal my identity would be challenged (...) in one of those two ways. It could be either "No, you're not."⁸¹ or "Yes, you are, and you're terrible because you are. Either way it's a challenge to the identity. (...) It's all part of the logic of the same package, the logic of the racist! "You can't be Aboriginal!", but "You, stupid nigger!"*

Because Adam does not look Indigenous, he did not immediately attract racist comments based on any physical or biological characteristics. Adam perceived this as racism nevertheless since he was denied the right to identify based on a lack of visible physical characteristics. However, when he claimed to be Indigenous, the racist comments which were then directed at him were based on a rejection of Indigenous culture perceived as "terrible".

Through the rejection of Indigenous culture as fundamentally different from that of other Australians, the enduring dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is reinforced, preventing the possibility of analysing Indigenous identity as resulting from Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous influences. As I will show, this is particularly problematic for the participants in this study, caught between both groups.

4.2.2.2 Who's Racist in Australia?

Racism happens at different levels:⁸² individual (for example when Josh's friend laughed at him because he did not look Indigenous enough), institutional (when Miriam was asked at work to bring a certificate of Aboriginality while a darker colleague was not), societal

⁸¹Adam is not automatically identifiable as Indigenous.

I will further explore the in-between position and feelings of the participants, as fair-skinned Indigenous people in chapter 6.

⁸² SCHEURICH, J. J., YOUNG, M. D., quoted in, BODKIN-ANDREWS, Gawaian, CARLSON, Bronwyn, "The Legacy of Racism and Indigenous Australian Identity within Education", *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2016, p. 793.

(when an Indigenous family's beliefs are decried because the so-called mainstream Australian norm is to sleep in a house with walls) and civilisational (when the Western norms brought by the British still dominate in Australia). The participants mentioned two factors which, they thought, could help explain the presence of racism: living in a rural area and not being educated.

Michelle provided an account of a trip to her home town in 2006.

Michelle *When I went back home in 2006, (...) I caught up with my best friend growing up. She was in a pub, and I remember seeing her: she had a baby on one hip, and she was running the pub now with her brother. (...) I left to go to uni. She (...) decided not to go because she didn't want to leave her family, wasn't keen to go to the city, and everything. So our paths went in completely opposite directions. I could get along with them, and talk to them. But she was bringing up, you know, "Ah, the fucking coons that live down the street; they cause so much trouble in the town..." And I had to keep my mouth shut, and swallow my anger and disgust. (...) I would never tell her, [that I have Indigenous heritage] (...) but I was shocked at the difference between the two of us. (...) If I had stayed in town, (...) heard the same jokes, the same way of talking about Aborigines, I probably would have grown up exactly the same way. But my mum took us out of there, (...) bust a gut so that we could go to university, and so my views on this are different.*

With her story, Michelle illustrates the fact that racism is still blatant in her small town. The fact that this is the case in rural Australia was pointed out by several participants.

Education is the second factor the participants insisted on to explain their better understanding of Indigeneity. Education, as Michelle showed, refers to tertiary education at university, something which also involves moving to a bigger city and experiencing a more multicultural environment.

When she told me the story of the family who pretended to be Indian and declared they were Indigenous when they felt it was safer to do so,⁸³ Miriam argued that the reaction people had – thinking that the family only identified in order to get benefits now granted to Indigenous people – was due to a lack of education. She, on the other hand, felt that she could understand the reasons why an Indigenous family would have wanted to pass as

⁸³ See 2.2.2.

Indian in order to avoid discrimination because she had learnt about Indigenous history at university. About this story, she said, “This is just an example I use to show how education can change the way you think.”

Vanessa, who works for Indigenous students’ support at university, affirmed that education is an essential key to improve the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Vanessa *I think it starts with education. So I think having real education in schools...Like, my partner, after having seen Utopia,⁸⁴ went, “How come I didn’t learn this at university? This is Australian history.” He was born in Australia. And that’s the thing. I think it is all education. I think there needs to be like a mandatory class in the first year for every student, no matter what degree, compulsory.*

Universities and their Indigenous centres were mentioned by several participants as spaces where they felt it was easier to identify and where they could avoid racist comments. I will come back to this in chapter 10.

4.2.2.3 “Classical Australian Racism”

I think that [in *The Celebrity Apprentice*, Pauline] Hanson as a third rate TV star represents Australian racism more than when she was actually the leader of a racist party. (...) While White people can watch Pauline Hanson on TV and normalise her with a kind of ‘isn’t it cute, we had a racist political leader before and now we have a harmless TV figure’, some people I know sit uncomfortably and think ‘hey – this is not enjoyable, this woman has seriously hurt me in the past’. But when everyone around you thinks they are having fun, to come and say in their midst: ‘this is not funny, this woman is a hurtful hating racist’, what you will get is a condescending ‘get a life mate, don’t be so bloody serious, we’re enjoying some light entertainment here, and you wanna talk about racism?’ That’s more like classical Australian racism; it hits you and disallows you to say ‘hey that’s racism’. More often than not, it works in a ‘relaxed and comfortable’ way.⁸⁵

⁸⁴*Utopia* is a 2013 documentary by Australian journalist John Pilger which studies the problems faced by Indigenous people in today’s Australia.

⁸⁵HAGE, Ghassan, “Continuity and Change in Australian Racism”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2014, p. 234.

Part II

Kate *"You're Australian if you're laid-back. (...) "You're Australian if you are just accepting of everyone."*

Michelle *"It's a non-offensive nation, if that makes sense. We generally get along with pretty much everyone."*

Josh *"It's just sort of accepting the good lifestyle we have here."*

These descriptions from the participants are part of the common discourse about what characterises Australian-ness. Associated with the old but still potent idea of the "fair go" – that is to say equality in opportunities for all Australians – is the more recent multicultural discourse founded on acceptance. This discourse came easily – if not automatically – to the participants as I asked what being Australian meant to them. They did not seem to notice that it sits awkwardly with their accounts of racism. As Hage wrote, Australians can sometimes incorporate racism into everyday conversation without thinking twice about it. As both Megan and Michelle mentioned, it is quite normal to exchange a few racist jokes or ask about someone's skin colour and blood composition at a barbecue:

Megan *It's almost like a conversation starter at a barbecue: "Oh you're quite dark; what have you got in you?"*

Michelle *I don't think [my mother's parents] ever disavowed mum's choices as such, who she married, because (...) they were happy for her and that sort of stuff (...) I don't think they thought he was good enough for their daughter, just like anyone else. (...) But never anything on the basis of him being of Aboriginal heritage. There was never anything about that. But they too were the sort of people who would make jokes about Aborigines and things like that. At family events, or barbecues, or bonfires, or whatever, those sort of jokes came up all the time, and I didn't think twice about it.*

Just like her Indigenous father joked about Indigenous people, Michelle's grandparents joked about them as well even though they knew their son-in-law had Indigenous heritage himself. This ambivalence reveals the strange quality of everyday racism towards Indigenous people in Australia. Joking about Indigenous people sometimes seems so ingrained in Australian society that racism is dissociated from its object. Sophia Hickey quoted Philomena Essed who explained the meaning of 'everyday racism':

Essed coined the term 'everyday racism' to describe 'systematic, recurrent, familiar practices' where 'socialised racist notions are integrated into everyday practices and thereby actualise and reinforce underlying racial and ethnic relations'.⁸⁶

The following example illustrates Essed's theory and shows that racism towards Indigenous people in Australia is now an everyday practice for some non-Indigenous Australians, something which perpetuates the division between both groups. Josh draws a difference between what he sees as real racism – blatant racism – and little jokes which are often overlooked in Australian society because they are so common.

Josh *I suppose, we're Australians – there's always...racist jokes, and you always see it... (...) It was always those little racist jokes...but never anything like someone saying, "Go away, you black nigger; I don't want to talk to you".*

Racist jokes are seen as quite harmless and distinct from what is perceived as real racism. Josh later explained the time when he was first confronted with what he named "genuine racism".

When I went jackarooing – when I was working on a cattle station in the Northern Territory – the station was quite racist. The town that was nearby, (...) is an extremely racist town, so much so that the pub's still segregated – which I learnt is pretty common in the Northern Territory. It's against the law, but it's sort of an unspoken rule, which is pretty shocking. I suppose that's when I really started to see genuine racism, more than just jokes.

Josh's understanding of racism finds an echo in David Mellor's findings: although it has been documented that blatant racism is decreasing in Australia – as Cowlishaw explained, it is now considered "regressive" – the findings are not based on the victims' view of what constitutes racism, and therefore, what some people do not consider proper racism can be perceived as such by victims.

The argument that because there is a cultural norm against racism, contemporary racism is predominantly subtle or symbolic may be misleading, at least in the Australian context. (...) This (...) challenges the validity of studying

⁸⁶ ESSED, Philomena quoted in, HICKEY, Sophia D., "'They say I'm not a typical blackfella': experiences of racism and ontological insecurity in urban Australia", *Journal of Sociology*, April 2015, p. 3.

racism only from the perspective of the perpetrator. Although such studies may have reassured politically correct individuals (including social scientists) by leading to the suggestion of diminishing racism, new cultural norms, or more subtle expression, they do not match the reality of the experiences of the participants in their efforts to enjoy a 'normal' everyday life.⁸⁷

Hage's earlier experience supports Mellor's analysis: a more subtle form of racism – what Josh saw as rather harmless jokes – can actually be taken more seriously by people who are affected by them.

Josh later reaffirmed the link between making racist jokes and being a typical Australian.

Josh *Some of my friends – and sometimes myself – call me the most Australian person they've ever met – these are Australian friends. And I think sometimes I feel like I'm a cliché. (...)*

Delphine Why do they say that about you?

Josh *I suppose I have a broad accent. I'm Irish. I'm Aboriginal. I make racist jokes. I drink beer. I live in the country – which doesn't make you Australian, I guess. And I wear blue shearer singlets.*

Amusing here is the juxtaposition of elements which, according to Josh, all point to Australian-ness but which one would not expect to find together: "Irish" (Anglo-Celtic heritage) and "Aboriginal"; "mak[ing] racist jokes" and "Aboriginal". As far as the argument I have developed is concerned, it confirms the status of everyday racism as something which is perceived as being different from actual racism in everything but name, hence the unashamed and relaxed way in which Josh mentions it. As Hage wrote, "classical racism (...) hits you and disallows you to say 'hey that's racism'."

In today's multicultural Australia, racism takes several. Cultural racism is now more prevalent than the old form of racism pointing to inherent inferiority, although I argued that old racism has not completely disappeared. The tolerant discourse of multiculturalism

⁸⁷ MELLOR, David, "Contemporary Racism in Australia: The Experiences of Aborigines", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 29, Issue 4, 2003, p. 483.

has not eradicated racism but arguably makes it more difficult to tackle since Australian society is now seen as having left its racist past behind. It is now described by the participants as a welcoming and accepting country. Nevertheless, what is seen as a harmless form of racism, as the participants showed, is still accepted as part of the Australian identity. Therefore, some participants adopted an ambivalent discourse, both criticising racism and promoting the image of an inclusive Australia, and at the same time tolerating everyday racism.

4.2.3 Visible Yet Invisible

In June 2011, Indigenous people represented 3 percent of the Australian population.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, as we saw, Indigeneity is not absent from Australian society. It is more recognised that it used to be. For example, Indigenous symbols have been increasingly used as distinctive representations of Australia. But it is also still rejected: racist jokes and criticisms about Indigenous people's behaviour in society – as violent, drunk or welfare-dependent – abound. But beyond discourses about Indigenous people, the everyday-life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people does not seem to be familiar to a lot of non-Indigenous Australians.

While hosting an event for reconciliation in 2001, Indigenous journalist Stan Grant asked the audience who among them interacted with Indigenous people in their daily lives.

It became embarrassingly obvious that (...) we were such strangers to each other. I'm sure if I asked those same questions of a similar room today I'd get the same response. And it isn't at all surprising. There are great numbers of Australians who in the regular course of their lives have no contact with Indigenous people, and it is not just because we are roughly only 3% of the population.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians", *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>, accessed on 23 May 2016.

⁸⁹ GRANT, Stan, "I'm Tired of Aboriginal People Being Seen as Anthropological Curiosities", *The Guardian*, 28 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/28/im-tired-of-aboriginal-people-being-seen-as-anthropological-curiosities>, accessed on 25 February 2015.

What, then, are the other reasons why Indigenous people remain invisible to a great part of the population? I will analyse two main reasons why this is so and try to explain why these reasons can be understood as yet other ways of rejecting Indigenous people in today's Australia. First, I will look at the status of Indigenous people in the new multicultural Australia. I will then explain how invisibility can be understood in terms of a difficulty for non-Indigenous Australians to relate to Indigenous people on a more complex level than that of symbols and general opinions.

4.2.3.1 Just Another Ethnicity

Then [during the assimilation era], the Australian solution to the problem posed for settler colonization by the recalcitrant persistence of extraneously constituted indigenous societies was to absorb them into the white stock. (...) In recent decades, the emphasis of assimilationist discourse has shifted from race to culture. Aborigines' day in the sun came in 1967 when a referendum removed clauses that had discriminated against them from the Australian constitution. Since then, the White Australia Policy has been abandoned in favour of multiculturalism. Positive representations of Aboriginality have been a prominent feature of the multiculturalist discourse. Rather than diminishing the pressure for Aborigines to assimilate, however, this has merely altered the ethnic profile of the society into which they are scheduled to blend. Thus they now find themselves represented as just another tile in the multicultural mosaic, a trivialisation of their difference that effaces their status as prior owners.⁹⁰

Patrick Wolfe argues that although the abandonment of racial-based policies should have brought about the recognition of Indigenous people's culture in Australian society, on the contrary, it had the effect of erasing their specific status as original inhabitants of the continent. Assimilation and later integration were aimed at reaching oneness and sameness in the country. The two policies were exclusive and therefore maintained the tradition of excluding Indigenous people and culture – as well as those of ethnic groups – from Australian society by pushing them towards assimilation into 'white' society. In contrast, multiculturalism is an inclusive policy designed to cater for cultural diversity. The main message promoted by multiculturalism is that there should still be one Australia but composed of many different but equal parts. The emphasis placed on equality often results

⁹⁰ WOLFE, Patrick, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race", *op. cit.*, p. 874.

in Indigenous people being associated with other ethnic groups in today's discourses. Indigenous people thus become "another tile in the multicultural mosaic" described by Wolfe.

This vision of Australia is problematic on two levels. First, it denies Indigenous people their unique status as first inhabitants of the continent, a status which is different from that of later migrants. This logic of equality also denies them the right to ask for specific rights. Secondly, it reduces the varied Indigenous cultures existing in Australia to one group called Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In terms of demands for rights, such a merging can be used strategically, and Indigenous people have indeed used it in order to gain a stronger voice in Australia from the 1960s onwards, by creating a movement of pan-Aboriginality focusing on common characteristics of Indigenous people across Australia. However, culturally speaking, the homogenisation of Indigenous peoples and cultures tends to again reduce Indigeneity to a set of criteria which do not seem to evolve much, and which do not reflect the diversity of Indigenous Australia today. Moreover, the study in chapter 3 of the ongoing predominance of Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia tends to show the limits to the possibility of having one's culture recognised as truly Australian if it does not conform to the values chosen by the dominant culture. Overall, even though Indigenous people are no longer subjected to forced assimilation, they are pressured into a subtler form of assimilation which is more difficult to resist since it is based on a discourse of equality within difference. Michelle Carey explains the dilemma:

Not only does the discourse of egalitarianism maintain equality, it also 'disembodies' Aboriginal people. In Australia, egalitarianism is configured to stand for sameness (as opposed to equality in difference) and what makes us the same is that we are all Australian. So, when Aboriginal people assert their difference through their Aboriginality, they are not only misrepresented as racists, they are discursively positioned as violators of the 'moral norm of equality'. In the process of marginalising Aboriginal people's right to claim their Aboriginality, they are rendered un-Australian – or non-Australian. This is the process of disembodiment.⁹¹

⁹¹ CAREY, Michelle, "From Whiteness to Whitefella: Challenging White Race Power in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Part II

The discourse of equality means that Indigenous people demanding recognition of their unique status are perceived as threatening the country's unity. Thus, as Carey explains, a refusal to comply leads to a rejection from the nation: Indigenous people cannot both be Australian and yet ask to be recognised as different – although this is the premise of the policy of multiculturalism.

The rejection of Indigenous people is not only based on their demands for specific rights or status in the present. The egalitarian discourse is also applied to history. Indigenous people are asked to forget about colonial mistreatments in order to join the now tolerant 'mainstream' Australian society and to look to the future – rather than to the past – as one. A common discourse circulating about Indigenous people is that they should "get over it", and "get on board". This implies that Indigenous people who are not willing to do this are perceived as "un-Australian", as Carey said, and on the margins of Australian society because of refusal to comply to "sameness".

Vanessa and Miriam provide illustrations of the "get on board" discourse:

Vanessa *Oh there's a great moment in [the film] Utopia; it's on Australia day at the Opera house, and it's like, "Do you reckon Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are mourning today?" and people are like, "What do you mean? They came here like everyone else. Everyone else came here. We're one Australia." That's the quintessential... (...) Oh, that was a great comment that somebody made: "We all just have to move on. They need to get on board." (...) Yeah. That is a common thing, basically, "Just get over it".*

Miriam *Last year, I had someone say to me, "Aboriginal people should just get over it." Get over what?! Like, get over the fact that they die 17 years before the general population? This guy said, "Aboriginal people should just get over it. Almost everyone was colonised, except..." But yeah, "You should get over it."*

Both comments indicate a belief that it is Indigenous people's own fault if they are not an integral part of the Australian society. The person interviewed in Vanessa's comment does not understand why Indigenous people might choose to reject Australia Day because it marks the beginning of colonisation: instead he thinks Indigenous people should not dwell on the past, they should "get on board" and "move on". However, Miriam points out

that, contrary to what the first interviewee thinks, living in the present and no longer dwelling on past mistreatments might not be enough for the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to be closed: the fact that Indigenous people are dying younger than the general population can be linked to the ongoing effects of colonisation.

More importantly, both comments stem from the belief that there is only one Australia, and that differences should be smoothed over in order to move on as one. This belief goes further than just imposing a common future on all ethnic groups and on Indigenous Australians. In declaring this need to adhere to a single way of being Australian, the two persons Vanessa and Miriam mentioned hold a far-fetched – although not uncommon – understanding of the past. Indeed, “They came here like everyone else” suggests that Indigenous people also travelled to the Australian continent and that therefore, everyone migrated to Australia, at one time or another. Such a comment does not recognise that tens of thousands of years separated Indigenous people’s arrival from that of the British and that Indigenous people did not colonise the country. Being migrants is seen as the “quintessential” characteristic of all Australians. The other person’s comment, “Almost everyone was colonised”, diminishes the differences between colonisers and colonised and attempts to render colonisation banal and a thing of the past having no consequence on the present. Both commentators consider that their vision of Australia should be normalised.

Later in the same extract from *Utopia* Vanessa mentioned, the director, John Pilger interviews several non-Indigenous Australians celebrating the 26th of January in Sydney. One of them is also asked if he understands the reason why Indigenous Australians might be mourning on that day. As Vanessa explained, the interviewee rejects this possibility and justifies his point of view by emphasising a common Australian-ness: “Every single person walking past me right here, everybody: they’re Aussie. Doesn’t matter if they’re black, white, yellow, blue, green, whatever man; they’re Aussie. We’re all Australian.”⁹² The “get on board” discourse is based, as Michelle Carey previously explained, on an understanding of multiculturalism as “stand[ing] for sameness (as opposed to equality in difference)”. This

⁹² PILGER, John, *Utopia*, ‘Australia Day’ extract, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3rnsGbf9l0>, accessed on 23 May 2016.

discourse also illustrates Hage's theory about the right that Anglo-Celtic Australians give themselves – often without realising it – to impose their vision of who should belong to the category 'Australian', and in what capacity. Again, this type of discourse encourages a belief in unity and equality while imposing a restricted understanding of Australianness. This makes it harder to criticise because it is not perceived as discriminatory,⁹³ in the same way that racist jokes are not always interpreted as genuine racism.

The following comment by Ben shows how racism against Indigenous Australians is put into perspective by arguing that all Australians are equally treated when it comes to racism. According to Ben, everyone in Australia is criticised in one way or another, not only Indigenous Australians.

Ben *As I mentioned earlier, [in] a lot of stories when I was younger, from family and friends, [Indigenous people] weren't always held in the highest regard. You still hear a lot of negative views about Indigenous Australians, but I'd say there are also a lot of negative views of other cultures in Australia. I think it's just the fact that it stands out when you talk about Indigenous Australians. Like the way we talk about politicians or TV personalities is terrible.*

This normalising discourse about Australian-ness can stem from a desire for Indigenous people to be included and treated as other Australians. However, as Hage wrote, whether or not 'white' Australians are supportive of other's claims does not matter. What matters is that they give themselves the right to judge who belongs.⁹⁴ This discourse can also be born out of resentment. Indigenous people are once again rejected from the nation, presented as Other, seen as standing against the interest of other Australians – when they pursue Native Title claims against the mining or pastoral industries for example, or rely on the welfare state at the expense of other Australians, or even simply, as the

⁹³ In her study of white and male privilege, Peggy McIntosh developed an argument which can be linked to the "fair go" discourse and which explains how, in the United States, white dominance persists within the discourse of equality: "A 'white' skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. (...) [O]bviousness about white advantage (...) is kept strongly inculturated (...) so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all."

MCINTOSH, Peggy, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁹⁴ HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 17.

previous examples showed, when they insist ‘too much’ on a negative history of the country.

In her study of the state of reconciliation in 2006, Elizabeth Moran highlights the ambivalence with which non-Indigenous Australians regard Indigenous people, who they see as both victims of colonisation for whom they have sympathy, but who they also resent for now having too much or for not “playing by the rules”. She quotes a participant who did not understand why Indigenous Australians did not try to join Australian society the way other ethnic groups do:

Well, every other nationality does. (...) Why can’t Aboriginals? They seem to make life harder for themselves and for everybody else. They have a chip on their shoulder. (...) Something needs to be done to help them blend in with our society, or stick their own and act civilly. Fair enough, when we first came here we made mistakes, but we’ve progressed and they seem to want to stick there, holding a grudge. What do you do?⁹⁵

This discourse is quite common in today’s Australia as the extracts from *Utopia* revealed. While there is now a rather strong consensus about the violence Indigenous people were subjected to because of colonisation and subsequent management policies, many Australians seem to think that now that the mistakes of the past have been acknowledged, Indigenous people should all agree to participate in the movement of reconciliation and stop “stick[ing]” to the past. However, this once again denies the right Indigenous people have to hold different views about reconciliation. It also pressures them into a single interpretation of reconciliation which could be summarised as ‘moving forward as one’.

To a certain extent, some participants drew on a benevolent version of this normalising discourse about the inclusion of Indigenous people as a “tile in the multicultural mosaic”. As I showed in chapter 3, multiculturalism is an important characteristic of Australian society for many participants. It was put forward by several of them as an argument supporting a non-racist vision of Australia where everyone is accepted.

⁹⁵ Interviewee quoted in MORAN, Elizabeth, “Is Reconciliation in Australia a Dead End?”, *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2006, p. 130.

Part II

Adina naturally linked cultural diversity and Indigeneity while describing the way she enjoyed living in a “rainbow” society. She told me about her young son learning about Indigenous culture at school and associated this with Australia embracing multiculturalism.

Adina *So he's telling me about, you know, the warring shadows, and the spirits, and... I mean, I had Aboriginal classes at school myself during the early 1990s when all this stuff was coming very much in vogue, when multicultural was cool all of a sudden.*

I asked the participants if they felt that having Indigenous heritage made them feel more, less or differently Australian. Most of the participants, while often aware of specific elements within Indigenous culture – knowing about their history, their beliefs or protocols to follow – included Indigenous people in multicultural Australia. However, this inclusion of Indigenous people in the multicultural Australian mosaic was not obvious for all the participants. For some, there was a feeling that being Indigenous is different from being Australian.

Adam had trouble reconciling the Indigenous part of his identity with his Australian identity. The contradictions in the following remarks reveal this.

Adam *Australian identity is quite inclusive. Whether it's true or not, that's how it feels. So, to me, it's better to be Australian than just be Aboriginal, because when I'm Australian, I connect with all of these people from all different cultures, from all different backgrounds. (...)*

But you're an outsider; there's always that factor. Aborigines don't get integrated into Australian culture, to some degree.

Adam feels that the Australian identity is an overarching one which includes his Indigenous heritage. Nevertheless, he also believes that Indigenous people are on the margins of Australian society. Adam's reflections echo Miriam's who also pointed out the ambivalent position of Indigenous people in Australia.

Miriam *Aboriginal is not necessarily Australia. It is, but it's separate. It's something different. It means something different.*

Miriam said she dissociated herself from the word “Australian” because of its association with colonisation and with more recent expressions of xenophobia such as the 2005 Cronulla riots. She also confirmed Michelle Carey’s idea about Indigeneity being constructed as un-Australian.

I think white Australia would think that I am ridiculous for saying that I am Aboriginal and that it's a way of being un-Australian. (...) I think if I wanted to be the most Australian person I can be, then I would not say that I'm Aboriginal. I don't feel like I'm making myself more Australian by saying “I'm Aboriginal, so I've been Australian for 40,000 years.”

Casey was the only participant who vehemently disassociated Australian-ness from Indigeneity.

Casey *I don't feel Australian whatsoever. (...) And to me that Australian flag is pretty much the equivalent of a swastika. My grandfather was stolen under that flag, along with his two sisters. That flag has been nothing but a symbol of oppression, genocide, assimilation, and all these negative things. So to me that's a symbol of all the worst things...It's like, would you expect a Jew to stand next to a swastika? (...) That's how I see it, and that's how a lot of other Aboriginal people see it. But some don't. Some other Aboriginal people have no problem with it, but in my eyes, it's just an impact of the assimilation process.*

Casey, who is very much involved in fighting for Indigenous sovereignty, travels with an Indigenous passport and refuses to vote for cultural reasons: as an Anaiwan man, he is not allowed to speak in the name of other tribes, which is something voting at a federal level implies. Casey is the participant who identified the most with his Indigenous heritage, which explains his more radical dissociation of Indigenous identity from Australian identity. His position reflects that of other Indigenous people who refuse to fall under the multicultural banner because they want to distance themselves from an Australian society based on colonisation, or because they feel their status should be recognised as unique, as Tonkinson explains:

Aboriginal objections [to multiculturalism] are grounded in a desire to remain clearly separated from all other ‘ethnic’ minorities since they wish to be regarded as descended from the original inhabitants, distinct from recent

immigrants, and to claim special status because of a long history of victimisation not shared by immigrants.⁹⁶

Jon Stratton explains how Indigenous people, in response to the “disembodiment” they were and still are subjected to, had to “racialize”⁹⁷ themselves, that is say define themselves in essential terms inherited from Australia’s race-based definitions of Indigenous people in order to assert their differences.⁹⁸

For some participants, multiculturalism is such a defining part of Australian society that, even though they are aware of an Indigenous demand to be kept separate from other groups in Australia, multiculturalism seems to overrule the Indigenous right to difference. But as Michelle Carey showed, Australian multiculturalism can have the effect of rendering Indigenous people invisible because they become another minority among the many ethnic groups which now form Australian society. For Indigenous people like Casey who refuse to be part of this society, this is perceived as a new form of assimilation. The rejection of Indigenous difference is then met by a parallel Indigenous rejection of ‘white’ society. As I will explain in the second part of this thesis, this double rejection can leave people who are in-between feeling like they do not belong anywhere.

4.2.3.2 “It’s Not Easy to Embrace a Culture If You Can’t See It. But It’s Not As If Many Have Made Much of an Effort.”

It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.⁹⁹

In this famous 1968 lecture, anthropologist W.H. Stanner denounced the lack of attention paid in academia to the Indigenous side of history. Almost fifty years later today, several

⁹⁶ TONKINSON, Robert, “National Identity: Australia after Mabo” in, WASSMANN, Jürg (ed.), *Pacific Answers to Western Hegemony: Cultural Practices of Identity Construction*, Oxford, New York: Berg, 1998.

⁹⁷ STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁹⁸ I will study this form of strategic essentialism in chapter 9.

⁹⁹ STANNER, W.E.H. quoted in GUNSTONE, Andrew, “Reconciliation and ‘The Great Australian Silence’”, *Australian Political Studies Association*, 2012, p. 1.

historians have addressed this continued lack and tried to document the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians.¹⁰⁰ However, this effort is not always visible in non-Indigenous Australians' understanding of Indigeneity. Beyond symbols and cultural elements, 'mainstream' Australia does not seem to show a specific interest in Indigeneity – contrary to most of the participants in this study who either studied Indigenous history or had educated themselves on Indigenous matters. As Stan Grant explained earlier, for a great part of 'mainstream' Australia, Indigenous people remain invisible.¹⁰¹ Non-Indigenous Australians learn about the history of colonisation at school, witness Acknowledgements of Country which are now common protocol for official events; they watch traditional representations of Indigenous culture displayed for events such as the 2000 Sydney Olympics and hear about violence and alcohol abuse through the media. In sum, many Australians, especially those in the coastal cities where Indigenous people were made invisible not only through physical but also cultural elimination, only know about Indigenous people through reports.¹⁰² These reports mostly come from non-Indigenous Australians, as Kevin Bullimore argued in his analysis of Indigeneity in the Australian media. According to him, when Indigenous people's voices are heard in the media, they are those of "culturally-approved" Indigenous people who "have been selected to fit the dominant Anglo-elite perception of what and who should be seen as Aboriginal".¹⁰³ In his view, this selection "fails to portray Aboriginality in a manner that reflects the kaleidoscope of Aboriginal identity."¹⁰⁴ This limited view of the diversity of Indigeneity results in non-Indigenous Australians only experiencing the surface of Indigeneity. It also means that Indigeneity is once again essentialised, reduced to a set of fixed characteristics, some of which are not far from the old colonial depictions.

In a 2009 article, journalist Tim Dick described

¹⁰⁰ See note 20.

¹⁰¹ See note 69.

¹⁰² BECKETT, Jeremy, "The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality" in, BECKETT, Jeremy (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, op. cit., p. 191.

¹⁰³ BULLIMORE, Kevin, "Media Dreaming: Representation of Aboriginality in Modern Australian Media", op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

the rut in which many of us find ourselves, unable to think of Aborigines in any terms other than disadvantaged or talented exceptions.¹⁰⁵ In public life, we celebrate individuals such as Rover Thomas, the *Bangarra* dancers¹⁰⁶ and Cathy Freeman. At dinner parties, we admire dot paintings on lounge room walls, condemn endemic violence and out-of-sight Third World conditions and hope our governments will *do something* about it all. On the street, we ignore the drunks and assiduously avoid the Block. And that's about it.¹⁰⁷

Several participants did not remember much of their school teachings about Indigenous history and culture. A few felt that there had been a good balance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous accounts of history. For example, Adam recalled learning a lot about Indigenous culture at the time when invasion was acknowledged and history curricula across the country started to include more diverse accounts of Australian history since 1788. Having identified as Indigenous, Adam was also part of an Indigenous group at school with which he was able to participate in ceremonies. Michelle was also introduced to Indigenous culture through special classes at school.

However, several other participants who attended the regular history classes lamented the lack of complexity in the presentation of Indigeneity.

Josh *I think...the mandatory subjects from primary school up to about year 10 would be reasonably balanced. But I get the feeling some of it is not entirely scientific, and a lot of it is not... I don't know how accurate it is, and it is very generalised. When we'd talk about Indigenous people, we'd just be like, "The tribes are very different", and they miss a lot of stuff.*

While Josh laments a lack of complexity in the presentation of Indigenous people, Adina goes further as she explains that, at her school, Indigenous people were only presented in a tokenistic way.

¹⁰⁵ See also MCKEE, Alan, "The Aboriginal Version of Ken Done...Banal Aboriginal Identities in Australia", *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1997, pp. 191-206.

¹⁰⁶ The *Bangarra Dance Theatre* is a Sydney-based Indigenous modern dance company created in 1989.

¹⁰⁷ DICK, Tim, "Talkabout: Time for Aboriginal Languages to Go Mainstream", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/it-pro/talkabout-time-for-aboriginal-languages-to-go-mainstream-20090925-g67r.html>, accessed on 25 September 2014.

Adina *Aboriginals were like, forgotten about. You look at their paintings, you're like, "Oh that's a pretty painting. Oh, there are little people, black people with sticks performing ritual dances with a whole bunch of smoke, not wearing very much." That's what the Aboriginals are.*

Megan who was studying to be a teacher when I interviewed her also lamented the lack of complexity in the representation of Indigenous people and culture. She reported the ongoing difficulty with finding diverse representations of Indigeneity. She nevertheless emphasised the gradual increase of positive Indigenous figures.

Megan *When I was studying I found that they used the same Aboriginal authors over and over... (...) Pearson this, Pearson that, blablabla. There's loads of people writing. And I'm studying to be a teacher, and I put together a lesson that was about Aboriginal role models, and you start googling it: it's always the same list, over and over: this AFL player, this author... And it's almost like they've got one woman, and one man but there's only 23 people in Australia who were successful and Aboriginal. It still isn't like out there. But you know, who wants to put that out there? I don't know, but (...) I do feel like it's really shifted recently. In the last five years, we've seen a lot more positive images of Aboriginality.*

In the case of the participants in this study, it has been – and sometimes, it still is – difficult to embrace their Indigenous heritage after having grown up with these portrayals of Indigeneity stripped out of any complexity or variation. Indeed, the participants do not fit these moulds and feel illegitimate as Indigenous.

As I said, it was usually in the course of their tertiary studies that the participants gained a more complex understanding of Indigenous people and culture, which allowed them to cast a more critical gaze on what they had understood Indigeneity to be before. This is what Miriam expressed in this extract:

Miriam *I am studying Aboriginal Studies. I never even thought up until 3 or 4 years ago that the Aboriginal culture is still so strong. Until you get involved with it, you don't think it's there. But it is, and it's so strong; it's all alive, and people are doing so many amazing things with their culture. And I can understand why white Australians and people who come to our country think, "There's no Aboriginal...there's nothing going on."*

Delphine You don't really see it...

Miriam *...until you look for it, right?*

I believe that the lack of variety in the representations of Indigenous people in everyday discourses about Indigeneity – at school, in the media, at a barbecue etc. – can be considered a form of ongoing rejection of Indigenous people from non-Indigenous Australian society. The fact that these discourses, as I showed, are, to some extent, being reproduced over the years not only reveals the continuing dominance of non-Indigenous voices but also a certain unwillingness to engage with Indigenous people on a deeper level. In the article previously quoted, Tim Dick explains that

Decades after the referendum and a year on from the apology, many of us remain uncomfortable with Aboriginal culture. We're unsure how we relate to it and how it relates to us. (...) When people do make an effort, it can grate. We're not used to it. Acknowledgments of country, for instance, can be clunky, easily dismissed as tokenistic. But the usual alternative is invisibility, especially as in our cities Aboriginal people often are.¹⁰⁸

The conclusion Dick draws is that engaging with Indigeneity on a superficial level is better than not engaging with it at all, although it remains unsatisfying. Indigenous people's demands for self-determination may be too threatening to non-Indigenous Australians and it may be easier to blame Indigenous people for not choosing to be part of a united Australia than to deal with these demands. As Casey's example showed, this is likely to create another "rut": some Indigenous people, because they still feel rejected from society because of their refusal to conform to Western norms, reject non-Indigenous Australia. This in turn strengthens some non-Indigenous people's belief that Indigenous people are essentially different and incapable of adapting to modern society.

Adina's description of the way her former husband's parents view Indigenous people demonstrates this idea that Indigenous people are part of Australia, but not completely. As Her ex-husband's parents way of relating to Indigenous people illustrates Dick's comments. They only relate to Indigeneity on a surface level, which may allow them to avoid discussing more controversial points.

¹⁰⁸ DICK, Tim, "Talkabout: Time for Aboriginal Languages to Go Mainstream", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2009, *op. cit.*

Adina *[My ex-husband's family] had spoken about Aboriginal people before but only in the context of foreign species, to be talked about very intellectually, opinions that one got from the 7:30 Report, or from The Australian, and other than that to be left the hell alone.*

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians – and especially people with Anglo-Celtic heritage – and Indigenous people has been characterised by ambivalence from the time the continent was settled to the present. This relationship is partly based on rejection of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous people. I demonstrated how Indigenous people have been constructed as Others in several ways throughout Australian history since 1788. There was first physical rejection which resulted in the killing of Indigenous people during the frontier wars, and later the attempt to eliminate Indigenous people as a race through miscegenation and cultural assimilation. As Patrick Wolfe writes, “it is important not to be misled by the biological cast of assimilationist rhetoric. For all the talk of “half-castes”, “full-bloods” and the like, Indigeneity was an ideological rather than a biological threat.”¹⁰⁹ It is the belief in Indigenous people’s essential difference which strengthened the will to make them disappear. The early rejections of Indigenous people, therefore, were both physical and cultural. I have explained how more recently, difference as a basis for rejection has been mostly framed in cultural terms. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the old racial assumptions of Indigenous inferiority are still present in today’s discourses. The subtler forms of rejection I described in the last parts of this chapter are yet other ways of keeping Indigenous people at bay, and therefore of continuing to construct them as Others. Moreover, physical rejection of Indigenous people still exists in several ways. As Tim Dick wrote, Sydneysiders still “avoid the Block”.¹¹⁰ But beyond this, it can be argued that Indigenous people are physically rejected from modern Australia because, for many non-Indigenous Australians, true Indigenous people are imagined living in remote Australia.

¹⁰⁹ WOLFE, Patrick, “Nation and MisceNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era”, *Social Analysis*, No. 36, October 1994, p. 114.

¹¹⁰ The Block is located in Redfern, a suburb in Sydney’s inner west where many Indigenous people live.

Those living in the cities and who are mostly portrayed in negative terms are not considered authentic representatives of Indigeneity. Many do not look like the traditional representation of a black Indigenous person and do not possess what is seen as the right kind of traditional cultural knowledge which non-Indigenous Australians associate with Indigeneity. Thus, the ongoing rejection of Indigenous people is still both physical and cultural, and the contest over the right to define Indigeneity continues. Recently, the University of New South Wales in Sydney published guidelines to help teachers use the rights terms to talk about Indigenous people, culture and history. Among the changes advised was the recognition that Australia was not discovered but “invaded”: “Australia was not settled peacefully, it was invaded, occupied and colonised. Describing the arrival of the Europeans as a “settlement” attempts to view Australian history from the shores of England rather than the shores of Australia.”¹¹¹ This statement, which is a well-established fact in today’s Australia, was nevertheless met with criticism from the conservative newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* which accused the university of performing a “whitewash” and of “rewrit[ing] the history books to state Cook ‘invaded’ Australia.”¹¹² The right of Indigenous people to provide a different version of history, and their right, more generally, to identify as Indigenous in ways that are different from those accepted by non-Indigenous Australians remain contested.

¹¹¹ “Indigenous Terminology”, *UNSW* website, <https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/indigenous-terminology>, accessed on 24 May 2016.

¹¹² *The Daily Telegraph* quoted in LEWIS, Simon, “An Australian University Says the English ‘Invaded’ the Continent”, *Time Magazine*, 29 March 2016, <http://time.com/4275901/australian-university-unsw-english-invasion/>, accessed on 24 May 2016.

CHAPTER 5

Constructing Indigeneity: The Desired Other

Michelle *When I started finding out, “Oh, I’ve got a bit of Aborigine in my family”, you’re kind of like, “Hey, hang on a second; that’s kinda cool!”*

Adina *I feel it's one unique drop of coolness.*

Andrew *Mum's got all the cool genes, Aboriginal.*

5.0 Introduction: Ambivalence

“The discursive practices of non-Aboriginal Australia have often been divided between traditions of fear, hate and disdain, and desire and yearning for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.”¹

In the introduction to chapter 4 and chapter 5, I wrote that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is made of oppositions and ambivalence. The notion of ambivalence describes the dual representation of the Other as unwanted and at the same time desirable. This concept was studied in relation to post-colonialism by Homi Bhabha. He analysed the disturbance in colonial authority produced by the ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised. Robert Young gave a definition of this concept:

¹ CURTHOYS, Ann, paraphrased in PALMER, David, GROVES, Denise, “A Dialogue on Identity and Ambivalence”, *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, January 2000, pp. 31-32.

“Ambivalence is a key word for Bhabha, which he takes from psychoanalysis where it was first developed to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite (‘simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action’).”²

Ambivalence has been a recurring feature of the way non-Indigenous Australians have perceived Indigenous people. Robert Hodge explains that ambivalent feelings were present early on in colonial history. He notes that the early anthropological interest in Indigenous culture contradicted the brutality of invasion and the destruction it caused.

The English invasion of Aboriginal Australia consisted of a direct assault on all the material and cultural conditions of Aboriginal life, including both political oppression and cultural genocide. This assault was also accompanied from the start by what seemed like its opposite, a strategy of recuperation that expressed regret for the physical injustice and attempted to collect and preserve instances of the brutalised language and culture (along with material remains like skulls and skeletons).³

From the first discourses produced before and at the time of colonisation to the current representations of Indigeneity, a counterpart to the rejection of Indigenous people has always been the desire experienced for their otherness. Historically, the figure of the ignoble, uncivilised savage which I described in chapter 4, competed against that of the noble savage, a concept commonly attributed to eighteenth century Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The yearning Westerners had for the uncorrupted and simple lifestyle they thought Indigenous people enjoyed still finds echoes in the New Age movement’s interest in Indigenous peoples’ spirituality.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Indigenous people increasingly gained recognition from Australian governments and society. The success of the 1967 referendum was evidence that the fate of Indigenous people mattered to other Australians. In 1992, the Mabo decision opened the way for Native Title claims. At the same time, school curricula

² YOUNG, Robert J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, *op. cit.* p. 153.

³ HODGE, Robert, “Aboriginal Truth and White Media: Eric Michaels Meets the Spirit of Aboriginalism”, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 1990, <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/readingroom/3.2/Hodge.html>, accessed on 29 May 2016.

started including new elements aimed at restoring a balance in the teachings of non-Indigenous and Indigenous histories and cultures.⁴ Cowlishaw called this period preceding the reconciliation era the 'recognition era'. Yet she also pointed out the limits of the new positive light in which Indigenous people were considered by non-Indigenous Australia. The interest developed for Indigeneity was only directed at traditional aspects of Indigeneity. This forced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to emphasise these particular aspects of their culture like "language, dance [and] religious rituals"⁵ which had previously been suppressed, and which were now revered.

In the post-Mabo and reconciliation era, the integration of Indigenous elements into Australians' everyday lives persisted, but mainly at a symbolic level, while stronger demands by Indigenous people were pushed aside or even clearly criticised. For example, following the 1992 Mabo decision, the government limited the possibility for Indigenous people to claim Native Title (see 2.1.5.8).

Today, the ambivalent vision of Indigenous people in Australia can still be found at several levels: for example, Indigenous people can sometimes be described as the original and 'true' Australians and yet as un-Australian⁶ when they ask for special rights. They are sometimes perceived as victims of disadvantage or as abusing the welfare state. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown in front of official buildings and acknowledging the traditional owners of a land is now common practice, yet this official recognition of the importance of the Indigenous component in the nation's identity does not mean that Indigenous people are not still regarded as being on the margins of Australian society.

The previous illustrations of ambivalence reveal that the non-Indigenous interest in Indigenous people and culture is limited to a selective and non-threatening set of

⁴ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Mythologising Culture, Part 2: Disturbing Aboriginality in the Suburbs", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 22, Issue 2, August 2011, p. 184.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 171.

⁶ The term 'un-Australian' has become increasingly used during the 1990s. It is supposed to be based on its American equivalent, 'un-American', which appeared in the 1950s during the Communist witch-hunt. Former Prime Minister John Howard popularised the word, using it as an accusation against political opponents. Ever since, the word has continued being used by people with various opinions to describe various attitudes considered contrary to Australian character and values.

representations of Indigeneity. These representations do not always take into account Indigenous people's definitions of themselves. Whether they are about rejection or desire, the influence of non-Indigenous Australia on the construction of discourses about Indigeneity remains significant. While mentioning the work of anthropologists, in the article previously cited, Hodge explained the concept of Aboriginalism, which, he wrote, silenced Indigenous people: "The foundation premise of Aboriginalism is the construction of Aborigines as 'primitive', in a binary opposition to 'civilised'. As primitives, they become an endlessly fascinating object of the White gaze, able to generate unlimited discourse but never able to participate in it on any terms."⁷ I believe that Hodge's statement can be qualified since Indigenous people, in their interactions with settlers and their descendants, have been able to participate in the conversation,⁸ although certainly not often on equal terms. However, one of the limits to the production of discourses by Indigenous people is that these discourses have often been developed as a reaction to non-Indigenous representations, in order to counter them. As I will show, today still, the reversed way in which Indigenous people are sometimes perceived – no longer rejected but revered – has not meant that it is now Indigenous people who define Indigeneity. Indeed, within the reconciliation discourse, some Indigenous voices and representations of Indigeneity count more than others, which are discarded.

The first problem attached to the notion of the desired Other, therefore, is that a positive vision of Indigeneity does not guarantee the freedom for Indigenous people to define themselves. This inevitably leads to a selection of representations of Indigeneity that Indigenous people do not control.

⁷ HODGE, Robert, "Aboriginal Truth and White Media: Eric Michaels Meets the Spirit of Aboriginalism", *op. cit.*

⁸ Homi Bhabha also attaches the concept of mimicry to that of ambivalence: "The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, 'mimic' the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be ambivalent or 'two-powered'. The effect of this ambivalence (the simultaneous attraction and repulsion) is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse."

ASHCROFT, Bill, GRIFFITHS, Gareth, TIFFIN, Helen, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 13.

A second issue ensuing from the first is that of appropriation. As the word 'desire' implies, the interest non-Indigenous Australians have experienced over time for Indigenous people has often originated in their own needs. In his article, Geoffrey Stokes quotes media worker Dot West who explains that discourses about Indigenous people serve to shape the definition of 'white' Australians: "Every time we're put down as savage or primitive or hopeless, white people are reassured that they are civilised, modern and successful. Aboriginal people are tired of being used as a sounding board for white society to bounce off ideas about its own identity."⁹ Therefore, the Other is needed as a counterpart for non-Indigenous Australians to express their identity. This also applies to positive descriptions of Indigeneity. Indeed, the attributes can be reversed: when primitiveness becomes synonymous with purity and an antidote to a corrupted modernity, the Indigenous Other still plays the role of counterpart to a then rejected Western identity. Therefore, when Indigenous identity is desired, the risk is that in order to build a positive identity for himself/herself, the non-Indigenous subject will appropriate Indigenous characteristics. What is problematic with the notion of appropriation is that it is not based on a relationship set up on equal terms, on sharing. It does not necessarily benefit the Indigenous people whose characteristics were appropriated and are therefore no longer theirs to control.

Both problems stem from the dominant position of non-Indigenous – and especially Anglo-Celtic – Australians, who, to a certain extent, retain the power of both shaping the definition of Indigeneity and of using it to their advantage rather than to that of Indigenous people, either consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, as I will show, it has been argued that even reconciliation can be understood as benefitting non-Indigenous Australians rather than Indigenous people.

⁹ STOKES, Geoffrey, "Citizenship and Aboriginality: Two Conceptions of Identity in Aboriginal Political Thought" in STOKES, Geoffrey (ed.), *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 159.

The same idea is present in Michael Dodson's 1994 speech: "Whether Indigenous people have been portrayed as "noble" or "ignoble", heroic or wretched has depended on what the colonising culture wanted to say or think about itself."

DODSON, Michael, "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality", *op. cit.*, p. 36.

In this chapter, I will study how Indigenous people have been constructed as desired Others by analysing three different ways of understanding this desire. First, Indigenous people can be desired because of the special status they have as original owners of the continent. Therefore, Indigenous culture is yearned for because it can provide a truer sense of belonging to Australia. This is a desire for indigenisation. Secondly, I argue that while indigenisation is based on a logic of sameness – non-Indigenous Australians want to belong in the same way as Indigenous people – there is another form of desire for Indigenous culture and it is based on difference. Within this perspective, sameness comes to stand for a ‘mainstream’ Australian society which is no longer desirable but considered empty of meaning, something Indigenous difference can bring back. This is a desire for a form of exoticism. I will show that both forms of desire can coexist in a typical display of ambivalence. I will finally study the reconciliation discourse as yet another form of desire experienced for Indigenous people and therefore as a discourse which, like the others, can work in favour of non-Indigenous Australians rather than Indigenous people.

5.1 Longing for Belonging

All nationalisms are constructed as ‘imagined’ communities’. However, given its short history as an uncomfortable federation, and the multiplication of ethnicities with increasingly more diverse migrant intakes, Australia faces greater than usual challenges to construct a credible unifying narrative. (...) Rather than existing as a ‘genuine’ entity springing forth from a common territory, shared ancestry, values and struggles, Australian identity was something to manufacture as shown by the intense debate over the writing of Australian history.¹⁰

Hollinsworth’s mention of Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” is another reminder of the fact that identities, those of Indigenous or ‘white’ people, individual or national, are constructs.¹¹ In the case of the Australian national identity, as Hollinsworth writes, the construction of national unity is made difficult for several reasons,

¹⁰ HOLLINSWORTH, David, *Race and Racism in Australia*, op. cit., p. 162.

¹¹ Following this idea and relevant to this topic is Richard White’s introduction to *Inventing Australia*: “When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve.”

WHITE, Richard, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1788-1980*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981, p. vii.

not only the growing ethnic diversity resulting from immigration but also the colonial past and the unresolved differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Australians have always had an ambivalent relationship with the original inhabitants of the continent whose presence needed to be erased in order to create a new settler identity. But at the same time, it was also believed that the key to true belonging lay in the appropriation of the Indigenous thousand-year-old culture and knowledge of the land. Thus was born an impossible relationship to Indigenous people, both rejected and desired, a relationship Avril Bell, following Alan Lawson, thus explained:

[T]he settler's simultaneous denial of, and dependence on, the presence of indigeneity means that these dreams of replacing the indigene as 'first people' (authentic and authorized) can never be fulfilled. The need, then, is to displace the other rather than to replace him; but the other must remain to signify the boundary of the self, to confirm the subjectivity of the invader-settler.¹²

Thus, while Indigenous peoples and cultures must be retained in order to play the counterpart to Australians' identity, selective representations keep them at a safe distance, locked away in both time and space, in a traditional past and in the remote outback.¹³ As I have showed in 4.2.3.2, another way of keeping Indigenous people away is by refusing – consciously or not – to interact with them on a deeper level than the symbolic one which is the only one many non-Indigenous Australians know.

5.1.1 The Essential Connection between Indigeneity and the Land

It is not the 'banal'¹⁴ Indigenous Australian – who often remains unknown and uninteresting – who is an object of desire, but the one constructed through discourses presenting Indigenous people as the bearers of an ancient and untouched culture, of a deep spiritual link with the land, to which non-Indigenous Australians do not have access. In 1923, English novelist D. H. Lawrence described the mysterious Australian landscape.

¹² LAWSON, Alan quoted in BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 103.

¹³ The notion of Indigenous authenticity associated with time and place will be the object of chapter 7.

¹⁴ As Alan McKee writes in "'The Aboriginal version of Ken Done...' Banal Aboriginality in Australia", *op. cit.*

[T]he landscape is so unimpressive, like a face with little or no features, a dark face. It is so aboriginal, out of our ken, and it hangs back so aloof. Somers always felt he looked at it through a cleft in the atmosphere; as one looks at one of the ugly-faced, distorted aborigines with his wonderful dark eyes that have such an incomprehensible ancient shine in them, across gulfs of unbridged centuries. And yet, when you don't have the feeling of ugliness or monotony, in landscape or in nigger, you get a sense of subtle, remote, FORMLESS beauty more poignant than anything ever experienced before.¹⁵

Lawrence captured an ambivalent feeling, made of incomprehension, aversion and fascination, which his characters felt when confronted with the Indigenous landscape and people. The landscape is compared to the faces of the aborigines as if the two formed a single, inseparable entity. This idea is still strongly present partly because, in the face of colonial appropriation, Indigenous people have constantly emphasised the important relationship they have to their land. However, what Lawrence's description shows is less the meaningful connection between the people and their land than the blending of the two in the eyes of the non-Indigenous travellers.¹⁶ As is revealed by the presence of a traditional-looking Indigenous man – featured on the two-dollar coin and placed at the same level as native animals like kangaroos or platypuses on other Australian coins – it can be argued that the desire experienced for Indigenous people stems from their link to the land, to nature, more than from a desire to interact with actual Indigenous people in everyday life.

Lawrence described both Indigenous landscape and people as “aloof”, incomprehensible, something that is reminiscent of the distant way I have described earlier in which Indigenous people are desired. They are described as “aloof” and “aboriginal” –

¹⁵ LAWRENCE, D. H., *Kangaroo*, quoted in MCLEAN, Ian, “Aboriginalism: White Aborigines and Australian Nationalism”, *Australian Humanities Review*, 1998, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-1998/mclean.html>, accessed on 30 May 2016.

¹⁶ Anthony Moran quoted Paul Carter's work on colonisation to make a similar point. He argued that in the published narratives of early explorers of the Australian continent, “Aboriginality was erased from the landscape. (...) Carter echoes Frantz Fanon who argued that colonizers do not take stock of the colonized as men and women, but treat them as part of the natural landscape, i.e. ‘as the *natural* background to the human presence’ of the colonizers, so that taming nature means taming the native.” CARTER, Paul and FANON, Frantz quoted in, MORAN, Anthony, “As Australia Decolonizes: Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/Indigenous Relations”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 6, 2002, p. 1023.

alien. This way of apprehending Indigenous people is also perceptible in today's discourses about them. It is reinforced by some Indigenous people's emphasis on "incommensurable difference[s]"¹⁷ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

From the analysis of this extract from Lawrence's novel, three points can be made which can be applied to today's Australian society: first, it seems difficult for non-Indigenous people to relate to Indigenous people and to the Australian land. This is the reason why, paradoxically, Indigenous people can be desired: they are the key to achieving proper belonging in Australia. The second point is that, ensuing this, Indigenous people are perceived as intrinsically linked to the land. This can be problematic when this relationship becomes the only signification Indigenous people acquire in the eyes of non-Indigenous Australians – thus, it is common to hear that the only 'real' Indigenous people are the ones living a traditional life on their lands. This prevents a more complex perception of Indigeneity in today's Australia. Thirdly, the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the aloofness which is said to characterise the relationship between them is thus reinforced, preventing both groups from appreciating their commonalities¹⁸ but also non-Indigenous people from ever truly belonging to the Australian continent.

Indeed, in 1997, Andrew Lattas described a feeling of alienation from the land experienced by non-Indigenous Australians and which is close to D.H. Lawrence's depiction:

As foreigner in an alien landscape, white Australians are seen to be removed from that realm of Indigenous primordial truths the land can offer the nation. They emerge as figures who lack a spiritual sense of belonging to the land, of possessing the land. Reconciliation with the spirituality of Aboriginal people is

¹⁷ MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, "I still Call Australia Home': Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society" in, AHMED, Sara (ed.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003.

¹⁸ Gillian Cowlishaw evoked the danger coming from "the populist separatist rhetoric that implies Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have no overlapping experience, intention or desire, because their histories are entirely different. (...) It promotes a false unity and homogeneity within each category." COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Racial Positioning, Privilege and Public Debate", *op. cit.*, p. 65.

posited as the means for healing that sense of being lost in space which is seen as being at the heart of the alienation belonging to settler society.¹⁹

Lattas theorised an “experience of the self as lacking in subjectivity, as lacking in spiritual form”²⁰ previously expressed, for instance, by Australian historian Manning Clark who, in 1988, when Australia celebrated the bicentenary of the arrival of the first fleet at Botany Bay, wrote: “I wonder whether I belong. (...) We white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien.”²¹

In her analysis of Peter Read’s *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Linn Miller explains that

romanticism has created an Australian consciousness in which Aboriginality is rendered as the emotional icon for belonging. Without this support, non-Indigenous Australians are then left with no adequate discourse by which to conceive and describe their attachment to land. (...) [R]omantic portrayals of Aboriginal attachments to the land [have become] superlative.²²

While her statement deplores the lack of positive discourses allowing non-Indigenous Australians to express a sense of belonging (her aim, as well as Read’s, is to develop a model of belonging which could include all Australians), I believe that it can also be linked to the paucity of positive representations of Indigeneity. As I stated, the desired Indigene is indeed the one whose link to the land is what non-Indigenous Australians lack and seek. This means that Indigenous people who do not fit this romantic portrayal are considered less authentic. Thus, the inherent link between Indigeneity and a unique relationship to the land could be problematic for people like the participants in this study. Indeed, I wondered

¹⁹ LATTAS, Andrew, “Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness” in, COWLISHAW, Gillian, MORRIS, Barry, *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and ‘Our’ Society*, Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997, p. 228.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 233.

²¹ CLARK, Manning quoted in READ, Peter, “A Haunted Land No Longer? Changing Relationships to a Spiritualised Australia”, *Australian Book Review*, Issue 265, October 2004, p. 29.

²² MILLER, Linn, “Longing for Belonging: A Critical Essay on Peter Read’s *Belonging*”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2003, p. 409.

to what extent they could relate to this description of Indigeneity and to what extent they had experienced this relationship to the land.²³

I will now look at the links between Indigeneity, land and belonging in the participants' discourses to try and understand how the participants relate to them.

Delphine Do you feel more, less, or differently Australian because you've got Aboriginal heritage?

Adina *I feel like I have more legitimacy to be here when Tony Abbott starts talking about immigration! (...) When everyone says, "Oh, everyone should go back to where they come from", I think that that would be an awfully long way away, and I'm not sure I can find it because it's, you know, 40,000 years ago or whatever. I like the fact that I can't be measured. Like, people say, "Oh, my family comes from Cork and they left there in 1968." Fabulous. I've got no idea; I love that, that it can't be defined as a time period. I mean, I know my German heritage, that we're Lutherans who fled, and I know my French heritage; we're Huguenots who fled. We always seem to be leaving one damn country to flee to another one. (...) Aboriginal, I don't have that. (...) We didn't come here in chains, or on a boat fleeing something else. It's kind of neat having that.*

Several participants liked the idea that their ancestors were not immigrants like all other Australians. Thus, although they acknowledged that Indigenous people have a special link to the Australian continent, this was more due to their prior ownership of it, and to the number of years they have been here rather than to a spiritual connection non-Indigenous people do not possess. Following Adina's comment, Miriam explained that prior ownership made her feel more legitimate in calling herself Australian because "the native Australians were there first" (although she also later dissociated the word Australian from her identity because she linked it to colonial power).

Beyond this sense of legitimacy drawn from prior ownership, the participants also used the discourse of attachment to the land which they grew up learning about. Both Michelle and Josh explained that they felt a strong link to the Australian land.

²³ I shall come back to the problem of restricting definitions of Indigeneity in the second and third part of this thesis.

Delphine Have you ever thought that your attachment to the land is connected to you being part Aboriginal?

Josh *Yeah definitely. My mother has told me the same thing.*

Michelle who now lives in one of the Paris suburbs, in a very urban environment, emitted the idea that her love for the rural area where she had grown up was linked to her Indigenous heritage.

Michelle *Every now and then, I wonder if the reason why I believe in a particular way is not because of my Aboriginal heritage, even if it hasn't been communicated to me directly. (...) Like, I've always said, "I need to live by the river", because I've always grown up by the river. In Australia, we went fishing down the river all the time. It was something that was an essential part of who I was. And here in France, I really have a problem with that, not being by the river. And when I go home, the first thing I do is go to Murray River, because to me [it] is home. (...) It's not so much that I identify with the town I come from, but I come from the Murray. And those sorts of things, I think, are more Aborigine than, say, a white person who would say, "I come from a particular town."*

Michelle grew up without knowing that she had Indigenous heritage. It is only retrospectively that she realised that several elements could indicate it was present in her family – such as going to the bush with her father to look for witchetty grub or being chosen to attend Indigenous classes at school. In the same way, it is now she lives in a city that she reflects on her love for the Murray River and associates it with an Indigenous way of experiencing the land, which is different from the 'white' attachment to a town. It is interesting to see that she follows the traditional representation of an Indigeneity located in a rural and natural setting whereas the 'white' person is presented as coming from a town. She depicts her attachment to the river as somehow stronger than a 'white' person's attachment to their town. Indeed, she describes her love for the river as "an essential part" of herself, thus following the discourse which binds Indigenous people to their land in an essential way non-Indigenous people cannot experience.

Adam also described the strong link he felt he had with the place where he had grown up. Adam grew up knowing about his Indigenous heritage and embracing it. Like Michelle, he does not know whether his love of the land is a consequence of his being Indigenous or

if he feels this connection because land and Indigeneity are commonly associated by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Adam *When I come back to Australia, wow, it's like... I'm not a spiritual person in any sense, but wow, the feeling that I get when I fly into this country is phenomenal.*

Delphine But do you link this to Aboriginality?

Adam *I do. And whether it is or not is not important. In my mind, it is. And so, to me, it's a strong association, it's like...just coming home. I don't know how else to describe it. It just feels right. I fly over Sydney harbour, and the look of...oh, such a beautiful harbour, and such a wonderful place. And even here, Western Sydney, as fucked up as it is in some ways, it's...it's my place. It's made me who I am. (...) And feeling that this land is...is mine. Not mine in the sense of a white person talking about the land, but... It's not the same, because it's not mine. I don't own it, but it's me. (...) It's always hard to describe. This is an Aboriginal thing, but that's how it feels: this is the land that made me. This is the land that grew me. Because you're part of it. It's not something separate from me; it is me.*

Adam's description echoes Michelle's: for both of them, the Australian land is considered home. Adam's words also echo the familiar distinction made between the 'white' and Indigenous ways of understanding the land: on the one hand, the land is owned, on the other it owns the people who live on it.²⁴ Moreover, Adam states that although he is not a spiritual person, spirituality seems to be present in this homecoming feeling, something that is also traditionally part of the Indigenous people's relationship to the land discourse. However, Adam's description also departs from the conventional association of Indigeneity with a rural or outback setting since Sydney and its Western suburbs are where he feels he belongs.

Whether the strong feelings experienced for the land where they come from originate in the participants' Indigenous heritage or in their absorption of the discourse delineating an essential link between Indigenous people and the Australian land, this discourse clearly

²⁴ For instance, this difference is expressed in Indigenous director Rachel Perkins' musical *One Night the Moon* in which a 'white' Australian's vision of his land clashes with that of the Aboriginal tracker: "This land is mine, all the way to the old fence line; every break of day I'm working hard just to make it pay/ This land is me, rock, water, animal, tree; they are my song; my being's here where I belong." PERKINS, Rachel, *One Night the Moon*, Dendy Films, 2001.

still has currency in today's Australia. As I said, the importance of the land in Indigenous culture was mentioned by almost all participants. Thus, Kate, who was in the process of reconnecting with her Indigenous heritage when I interviewed her, expected she would experience this connection once she had acquired more knowledge about her background. I find interesting the way she seemed to anticipate that the process of researching her ancestors' culture would transform her feelings and vision of the land and, in a way, indigenise her.²⁵

Kate *I think it's once I've found out more about the culture, I might feel more tied to the land, and I think the country of Australia itself will have more of a significant effect...because I know that the land, you know, being caretakers of the land is so important to the Indigenous culture and is such a big part of it. I think that the land itself will have more meaning, and I might feel more tied to one particular place.*

5.1.1.1 Indigenisation and Appropriation

In his study of the appropriation of Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous Australians, and its effects on Indigenous people and on the definition of Indigeneity, Mitchell Rolls²⁶ gave the example of the Reed Publishing House.

[It] has produced many popular books purporting to contain authentic Aboriginal myths, legends, fables and stories. (...) However, the "beautiful and amusing" "tales" contained within these books have a function to play beyond the level of mere interest or entertainment. According to the introduction of *Myths and Legends of Australia* (1965) – which appears unchanged in the 1994 edition (...) they are to assist the growth of non-Aboriginal roots into the Australian soil. Reed asserts: "We shall not put our roots into the soil until we have incorporated their [Aboriginal] folklore into the Indigenous literature of

²⁵ However, Kate also said later in the interview that learning more about her heritage "is not going to change how I function day to day, or change what I do. It just might give me a better insight into why specific days, for example, are important like why Reconciliation week is important, and all that sort of things. So I just hope to learn more, but I don't think it's going to change anything."

²⁶ See also ROLLS, Mitchell, "Black Spice for White Lives: A Review Essay", *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, January 2000, pp. 149-161.

FURPHY, Sam, "Aboriginal House Names and Settler Australian Identity", *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 72, 2002, pp. 59-68.

MCLEAN, Ian, "Aboriginalism: White Aborigines and Australian Nationalism", *op. cit.*

the southern continent, and can see the land through the eyes of the primitive.”²⁷

The discourse about the need to indigenise settlers can be traced back, as Rolls explained, to the Jindyworobak literary movement founded by Rex Ingamells in 1937 and which attempted to create an essentially Australian culture by appropriating ‘authentic’ Indigenous motifs. Australian painter Margaret Preston who illustrated some of the movement’s publications urged “that Aboriginal art become the foundation and inspiration of a modern national Australian art.”²⁸ In his analysis of the way the movement operated, Sam Furphy explained that

Ingamells did not believe that there were any ethical dilemmas involved in the appropriation of indigenous names and argued that: '[s]ince most Australian Aboriginal speech has passed for ever, never to be spoken again in proper dialect, here are simply memorials that may be freely used and may fitly lend colour to our transplanted European life in this country.'²⁹

The appropriation of Indigenous symbols was not regarded as such since it was believed that Indigenous people – and their languages and cultures – were doomed to extinction and that their symbols would be bequeathed to settlers, who could use them to “lend colour” to a settler Australian culture in need of distinctiveness. Naming the process of incorporating Indigenous cultural elements into the non-Indigenous culture without Indigenous people’s consent did not stop the urge to appropriate such elements. In their attempts to understand how Indigenous people have reacted and continue to deal with the New Age³⁰ appropriation of Indigenous symbols, David Waldron and Janice Newton described the way in which Australian New Agers understand appropriation today:

²⁷ REED, A. W. quoted in, ROLLS, Mitchell, “The Making of “Our Place”: Settler Australians, Cultural Appropriation, and the Quest for Home”, *Antithesis*, Vol. 10, 1999, p. 124.

²⁸ PRESTON, Margaret quoted in MCLEAN, Ian, “Aboriginalism: White Aborigines and Australian Nationalism”, *op. cit.*

²⁹ INGAMELLS, Rex quoted in FURPHY, Sam, “Aboriginal House Names and Settler Australian Identity”, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁰ The New Age movement covers a range of spiritual or religious beliefs and practices which developed in Western countries in the 1970s. The movement notably found its inspiration in the cultures of Indigenous peoples around the world.

[They] took on a specific view of history, looking for the “heart” and “warm glow of hope” rather than facts. They did not take an objective-historical approach to the re-appropriation of the past but pursued “subjective interpretations and sometimes invention about something which [they know] little can be said or proved but which feels right to them.”³¹

The people I interviewed were well-aware of the potential offense they could cause Indigenous people if they identified as Indigenous but did not possess the seemingly required characteristics – including the right knowledge. In spite of having confirmed Indigenous heritage – which was not the case of the New Agers in the article – the participants often thought that they were not entitled to claim Indigenous cultural elements without being immersed in Indigenous culture and lifestyle. I will explain their concerns with legitimacy in more details in the second part of this thesis. Nevertheless, several participants mentioned that they enjoyed knowing they had a connection to Indigenous culture.

Josh explained to me how he had sometimes mimicked Indigenous people such as the ones he had watched perform traditional dances in front of the Parliament House in Canberra.

Josh *Dave, one of my good mates, he's a musician. He plays the didgeridoo, and we used to muck around when we lived together. We'd have pretend corroborees, and he'd play the didge and the clap sticks, and I'd dance. And it wasn't anything official: we didn't know what we were doing, but we were just having a bit of fun, I suppose. Some people thought it was racist but...to us it wasn't. (...) Yeah, I don't know. Just enjoying ourselves.*

The fact that Josh feels the need to add that imitating Indigenous ceremonies was not racist shows he is aware that it can be perceived as such, as a form of appropriation or mockery of Indigenous culture. He defends his actions by adding that he did not know what he was doing and that this was only a game. As I said, most of the participants felt uncomfortable embracing Indigenous culture since they did not feel Indigenous enough.

³¹ WALDRON, David, NEWTON, Janice, “Rethinking Appropriation of the Indigenous: A Critique of the Romanticist Approach”, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 16, No. 2, November 2012, p. 77.

A similar example is Michelle's story about her Dreamtime animal.

Michelle *I had a dream one night – and that sounds very stupid, (...) I know – I had a dream one night about a platypus. So I got up the next day, and I needed to paint this platypus. And it still sits here today because I consider that as my Dreamtime animal. I know that sounds very stupid.*

The fact that it sounds stupid to Michelle is linked, I believe, to the fact that she identifies as a “white Australian” and therefore is unsure whether she is entitled to Indigenous experiences like having a Dreamtime animal. Earlier, Michelle explained that she thought it would be “offensive (...) to Aborigines who are aware of their culture” to get extra points and go to university by declaring she was Indigenous. She said, “I don't have any links to the culture.” Therefore, she seems to assume that feeling Indigenous in some ways – like having a Dreamtime animal – while living a ‘white’ life is a form of illegitimate appropriation of Indigenous culture.

Andrew, on the other hand, adopts a broader definition of Indigeneity, which is reminiscent of the description of the New Agers' feelings towards Indigenous culture.

Andrew *I've got friends that aren't Indigenous at all but who really identify with Aboriginality or Australian Indigenous views. It's almost a religion³² for them, and kind of their engagement with the earth.*

In the same way as Waldron and Newton argued that Indigenous people did not necessarily reject New Age romantic images of their cultures and sometimes also used them, Jane Mulcock found that Indigenous people could be willing to ‘indigenise’ non-Indigenous people by introducing them to the law of their land.³³ Going against the idea of an “incommensurable difference” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, the point of view adopted by Andrew's friend shows an appreciation of Indigenous culture at a

³² The feeling of being alienated from the land described by Andrew Lattas is linked to sacredness in David Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*. In this book Tacey writes that “by virtue of [a split between the spiritual land and the secular Australian experience manifested along racial lines], white Australians are denied access to sacredness (especially the sacredness of the land).”

TACEY, David J., *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, Melbourne: Harper Collins, 2000, p. 8.

³³ MULCOCK, Jane, “Dreaming the Circle: Indigeneity and the Longing for Belonging in White Australia” in MACFARLANE, Ingereth, HANNAH, Mark (eds), *Transgressions*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2007, pp. 63-82.

more general level. The relationship Indigenous people have with their land becomes an “engagement with the earth”. The relationship is thus reduced to a more general way of perceiving nature, to a sort of ecological understanding of Indigenous people’s connection with their land. I will come back to this as I explain how the desire for Indigenous culture can be perceived as a need to move away from a Western society regarded as corrupted (5.3.1). For now, I would like to come back to Jane Mulcock’s conclusions. I mentioned the article to Adam who reacted to it in this way:

Delphine You know, I’ve read an article about a group of white women who (...) looked at their family trees to find Aboriginal heritage in them, and couldn’t.

Adam *That’s so the opposite!*

Delphine Because they feel that their attachment to the land – they’ve been in Australia for generations –

Adam *Maybe they do have an attachment to the land.*

Delphine But they feel that it’s not...as legitimate as...

Adam *So they’ve got to have that genetic attachment to the land! Honestly, I find this genetic thing quite funny. I don’t even have the feeling that I need to pass my genetics on. (...) I don’t get why you need to have a genetic attachment in order to feel like you are part of something. I do...but in the end the cultural stuff is far more important. I don’t even know if the genetics matter.*

Adam thus moves away from the ever-present biological description of identity in Australia – especially Indigenous identity – to emphasise the place of culture. This is also what Kate did when she said that only a better understanding of culture could help her become more Indigenous. Adam seems to agree with the idea that experiencing attachment to the land is not dependent on having Indigenous heritage. However, he also said in a previous quote about Sydney that he chose to believe that his personal attachment was linked to his Indigeneity. This hesitation is common: overall, the participants who experienced a special link to the land seemed to hesitate about its origin. It can be argued that they were caught between two discourses. The first one is the old but still potent

discourse linking Indigeneity and land in an essential way, which is different from the way 'white' people relate to the land – which prompted Michelle and Adam to compare their experience to that of 'white' people. The second discourse advocates an opening of the definition of belonging, which would allow non-Indigenous Australians to experience it as well.

Since Josh had previously mentioned the importance for him of the Australian land, I asked him if he had ever connected this attachment to his Indigenous heritage.

Josh *Yeah, definitely. My mother has told me the same thing. However, why do I feel like that but not my siblings? Other white Australians probably feel the same way. (...) I guess I feel like that because I've always been here.*

Again, there seems to be some kind of hesitation in Josh's mind about the origin of this feeling of attachment. In saying that the reason why he feels attached to the Australian land is because it is the place where he grew up, Josh does not really reject the link between Indigeneity and the land but rather redefines what it means to be Indigenous. At some point during the interview, he actually questioned the meaning of the term: "I mean, what makes you Indigenous? It would be the question raised here".

In *Place, Belonging and Nativeness in Australia*, David Trigger actually argued that the term "Indigenous" should be the object of more attention by academics and that it may be necessary to "break the nexus between 'Indigeneity' and an exclusively Aboriginal identity."³⁴ Trigger's and Josh's points of view is echoed by Andrew's.

Andrew *The idea that I have more claim, or more ties, or feelings towards Australia, I don't think is there in the sense that I've been brought up with the same cultural or spiritual ties to the earth and Australia as more traditional Australians. (...) If my parents were from Australia and I was born and raised in France for instance, I would have the same feelings towards France: that's all that I've known, and this is where I belong, where I have my ties.*

³⁴ TRIGGER, David, "Place, Belonging and Nativeness in Australia" in VANCLAY, Frank, HIGGINS, Matthew, BLACKSHAW, Adam, *Making Sense of Place: Exploring Concepts and Expressions of Place through Different Senses and Lenses*, Canberra, ACT: National Museum of Australia Press, 2008, p. 306.

Here it is the notion of belonging Andrew discusses. Josh and Andrew's interpretation of it – as a feeling depending on the place where one was raised – tends to show that they are Australians who feel at home in their country and who do not experience the alienation described by Lattas at the beginning of this section. In 2004, Read argued in "A Haunted Land No Longer?" that the anxiety felt by 'white' Australians regarding their right and possibility to ever belong in Australia was now fading.³⁵

It seems that non-Aborigines are now less concerned than they were two decades ago to parallel or appropriate Aboriginal spiritual place belonging. (...) [T]o return to the Aboriginal critic Sue Stanton: 'The true measure of belonging will only come when non-Aboriginal Australians have confidence in their own identity, and celebrate it.'³⁶

The association between Indigeneity and the land remains important in the participants' representations, and the influence of the discourse linking land and Indigeneity is still obvious. They enjoy knowing that their ancestors were the first inhabitants of Australia. However, they do not seem to feel very strongly about the part played by their Indigenous heritage in their sense of belonging to the Australian land. It is rather to the concept of multiculturalism that their sense of belonging seems attached.

As I explained in chapter 3, the participants' understanding of the policy of multiculturalism as based on tolerance and on the right for everyone to experience belonging in Australia seemed more important than their Indigenous attachment to the continent. To the participants, multiculturalism may be the core element of this confident identity mentioned by Sue Stanton. However, this point of view also depends on the degree to which the participants are involved with their Indigenous heritage. Casey who refuses to call himself Australian defends a specific identity for First-Nations (his choice of words) people. Casey did not deny the right for non-Indigenous people to belong.³⁷ However, it seems clear from the articles he published that the two forms of

³⁵ READ, Peter, "A Haunted Land No Longer? Changing Relationships to a Spiritualised Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Casey also identifies with his 'white' New-Zealander (Pakeha) heritage: "I was born in New Zealand; I have Pakeha heritage. I'm a proud First Nations man and my tribe is the Anaiwan people" is how he defined himself.

belonging are separate. Indeed, Casey denounces the use of denominations such as “Indigenous Australian” or “Aboriginal Australian” because to him, they denote an attempt from the Australian government to assimilate Indigenous people in the same way as it aims to convince them that their identity and interests lie within ‘mainstream’ Australian society. In his advocacy of self-determination, Casey’s point of view meets those of people fearing that the discourse of shared belonging and of reconciliation might not benefit Indigenous people.³⁸

Some questions can be raised: is it not only possible for the participants to be inclusive in their definition of belonging because, as Hage wrote, their dominant position as ‘white’ Australians allows them to define the terms on which belonging can occur? Moreover, in so doing, do they run the risk of denying Indigenous people an exclusive spiritual link to the Australian land, which – although it may have a restricting effect on the definition of Indigeneity – remains an important criterion of definition for many Indigenous people? The participants’ concerns over the question of legitimacy indicates that they know, in spite of their open understanding of belonging, that appropriation of Indigenous people’s relationship to the land or other elements of their culture is problematic. Thus, Jane Mulcock, despite having experienced the sharing of cultures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians writes

When someone (...) suggests that it is possible to truly belong to a place regardless of Indigenous heritage, she or he steps across an invisible boundary that carries considerable political currency and is rigorously defended by those who would like it to be impermeable.³⁹

³⁸ Thus, Mitchell Rolls states that “As this interest in Aborigines and their cultures is precipitated by a sense of crises, be they personal, social, national, environmental, whatever, it tends towards being acquisitive and exploitative. The interest is not in working collaboratively with Aborigines to assist in the realisation of equity and justice, but in finding within Aboriginal cultures the answers to our needs, wants and desires.” ROLLS, Mitchell, “The Making of “Our Place”: Settler Australians, Cultural Appropriation, and the Quest for Home”, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

³⁹ MULCOCK, Jane, “Dreaming the Circle: Indigeneity and the Longing for Belonging in White Australia”, *op. cit.* p. 74.

5.2 Longing for Difference

Whereas the desire for indigenisation, for belonging in Australia in the way Indigenous people do, is based on a desire for sameness, I believe that the attraction for Indigenous people and cultures also comes from a need to be different. This seems especially true in an age when the white Anglo-Celtic culture is losing originality and even purpose in a society now defined by multiculturalism. Indigenous heritage can be seen as a sort of remedy to this devaluation of the white Anglo-Celtic identity. Whereas before, when someone had Indigenous heritage, he/she was considered tainted, having received 'a touch of the tar brush',⁴⁰ it is now sometimes considered 'exotic' to be able to claim Indigenous ancestry. This is what Marcia Langton hints at as she ponders the reasons why Sally Morgan's novel *My Place* became so successful:

Could the attraction be (...) that *My Place* raises the possibility that the reader might also find with a little sleuthing in the family tree, an Aboriginal ancestor? This indeed would be a startling perception. Yes, Morgan raises the possibility for the reader that he or she would thus acquire the genealogical, even biological ticket ('my great-great grandmother was Aboriginal') to enter the world of primitivism.⁴¹

Megan's analysis of the reasons why Indigenous heritage is now desired resonates with Langton's theory.

Megan *I think it's something real, isn't it? In this society of immigrants. (...) It's something to latch onto. It's a genuine Australian experience I guess. And that's why it's enjoyable to be able to say that now.*

The expression "to latch onto" echoes Langton's critical description of people trying to acquire a "biological ticket". "The world of primitivism" mentioned by Langton has its roots in the myth of the noble savage, the counterpart to the description of the ignoble savage I analysed in chapter 4.

⁴⁰ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., p. 4.

⁴¹ LANGTON, Marcia, "Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...": *An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

I will first analyse what perceiving Indigenous people as noble savages entails, before showing how this myth remains present in the vision of Indigeneity in today's Australia.

5.2.1 The Noble Savage

The 'noble savage' (...) acquired sociological status [when] in 1789, the French philosopher Rousseau produced an account of his ideal form of society: simple, unsophisticated man living in a state of Nature, unfettered by laws, government, property, or social divisions.⁴²

Explorer James Cook seemed to carry with him Rousseau's innocent depiction when he landed on the Australian continent. In September 1770, he described the living conditions of the Australian Indigenous people he had met.

[The Natives of New-Holland] are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniencies so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquility which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all the things necessary for life. (...) [T]hey seem'd to set no Value upon any thing we gave them, nor would they ever part with any thing of their own for any one article we could offer them; this in my opinion argues that they think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life and that they have no superfluities.⁴³

Martine Piquet argues that the myth of the noble savage did not have a very strong influence in the Australian colonies: the settlers who came to the continent were more attuned to the ideas of seventeenth century philosophers such as Hobbes or Locke than to those of the Enlightenment period. Moreover, the sexual promiscuity and laziness exhibited by Indigenous people was regarded as an affront to Christian morality rather than perceived linked to an innocent state of nature.⁴⁴ However, if traces of the negative vision of Indigenous people mentioned here are still present in today's representations, I argue

⁴² HALL, Stuart, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power", *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁴³ COOK, James, in EDWARDS, Philip (ed.), *James Cook: The Journals*, London, New York et al: Penguin Books, 1999 and 2003, e-book.

⁴⁴ PIQUET, Martine, *Australie plurielle*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

that the benevolent description of Indigenous people found in the noble savage discourse is also part of the way they are perceived today.

As Langton's quote showed, the notion of "primitivism" placing Indigenous Australians at the bottom of the ladder of evolution and constructing them as uncivilised, can be flipped to reveal a positive side. Thus, being primitive is no longer constructed as a lack, but as a choice to live in a simpler way, closer to nature. Within this representation, the elements of civilisation Indigenous people seemed to lack – a work ethic, an ability to make the land productive – are now perceived as complications brought about by a Western lifestyle. Thus, Cook's description tends to imply that Indigenous people did not even need to work on the land since "the Earth and sea *of their own accord* furnishes them with all the things necessary for Life." Therefore, Indigenous people were both rejected and desired for their simplicity. Note that it does not ensue from this positive view of primitiveness that Indigenous people, at the time of colonisation, were considered equal to Europeans. The observers of this more innocent way of life expressed a longing for an earlier stage in the development of humanity, a time when the world was less complex. This earlier stage was considered inferior to the degree of civilisation reached by Westerners. Although it is now known that no such stage of development existed – the hunting and gathering model used by Indigenous people was simply different from the agricultural one developed in Europe – the image of Indigenous people living in harmony with the land remains a strong one in today's Western societies.

Megan who talked about Indigeneity as "a genuine Australian experience" thus completed her representation of it:

Megan *My friends, a lot of them value...connectedness, I guess, like, Native American things, and that's very earthy and genuine.*

The connectedness Megan refers to is evocative of the link Indigenous people have with the land. This is a characteristic Megan attributes to different Indigenous peoples. The term "earthy" reinforces the perception that Indigenous people live closer to nature than

non-Indigenous people. This is a more “genuine” relationship to the earth, one that Westerners seem to have lost, to a certain degree.

The following extract from Adina’s interview further reveals the ongoing presence of the discourse of the noble savage in today’s Australia.

Adina *When you look out the window, and you see the mountains, and you know that that's where you want to be most of all; (...) my family don't at all have that feeling. My family are not nature lovers. (...) [My mother] doesn't care what leaves feel like, or the different stages they go through; she doesn't feel them through her hands. I feel that. And when we were little, we used to live near the national park, and that's where I'd be, 90 percent of my time, standing on the waterfalls. And they have some Aboriginal paintings there, and tracing them with my fingers and wondering about the people and stuff. She doesn't feel anything like that. Neither does my father. (...) I know we feel different things. And I didn't know where that came from. And I don't know whether that's Aboriginal, or whether it's because I really, really like mountains so very much. But I know that that's there somewhere, and my son feels it.*

Adina’s description of her love of nature is very similar to that of Michelle who described her connection to the Murray River. Like the other participants I quoted, Adina wonders if this might be linked to her Indigenous heritage. I think that beyond the discourse binding Indigenous people to the Australian land lies a more general reference to the myth of the noble savage celebrating a closer relationship to the natural world from where we all come but have strayed. Indeed, contrary to Michelle or Adam, Adina does not refer to a specific place to which she feels connected. Indigenous people emphasise the link to the land where they come from because they believe this is the place where their ancestors, where their Dreaming reside, and that, therefore, they have a responsibility to take care of it. But Adina’s description seems to englobe nature as a whole. She describes “what leaves feel like”, “the waterfalls”, “the mountains”. Although Adina would like to visit the place where her community is from and considers it important because it is “the soil”, she mentioned to me that she would not particularly like living there.

Adina *I don't like sand at the beach, I can't imagine...! When I found out that the tribe I came from...God, that was a surprise, I said, "I don't even like the sand!"*

The simple connection to the natural world described by James Cook and hinted at by Adina is something that is still very present in the representation not only of Indigeneity, but also of Australian identity in tourism advertisements. Whether it is its urban beach culture, its atypical flora and fauna or its outback, nature is presented as a core part of the Australian experience. A 2008 *Tourism Australia* commercial directed by Baz Luhrmann once again emphasised the strong link between Indigenous people and the natural world through a re-enactment of the myth of the noble savage. The commercial starts on a rainy night in a large Western city where we follow an overworked businesswoman. An Indigenous boy – who played 'half-caste' Nullah in Luhrmann's film *Australia* – is barefoot in the rain and follows the woman while whispering: "Sometimes, we have to get lost to find ourselves. Sometimes, we gotta go walkabout." As red glittering sand trickles through his fingers into her hand like fairy dust, the woman finds herself in the Australian outback, swimming in a billabong. The caption ending the commercial reads: "She arrived as Ms K. Mathieson, Executive VP of Sales. She departed as Kate." The message could not be clearer: in order to find our true selves, we have to go back to a simpler state of being which can only be found in nature, far from the busy, urban, Western world. Through this representation, it is claimed that this innocent and ideal link between self and nature is one that Indigenous people, contrary to Westerners, still possess. They, whose perceived inability to tame nature was once despised, are now revered as the inheritors of an ancient wisdom according to which living in harmony with the natural world is the only way to be true to oneself. Another message broadcast by the commercial is that Indigenous people are willing to share this positive primitiveness with us, Westerners, and therefore are our saviours. The Indigenous boy's appearance – barefoot and scantily clothed – and his mysterious and somewhat magical behaviour point to two things. First, Indigeneity is associated with a mythical past, with the Dreaming, which does not know temporal limits. Megan described this representation of Indigeneity as an immemorial concept which does not belong to modernity, and perhaps not even to reality – or at least to a Western reality.

Megan *It's a different type of Australianness. It's a bit mythological.*

The second thing the Indigenous boy emphasises is the importance of simplicity. The description of Western societies as too complex and characterised by superfluity was already present in Cook's description. The Western lifestyle is today associated with a loss of spirituality, something that, again, Indigenous people are believed to have retained. Spirituality is not necessarily linked to religion, but it is often associated with a deeper connection to nature – perceived, along with the Dreaming, as Indigenous people's religion – as opposed to the accumulation of goods. Michelle mentioned that these elements were, in her mind, associated with the Indigenous way of life, and that in this way, she felt close to her Indigenous heritage.

Michelle *I find the way [Indigenous people] live and their belief system to be something I'd actually adhere to. I'm not at all religious but I do believe that we come from the land and that we go back to the land, that we should treat animals and plants the same way as we treat ourselves. (...) There are things that I still appreciate about the Aboriginal culture as in, I guess they're a little bit – this is going to sound very silly – but almost in a hippie kind of way. It's back to the grassroots system, and not so focused on money, and control, power, and work, and everything else. And I like the idea (...) that you don't have possession of things. I'm really not someone who's big on possessions. I'd give a lot of my stuff away. I don't consider money to be that big of a motivation factor in my life. I need enough money to live with, but I'm not one to worry about it being essential in life. And those sorts of things are part of the Aboriginal culture I identify with and find cool.*

The positive characteristics of Indigenous identity are more often than not connected to this “mythological” perception of Indigenous people and culture, which can be traced back to the myth of the noble savage. It is interesting to see that even though the participants are aware of the variety of ways of being Indigenous in Australia today, and are critical of the representation of Indigenous people as noble savages they were shown at school,⁴⁵ the characteristics belonging to the noble savage myth are still appealing for several of them and form part of the reasons why they enjoy having Indigenous heritage.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Michael Peachey, Student Services manager at the UNSW Indigenous Centre Nura Gili told me, “When I was at school, that's what you were told: [Indigenous people] were still the ones in the desert, standing on one leg with a spear, hunting kangaroos.”

⁴⁶ George Morgan mentions a “popular disillusion with Western rationality and modernity and a yearning for inner spiritual fulfilment forged through a connection with nature and the land.”

In their analysis of Luhrmann's commercial, Alan Pomering and Leanne White criticised the non-Indigenous appropriation of Indigenous people's connection to the land, as well as the romanticisation of the figure of the Indigenous, which has little relevance to the lives of Indigenous people in 2008 Australia.

In this Luhrmann-inspired campaign, the portrayal of Indigenous Australian identity is once again an issue. At the same time that Black Deaths in custody were making headlines in Australia and around the world, the new *Tourism Australia* advertising campaign reached into the archives (...) to appropriate Indigenous Australians' spiritual link with the land. (...) But it is a staged authenticity that is presented. The shamanistic power attributed to the Indigenous figure that magically gains entry into each executive's home and unconscious, and the visual image of the protagonist's nakedness and child-like innocence resonates with the romantic notion of the *noble savage*. (...) The Indigenous identity in *Tourism Australia*'s advertising campaign is a far cry from the factual identity of Indigenous Australia, most notoriously being played out in Australia's prison cells and prisoner-transport vehicles. The concentration on negative illustrations in this article is not intended to suggest that there are not positive facets of the contemporary identity of Indigenous Australians. Most portrayals (whether considered well-meaning, positive or negative) effectively serve to highlight how Australian national identity still struggles to move from a colonial to a postcolonial outlook and appropriately accommodate the place of Indigenous culture in Australian life.^{47 48}

As Pomering and White show, the perpetuation of the representation of Indigenous people as noble savages can be problematic on several levels. First, it shows a continuing appropriation of Indigenous cultural elements by white Australians. Secondly, the representation of Indigenous people as mythological people who live a life in harmony with nature in the outback excludes the majority of Indigenous people whose lives do not

MORGAN, George, *Unsettled Place: Aboriginal People and Urbanisation in New South Wales*, Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2006, p149

⁴⁷ POMERING, Alan, WHITE, Leanne, "The Portrayal of Indigenous Identity in Australian Tourism Brand Advertising: Engendering an Image of Extraordinary Reality or Staged Authenticity?", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2011.

⁴⁸ In *The Guilt of Nations*, Elazar Barkan reflects on the unbalanced representation of Indigenous people since the 1970s and on the incorporation of Indigenous people and culture into non-Indigenous Australian society. He argues that "the Aborigines who receive the most attention from the state, whose rights are validated and are sponsored by various government actions are those who can reciprocate most easily by contributing to Australian identity", that is to say "traditional nomadic groups [or] creative artists". "In contrast, the merely poor Aborigines, the urbanized and assimilated, have little to contribute and receive relatively little help." BARKAN, Elazar, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 261.

resemble this portrayal of Indigeneity. Finally, although the child in the commercial seems to bridge the gap between the two worlds of Indigenous people on one side and Westerners on the other, his disappearance in the second part of the commercial – when the woman reconnects with her partner – seems to point to his magical quality which excludes him from reality. A true connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people remains impossible if Indigenous people are not perceived as real people, but only as what Megan called “mythological” Australians who inhabit a parallel world.

Adam rejected these depictions of Indigeneity which – although seemingly positive – are based on an idealised construction of Indigenous people.

Adam *I struggle with [the unique spiritual link with the land] a little bit. Because it's that noble savage thing again, this idea that there was some time when Aboriginal people were these perfect cultures. I just think that's a form of racism.*

5.2.2 Longing for Ethnicity

As Adam pointed out, the longing for a noble-savage type of Indigeneity expresses nostalgia for a constructed, idealised definition of Indigeneity. It represents a desire for a different way of living constructed as the opposite of the Western lifestyle, itself perceived as too complex and devoid of spirituality. In the Australian context, this disappointment in Western values translates into a rejection of the ‘white’ Anglo-Celtic culture, which is still predominant in many ways despite the official policy of multiculturalism. As I said, many participants mentioned that they enjoyed living in a multicultural society where it is easy to embrace different heritages. Multiculturalism can therefore be seen as an antidote to simply being ‘white’. For example, Andrew told me that he was proud of having “a mix of heritage” and that he “love[d] the idea of bringing it all together.” This tendency shows the evolution of the perception of ethnic diversity in Australia.

Not so long ago, being ethnic was regarded, by some Australians, as an unfortunate condition that could only be cured by a move to a better country and a good dose of assimilation. Now (...) being ethnic has a certain cachet, and being non-ethnic, meaning of old Australian or Anglo-Celtic origin, has taken on

negative connotations that figure in our comedy films, politic and even literary awards. (...) The 'non-ethnic' experience is, by implication, a negative, a lack, not much of an experience at all.⁴⁹

Adina's comments on diversity echo Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs' analysis. However, she also links Australians' acceptance of diversity to living in an urban rather than a rural area.

Adina *Now it's fabulous. (...) It has filtered through to so many different areas. (...) It's so much in our faces. I mean, if we saw an advertisement today with a bi-racial couple, nobody would give a crap unless they were really backwards, or they were really country. I saw two men holding hands in Newtown – absolutely fabulous. Even in Gosford where I was celebrating with my friend the other day: we have a lesbian couple who have two kids. Awesome! (...) You would never have seen that growing up.*

Adina not only links her Indigenous heritage to the other ethnicities forming multicultural Australia, but also to a more tolerant and open-minded attitude to difference in society. At the end of the interview, she concluded by saying, "That's my black story. I'm coco. It's a rainbow". The multi-coloured world in which she lives is an important part of her identity. But for Adina, it even goes beyond the concept of colour or that of ethnicity. Indeed, Adina associates her Indigenous background with her lifestyle: "We run a gluten and dairy-free household. I'm a vegetarian. [My son] only eats free-range things." Adina also professed her love for the eclectic Sydney suburb of Newton, and her enthusiasm for gay rights and multiculturalism. It can be said that Adina enjoys living a life which does not appear 'mainstream'. She herself said to me: "I feel different. I am different. And it's cool." Her Indigeneity felt like another piece of difference fitting with the other elements of her life. Because Adina feels less legitimate in embracing her Indigenous heritage than her son does (according to her, because he's learning about the culture while he is growing up), Adina seems to incorporate bits and pieces of what she feels Indigeneity is about in her everyday life, making up her own definition of what it means as she goes.

Adina *We have started to cook aboriginally – if there's such a thing. We find the*

⁴⁹ COCHRANE, Paul quoted in GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999, p. 98.

ingredients, and we go on nature walks, and we have a look at the different types of bushes, what are their uses. (...) So Aboriginal is cool. It doesn't mean I'm going to go take up, you know, freaking tribal dancing or whatever, because quite frankly, I'm not that good at dancing, (...) but my son tries to play very badly the didgeridoo, and he knows the secret cultural things that they teach him, (...) and why people who aren't Aboriginal shouldn't play the didgeridoo. (...) I don't know the rules, but he's trying to teach me.

It sometimes seemed as if Adina's view of her Indigenous heritage resembled what Bell Hooks called "spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture."⁵⁰ However, her self-admitted lack of knowledge and feeling of illegitimacy sometimes stopped her in her tracks and made her question the way she approached her Indigenous heritage.

Indigeneity, in Adina's mind, is clearly linked to difference. And difference is something she values. In the same way that Michelle mentioned a kind of "hippie" understanding of her Indigeneity, Adina links her Indigenous heritage to her desire to remain outside of what she seems to see as a 'white', rather boring and intolerant, 'mainstream' Australian society.

5.2.3 Longing for Community

Ethnicity is also valued and desired, as Gelder and Jacobs wrote, because it is associated with belonging to a community. The term 'community' is quite vague. It is unclear what exactly the Indigenous community is. Although the concept of a national Indigenous community appeared at the same time as Indigenous people's demands for civil rights (with the development of a movement of pan-Aboriginality), the community is actually composed of very different voices, in the same way as any other community is. However, even though, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, it is an imagined construct,⁵¹ there is the idea that ethnic communities can bring a sense of belonging, which is absent from the bigger and more anonymous 'society'. Thus, embracing one's heritages – including one's Indigenous heritage – in the way several participants do can also be a way to join one or

⁵⁰ HOOKS, Bell, quoted in ROLLS, Mitchell, "Black Spice for White Lives: A Review Essay", *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁵¹ ANDERSON, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, New York: Verso, 1983.

several communities. This idea was expressed by Pat Dudgeon in *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts'n'all*, a book in which several Indigenous academics explained how they understood and dealt with their Indigenous identity in their everyday lives.

I think some white people would give their left legs to be Aboriginal. One advantage is that you have a voice. (...) Aboriginality gives you a sense of belonging. (...) You can go anywhere in Australia (...) and just go to the local Aboriginal community centre or whatever and then you're hooked into this huge network. So as an Indigenous person you've got like a passport all over Australia and then internationally. If we were over in the States, we could make contact with a native American and relate/belong as Indigenous people. We are in the 'club', the 'black club'!⁵²

In the course of the interview, Casey, who owns an Indigenous passport, often emphasised the very sense of belonging described by Dudgeon. This is something he especially felt the first time he visited his Indigenous extended family.

Casey *They were so welcoming, so welcoming... I think that's an essential, or a very core part of Aboriginal, or First Nations culture. It's just how welcoming we are to not only Aboriginal people or other First Nations people. Very, very different, I think, to Western culture in that respect.*

The sense of belonging community brings seemed to be sought by several participants. Adina mentioned the “community school” where her son goes and which she described as multicultural and tolerant. As for Michelle, she now lives in France. Therefore, she feels it is difficult to contact the Indigenous community where she is from, and she does not envisage identifying as Indigenous. Nevertheless, she told me about her former job in a company working with Indigenous people, and how this was a way for her to reconnect with the general Indigenous community.

⁵² DUDGEON, Pat in OXENHAM, Darlene (ed.), *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts'n'All*, Perth, WA: Gunada Press, 1999, p. 73.

Michelle *That was a job I was really proud to do because you feel like you're actually doing something for the Aboriginal community. I feel apart from it. Like, I don't feel like I'm part of the Aboriginal community, but I'm doing something to...help them in a way. (...) My way of connecting with the Aboriginal community was...as a satellite, indirectly.*

Thus, the link to community is another important aspect of the Indigenous identity for several participants. It may give them a stronger sense of belonging than the 'white' Anglo-Celtic society in which they grew up. This takes us back to Casey's comparison between the welcoming Indigenous community on the one hand, and Western culture on the other.

5.2.4 Whiteness As a Lack

Gelder and Jacobs in *Uncanny Australia* argue that "being ethnic has a certain cachet, and being non-ethnic, meaning of old Australian or Anglo-Celtic origin, has taken on negative connotations." "Whiteness", they write, "far from being constructed as something to be gained, is a state of incompleteness".⁵³ Whereas whiteness used to be the key to truly belonging in Australia, it is perhaps not perceived as such anymore. Several authors have linked the concept of whiteness to invisibility.⁵⁴ Steve Garner argues that the term "unmarked" is a better way of describing the phenomenon of "whiteness as a kind of absence".

Whiteness for the majority of 'white' people is so unmarked that in their eyes, it does not actually function as a racial or ethnic identity, at least outside of particular contexts when they might perceive themselves to be in a minority. Whiteness is rendered invisible under the weight of accumulated privileges.⁵⁵

This difficulty in identifying whiteness as substantial – before it can be recognised as a position of power – has also been documented.⁵⁶ Wendy Brady and Michelle Carey explain how in a class exercise during which students were asked to describe their culture through

⁵³ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p. 99.

⁵⁴ For instance, and already cited in chapter 3: DYER, Richard, *White*, MCINTOSH, Peggy, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies*

⁵⁵ GARNER, Steve, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, London, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 34-35.

⁵⁶ See also PALMER, David, GROVES, Denise, "A Dialogue on Identity and Ambivalence", op. cit.

symbols, “many students from dominant culture backgrounds often complain bitterly, declaring “We don’t have any!”. One student explained, “I never thought we had culture and just saw myself as Australian. That’s ok when you’re overseas⁵⁷, but I used to get jealous of friends who weren’t Aussie [that is, Australian of non-Anglo-Celtic descent] because they had all this culture stuff.” Brady and Carey explain how the students’ comments “clearly indicate how deeply within members of a dominant group there is a sense of being at the centre and not being required to form an understanding of what constitutes their identity and culture.”⁵⁸ Thus whiteness (or Anglo-Celtic heritage) both means being in the centre and its consequence, not being able to see oneself.⁵⁹ It is a dominant position, but because it is invisible to the people who are ‘white’, it is not regarded as such. As both Steve Garner and Maureen Perkins remind us, the invisible quality of whiteness only exists in the eyes of ‘white’ people experiencing it as such: “‘Unseen by whom?’ Those on whom such power impacts do not fail to see it, and people of colour generally do not fail to see whiteness around them.”⁶⁰

On the contrary, rather than being perceived as a position of power, whiteness can even be considered an absence of substance. This idea was sometimes visible in some of the participants’ discourses. For example, Adina told me about her son’s surprise at finding out that some of his schoolmates were Indigenous although it did not look like they were.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, in the SBS *Insight* discussion following the broadcasting of the *First Contact* series, journalist Stan Grant and facilitator Sharyn Derschow mentioned that, as Indigenous people, they did not feel recognised as Australians in Australia. Only when they travelled overseas were they perceived as such. Thus, while Australians with white Anglo-Celtic heritage feel that they lack substance by only being Australians, some Indigenous people who would like to participate in Australian-ness are excluded from it.

Stan Grant: “Having lived overseas for a long time, it’s a liberating experience for an Indigenous person and sometimes you can feel like an Australian for the first time.”

Sharyn Derschow: “The only time I felt Australian is overseas; I have never once (...) in Australia felt Australian. I have always carried my skin heavy”, *Insight, First Contact*, 20 November 2014.

⁵⁸ BRADY, Wendy, CAREY, Michelle, “Talkin’ Up Whiteness; A Black and White Dialogue” in, DOCKER, John, FISCHER, Gerhard, *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2000, pp. 272-273.

⁵⁹ “[T]he unmarked nature (...) of whiteness derives from it being the centre point from which everything else can be viewed, but which can see itself only if reflected in another.”

GARNER, Steve, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 43.

⁶⁰ PERKINS, Maureen, “False Whiteness: ‘Passing’ and the Stolen Generations” in MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen (ed.), *Whitening Race, Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, op. cit., p. 174.

GARNER, Steve, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 41.

Adina *"Some of these kids have blue eyes, and that's really weird! You would never guess it!" And he finds it great. It's like he's found out a secret about someone or something. "Jordan's an Aboriginal. I had no idea! You'd think he was like everyone else! But no, he's not! How do they know he's one? But it doesn't matter, because it's crazy!" And so he gets really excited about those sorts of things. So he considers himself an Aboriginal, which he's very pleased about.*

He thinks he's very lucky, because he's not just some white kid, you know, seen dangling around the playground like there are a ton of white kids at his school. He's just like one of the other kids. He's the more interesting one, because he's got all this knowledge. (...) So that's how he feels about being Aboriginal. He's not just Aboriginal. He's a whole rainbow of things. And so that's a big part of him. And he loves that part. He loves being Aboriginal more than he likes being anything else.

It is once again obvious that Adina values difference. Whiteness does not stand here for a skin colour but represents a culture – or lack of it – that of Anglo-Celtic Australians, or what is thought of as ‘mainstream’ Australia. In Adina’s eyes, it lacks originality (“You’d think he was like everyone else”, but no, “He’s the more interesting one”). Adina does not associate originality with Indigeneity only. Her son is original for several reasons, because of his Indigenous heritage, because of the knowledge he acquires at school about Indigenous culture, because his father has Finnish heritage, because he goes to a multicultural school etc.: “He’s a whole rainbow of things.” There no longer seems to be a longing for belonging but rather a longing for difference. Or else, belonging originates in smaller communities, in minority cultures, whether formed based on ethnicity or on life-style choices. Therefore, the desire to claim Indigeneity partly stems from a will to distance oneself from the bland, ‘mainstream’, ‘white’ Australian society.

In Australia, even more than whiteness, it is the Anglo-Celtic culture which can be perceived as lacking meaning. As I wrote earlier, according to Vanessa’s experience, racism towards Indigenous people comes from “people who just say: ‘I’m Australian. That’s it. I’m nothing else.’ That could be European, sort of migrated earlier on, or, you know...” Here again, there is a separation between people who claim to have an ethnic heritage and

people who only call themselves Australian. While ethnic Australia is constructed as tolerant, racism is only associated with whiteness.⁶¹

For Miriam and Adina, Anglo-Celtic heritage seems boring and lacking exoticism.

Miriam *On my mother's side, all I know [about my heritage] is that it's English. They've never said, you know, "Your grandfather's Irish, or Scottish", and nothing more exotic than that..*

Adina *So we were just white, and everyone else was white too. They might have been Scottish, or maybe Russian if they're a bit more interesting – that would have been exotic, Russian, or Danish – my friend's Danish and that's very exotic – but other than that...*

As Adina's comment shows, just like there were different phases of integration of immigrants into whiteness in the era of the White Australia policy, there now seems to be a reversed classification built according to degrees of interest. 'White', which used to represent the epitome of belonging in Australia, can now seem to be the least desired identity. Then comes that of Europeans who migrated to Australia later and whose communities are still visible in Australia – even though it may only be through "a celebration of costumes, customs and cooking".⁶²

The attraction for other ethnicities or for Indigeneity, however, can remain quite shallow. These are cultures which are desired because they appear exotic, in terms of food for example. As stated before, their desirability also depends on place, on social class, on the level of education. Thus, Morgan explains that the "growing interest in Indigenous traditions (...) is particularly characteristic of middle-class citizens of a liberal/progressive bent for whom the colonial past is a source of shame, and for those who identify with counter-cultural movements."⁶³ As far as Indigenous identity is concerned, as I explained before, several commentators warn against the possibility that such a form of indigenisation can be yet another form of appropriation of Indigenous culture: "Elements of

⁶¹ Other participants, however, have experienced racism from the Indigenous community, as we will see in the second and third parts.

⁶² GUNEW, Sneja quoted in STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, op. cit., p. 97.

⁶³ MORGAN, George, *Unsettled Place: Aboriginal People and Urbanisation in New South Wales*, op. cit., p. 149.

a real Indigenous identity are incorporated by the pseudo-Indigenous population while, simultaneously, the existence of the real Indigenous people is denied.”⁶⁴

5.3 Longing for Reconciliation?

Anthony Moran describes the concept of “indigenising settler nationalism” which developed in the second half of the twentieth century and aims at establishing Indigenous culture at the heart of the nation’s identity.

I argue that indigenizing settler nationalism develops and elaborates an impulse that has existed for a long time in Australian settler nationalism, fore-grounding the importance of the indigenous contribution to national culture. It is characterized by an attitude of mourning and sorrow in relation to past and contemporary forms of oppression of the indigenous. It involves an honouring of, and a desire to make reparation to, the indigenous absent in earlier dominant forms of Australian settler nationalism (for example, white Australia nationalism), and views the actions of the settler nation in the past with a more critical eye. It adopts a position that calls upon the nation to reconstruct itself through a fuller recognition of the indigenous and their claims as a central component of the national identity.⁶⁵

While the interest and desire for Indigenous culture is not new, it was more often than not the case in the past that Indigenous culture was appropriated to serve the national culture, with little regard to how it could benefit or be detrimental to Indigenous people. Moran argues that today, non-Indigenous people reflect more on the consequences of past actions towards Indigenous people and therefore envisage their relationship with them differently. Thus, Indigeneity is still an object of desire in the reconciliation era, but what Moran’s quote shows is that it may be a healthier form of desire.⁶⁶ Indeed, he argues that this desire is now based on a better understanding of Indigeneity. It also takes into

⁶⁴ BRADY, Wendy, CAREY, Michelle, “Talkin’ Up Whiteness; A Black and White Dialogue”, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁶⁵ MORAN, Anthony, “As Australia Decolonizes: Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/Indigenous Relations”, *op. cit.*, p. 1014.

⁶⁶ At the end of his article, however, Moran qualifies his position by adding that “until such time as the nation-state enacts real and binding forms of agreement with Indigenous peoples that recognize their legitimacy as political communities with non-negotiable Indigenous rights, indigenizing settler-nationalism is open to the accusation that it is a form of window-dressing that comforts the non-Indigenous with a sense of their own moral good, and of the moral good of their nation.”

Ibid., p. 1036.

consideration Indigenous people's claims. Thus, Moran contends that the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people is now set on more equal terms.

The participants' vision certainly corresponds in many ways to Moran's description: the people I interviewed are often better informed about the complexity of Indigenous people's cultures, their history, and about current issues, which leads to more respect for Indigenous people's claims. There is also, as Moran wrote, a form of sorrow, and even of guilt for some, for living in a country with a racist past and for still not knowing enough about Indigenous people and culture. Some participants emphasised the progress that is being made in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, while others deplored the fact that nothing seemed to really change. However, to qualify Moran's statement, in the participants' cases, it did not necessarily seem that Indigenous people and culture were now a key component of the Australian identity. As I said, several participants mentioned how Indigenous people were both part of Australian society and yet outside of it. Several also considered that multiculturalism was what best defined Australia – often including Indigenous people in the mosaic. Therefore, it seemed that while, during the 1990s and the reconciliation movement, Indigenous people occupied a central place in Australians' concerns, they are now more in the periphery. To be sure, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has evolved. For many Australians, guilt has replaced rejection. Moreover, it makes no doubt that today there is “a huge reservoir of goodwill towards Indigenous people on the part of millions of Australians.”⁶⁷ This was again confirmed by the strong support for the official apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008. However, according to Sarah Maddison, “despite this desire, (...) Australia remains profoundly stuck.”⁶⁸ What this means, in the case of the participants in this project, is an ongoing distant relationship with Indigenous people. One of the aims of the reconciliation movement was to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians closer together. Although the participants knew more about Indigenous history and current claims, those who did not identify had little contact with Indigenous people in their daily lives. Therefore, while there has been a displacement of the feelings experienced for Indigenous

⁶⁷ DODSON, Patrick quoted in MADDISON, Sarah, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relations in Australia*, Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen and Unwin, 2011, p. 141.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

people – guilt and compassion instead of rejection, for example – the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people persists.

In the following study of reconciliation, I will first analyse the ways in which the reconciliation policy and movement have impacted on the participants' understanding of Indigeneity before looking at the limits of the reconciliation movement.

5.3.1 The Participants and Reconciliation

I started this research project with the idea that the young generation of non-Indigenous Australians who had grown up with the policy of reconciliation could have been positively influenced by the changes which it sought to create in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Given the increasing number of identifications as Indigenous in Australia,⁶⁹ and in spite of the limits of the policy, I wondered about the effects a more visible presence of Indigenous history, culture and symbols, a more positive discourse about Indigenous identity and its place in the Australian nation could have had on the participants. For example, I expected that they would have been taught about the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people at school. I imagined that they could have watched the ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympics in which reconciliation was strongly featured. The participants' responses were not always what I expected them to be.

5.3.1.1 What is Reconciliation?

It soon became clear that many participants did not remember much about the reconciliation era. The majority of them were in primary school or in high school at the time of the major events, which happened between 1991 and 2001, and admitted not having paid much attention to political events at the time. However, what this also shows is that today, to a certain degree, reconciliation has disappeared from the discourses about

⁶⁹ "Indigenous Australia's Rapid Rise is Shifting Money and Votes", *The Conversation*, 15 September 2014, <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-australias-rapid-rise-is-shifting-money-and-votes-26524>, accessed on 30 November 2016.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in Australia. Several participants were actually unsure about what reconciliation was – I mostly referred to the official reconciliation policy. Andrew asked me, “When you talk about Reconciliation policy, is it what Julia Gillard did?” Before she started Indigenous studies at university, Miriam also had a vague understanding of reconciliation.

Miriam *Yeah. I just remember it being a concept. I don't remember anything in particular... (...) A bit at primary school...things in the nature of that NAIDOC week... I don't remember anything in particular, but it was a pretty big buzzword when I was growing up. It was a pretty big issue.*

I believe that Miriam's words summarise the general experience of reconciliation among the participants: they felt that reconciliation was important but also found it difficult to explain what it consisted in. This is perhaps because the policy, as Elizabeth Moran explains in her study of its impact, had not originated in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

What [CAR⁷⁰] did not create was a public space, either nationally or at a local level, in which both Aborigines and the wider community could tell their stories. (...) [T]here had been no informal process or societal debate, no recognition of past harm. Indeed, there was no formal treaty or legal foundation for the process. Instead, it was almost as if CAR was trying to find ‘solutions’ without having identified either in the Aboriginal or wider community what the problems were that need to be ‘solved’.⁷¹

For his part, Josh linked reconciliation to the 2008 apology. Because all of them were old enough to pay more attention at the time, this is the event which most of the participants remembered most vividly. It was perceived as a significant moment, in terms of the number of people who attended or watched it and in terms of its impact.

Miriam *I've done some research in which I've contradicted myself on that because I don't think it went far enough. But then, I had a presentation at uni on it, I also concluded by saying that there were hundreds of Aboriginal people standing out front of Parliament House pouring their eyes out, so obviously it meant a lot to a*

⁷⁰ The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, created in 1991.

⁷¹ MORAN, Elizabeth, “Is Reconciliation in Australia a Dead End?”, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

lot of...to some people, something so emotional, so it was really important.

Andrew, for his part, remembered the debate about the need or not to apologise, which took place before Kevin Rudd became prime minister. What both Andrew and Miriam confirmed is that their understanding of reconciliation as well as of other issues related to Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships came later in their lives, when they studied Australian and Indigenous history, or when they became interested in their heritage. Consequently, we could suppose that other Australians who do not take an active interest in Indigenous issues would not have a clear idea of what these are. Adam was one of the oldest participants and was the only one who told me that he remembered the reconciliation decade as a time of great change. His age partly explained this. But as he explains, the fact that he paid more attention to reconciliation is also linked to the place given to Indigeneity in his education.

Adam *I can remember a lot about reconciliation. It was a really big deal at the time, in Australia in general, not because I was Aboriginal. But I'm sure it was more salient because I was Aboriginal. (...) I think, because I had identified, I did notice it. (...) A lot of that stuff was going on. It was just such a big change in Aboriginal-white relations. This idea that an Aboriginal person was actually fighting for their rights, and for someone like me: I had never seen that before.*

The participants' relatively young age partly explains why they do not remember the reconciliation policy. However, even after having learnt about it at university, Miriam told me she did not exactly know what it entailed.

Miriam *You know, obviously, it's part of an era of Aboriginal politics that you learn about at uni. But I don't really... I still don't understand the premise of reconciliation. I mean, I know things about what Howard said about how reconciliation should be practical and not so theoretical, Sorry speeches that mean nothing.*

What both Andrew and Miriam understand about reconciliation are the debates about the form it should take. The aims delineated – closing the gap between Indigenous and non-

Indigenous Australians, acknowledging past harms and changing attitudes and relationships⁷² – remained unclear, something Elizabeth Moran also noticed.

Interestingly, both groups displayed a limited knowledge of the process of reconciliation, what it meant and what activities have been undertaken by CAR. Both groups also believed that the process was not for them – Aborigines tended to see it as a sop to make white Australians feel better, and white Australians saw it as aimed at Aborigines. One Aborigine who was asked about the issue said: 'I have no idea, totally no idea what reconciliation is about because it is not visible.' (...) Neither group appeared to 'own' the process of reconciliation, which makes the idea of a people's movement also problematic.⁷³

Beyond the lack of knowledge about the policy, Ben's interpretation of the Walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000 shows that the aims of the movement could be misinterpreted: to him, it looked like a demonstration rather than a uniting event. This is evidence of the confusion about the aims of reconciliation described by Moran.

Ben *All that really stands out to me about reconciliation was that Reconciliation march across the Harbour Bridge around the year 2000. It was given a lot of coverage on TV. (...) I'm not a fan of people protesting about anything whether I believe in it or not. It was one of the biggest protests I have seen, which I guess stands out that it meant a lot to the people.*

The Walk for Reconciliation in May 2000 was one of the times when reconciliation became a people's movement. The walk was a great success since an estimated 25, 000 people participated. However, Prime Minister John Howard, who advocated a practical understanding of reconciliation rather than a symbolic one and refused to officially apologise to Indigenous people, refused to be present. Organiser Shelley Rey explained that the walk took place "at a time of political turmoil"⁷⁴ (which Andrew mentioned earlier). This may explain why, to Ben, the walk – the purpose of which was to peacefully bring

⁷² MORAN, Elizabeth, "Is Reconciliation in Australia a Dead End?", *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

⁷⁴ REY, Shelley quoted in DAVIS, Tony, "Marching for a Fresh Beginning", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/marching-for-a-fresh-beginning-20100527-whuu.html>, accessed on 3 June 2016.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together – was viewed as a “protest”. Nevertheless, it tends to confirm that the meaning of the movement of reconciliation was not always grasped properly.

5.3.1.2 Reconciliation in Schools

The participants’ accounts of what they had learnt about Indigenous people and culture at school varied. Several participants followed Indigenous classes at school, either because they already identified as Indigenous, or because the community knew them to be Indigenous. This is Michelle’s case: although she did not know about her heritage, she told me that the Indigenous community must have known her family and told the school about her heritage.

Adam once again emphasised the changes he noticed at the time of reconciliation.

Adam *We watched a lot of stuff at school on Aboriginality. We learnt a lot about Aboriginality. (...) They were starting to produce a curriculum which was more Australian-oriented and which acknowledged there was an invasion, not a colonisation. This is all new stuff, though. Earlier high school: all colonisation. So probably about year 10 (year 10 would have been 1994). Everything was changing for me as in, Aboriginal culture was being talked about; it was being discussed. I think it still had this dichotomy about the noble savage and the... But it was better than it was. Before that, Aboriginal people were essentially ignored in history. They were just the people who were here when we took the country. So yeah I did learn a lot from school.*

Other younger participants did not notice the change Adam saw. In fact, several were quite critical of the teaching they had received at school for two reasons. Some felt that, at best, as Josh said earlier, it lacked accuracy and was too generalised. At worst, they felt that the curricula were too centred on the ‘white’ history of the country.

Michelle *Younger at school, we didn't learn anything about Aboriginal history at all. It was mostly about the first white explorers that came to Australia. We might have had one class in the whole year of Social studies where they would talk about the fact that Aborigines existed and that they fought with white men when they arrived, and a lot of them were killed. That was the basic, and nothing else. (...) So really it*

was all about the white explorers' part of history, never anything about the Aborigines (...) I did the first year of Aboriginal history [at university] and I found it fascinating. I learnt a lot. (...) But at school we didn't do anything. It's not part of the curriculum. It might be a bit more today – I don't know.

Megan *At school, it was like, "Captain Cook came. The Aboriginal people were here and they were natives". No, they didn't do much about real life, like diverse kind of... Not when I was at school. I'll be 34⁷⁵ this year. I think it was still pretty raw. It was just starting. And we probably had school books from the 70s. They wouldn't have had time to get rid of the old stuff (...) so it was just starting. It was probably another 10 years before they really...*

As I wrote, a problem several participants experienced at school was the lack of complexity in which Indigenous people were presented to the students. The image of dark-skinned Indigenous people living a traditional life in remote areas – what Megan calls “the old stuff” – seemed to persist while “real-life” Indigenous people such as those living in cities – the majority of them⁷⁶ – were not mentioned. Thus, the dichotomy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people was perpetuated when the participants attended school: it would have been difficult to perceive oneself as Indigenous when they were depicted as not being part of modern Australia.⁷⁷

The following quote by Kate shows that always linked to these old depictions of remote and traditional Indigenous people is the tendency to portray them as a single group. Diversity is erased as well as individuality. This is what Steve Garner explains when he compares the way in which ‘white’ people are always treated as individuals whose specific characteristics are taken into account, while people who are not ‘white’ are stereotyped: “One of the ways in which racism works is to treat people as the opposite of individuals, to deny this and instead produce them as merely representations of a form of person.”⁷⁸ As Kate explains Indigenous people are celebrated as a group and little attention seems to be paid to the differences between them.

⁷⁵ In 2013.

⁷⁶ “KORFF, Jens, “Aboriginal Population in Australia”, *Creative Spirits* website, 23 August 2016, <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-population-in-australia>, accessed on 12 December 2016.

⁷⁷ The depiction of Indigenous people is the topic of chapter 7.

⁷⁸ GARNER, Steve, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 46.

Kate *We'd celebrate or do some sort of ceremony every year for Reconciliation Week, but it's very, I guess, tokenistic. It's nothing like the appreciation that I have for it now, but yeah, I guess there was an element of that but it was more about "we celebrate the Aboriginal people", not "we celebrate these particular people because they're Aboriginal" if that makes sense...*

Adina denounced the tokenistic aspect of reconciliation more vehemently. According to her, when she attended school, Indigenous people were treated as little more than puppets presented from time to time in order to send a message of reconciliation.

Adina *They talked about [reconciliation] in the assemblies [at school], and behind their backs, everyone made racist jokes. (...) So we very rarely heard about [Indigenous people]. They were brought out in occasions, did a sweet little dance, and then they were just put back in the cupboard where they belonged.*

Despite the lack of diversity and complexity in the presentation of Indigenous people and culture, it seems that when the participants went to school, more aspects of Indigeneity were being incorporated into the curricula. Events such as NAIDOC week⁷⁹ were being celebrated and the general message of reconciliation was being communicated to this generation. Adam, whose father struggled to acknowledge his Indigenous heritage ("They were brought up with it being such a shame") explained that he personally believes the change of discourse made a difference.

Adam *The stuff was all very surface [the Indigenous classes he followed]... It was like smoking ceremonies, flag raising ceremonies. But it was nice to have that acknowledged. And I think, again, that that's why my age group probably doesn't struggle as much with it.*

It is difficult to judge to what extent this helped the participants view their Indigenous heritage and Indigeneity in general in a more positive light. Many participants, as I will later show, still find it difficult to claim their heritage. It is not, however, for the same reasons as their parents. While they were still aware of negative stereotypes about Indigenous people, the participants did not seem to be silenced by the shame of having

⁷⁹ National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee. NAIDOC week is a celebration of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander cultures which takes place in July.

Indigenous heritage, which previous generations experienced. Kate strongly emphasised this.

Kate *I think that we are a very sophisticated society. I think anyone who still associates negative stereotypes with Indigenous people are, you know, just morons in general. (...) I would never think... I would never not say it because of negative stereotypes.*

Some of the participants mentioned that things were moving in the right direction. Others, on the contrary, thought that nothing had changed since they were at school. For example, Adina strongly praised the Indigenous classes her son attended at school. On the other hand, Vanessa told me that she had talked to children who are between 10 and 12: “I just ask them curiously every once in a while: “What have you learnt about Australian history?” and it’s all Captain Cook.”

Another issue was raised by Megan who was studying to be a teacher.

Megan *I still don't think teachers really get how to integrate [Indigenous culture] into their curriculum in a meaningful way. They did NAIDOC week at kindie, and they did Aboriginal hand prints – and you know, that's cool but is that any different to what they would have done 20 years ago? Not really.*

Therefore, having heard the discourse about reconciliation may have helped the participants see Indigeneity in a better light. But it is not until they went to university where they gained a more in-depth knowledge about Indigenous history and culture, and met a greater variety of Indigenous people that they formed more complex views about Indigeneity.

With Megan’s last comment, the more general question of the evolution of the movement of reconciliation can be raised. Peter Read argued that the decline in the first decade of the twenty-first century of the anxiety about non-Indigenous people belonging in Australia may be “linked to the era of political uninterest in Indigenous causes in which we now find ourselves.” If Read is right, then perhaps the decline of the discourse about

reconciliation is due to a lesser interest in the whole process. This is Robert Manne's opinion.

During the early 1990s, the question of the apology was attended by an atmosphere of true moral intensity. For many Australians, something of central importance in the life of the nation was being transacted. During the Howard years that moral intensity gradually drained away. Despite the momentary excitement at the time of the Rudd apology, it has never returned. Insofar as there is any interest in Indigenous questions, it is now focused not on the quest for reconciliation but almost solely on closing the gap and the overcoming of what is called Indigenous community dysfunction.⁸⁰

5.3.2 The Limits of Reconciliation

Several commentators have analysed the movement of reconciliation as another example of the ambivalence characterising the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Although there is now a genuine desire for many Australians to embrace Indigeneity, the question of appropriation has been raised again.⁸¹ Therefore the question of who benefits from reconciliation is asked. Moreover, as Gelder and Jacobs explain, "the impulse is (...) towards reconciliation at one moment, and division at another: 'one nation' and a 'divided nation'."⁸² This "ceaseless movement" which, they write, displays a post-colonial mentality is also visible in the way non-Indigenous people can both feel guilty about the past and yet be unable to form a more mature relationship with Indigenous people.

⁸⁰ MANNE, Robert, "The Sorry History of Australia's Apology", *The Guardian*, 27 May 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/26/sorry-history-australia-apology-indigenous> accessed on 3 June 2016.

⁸¹ For example: "In the case of the postcolonial apology, settler Australians ask that they no longer be seen as belated arrivals, as illegitimately present, as colonial. In apologizing, settler Australians ask Indigenous Australians to see them more as they would like to see themselves: as settlers who properly belong, who have a kind of indigeneity. We might ask whether a situation such as this, where settler subjects are no longer seen as 'settler', is actually a little *too* postcolonial. (...) What might be the implications of 'dispossessed' settlers acquiring their own indigenized sense of belonging? Does this mark the beginning of reconciled coexistence, or inaugurate a more penetrating stage of occupation? Indeed, when the settler nation fantasizes about coexistence, is it engaged in remembering or forgetting?"

GOODER, Hardie, JACOBS, Jane M., "On the Border of the Unsayable: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁸² GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

5.3.2.1 Today's State of Reconciliation

5.3.2.1.1 Ongoing Ambivalence

Reconciliation Australia, the non-governmental organisation which replaced CAR at the end of the official reconciliation policy (2001), has been publishing a reconciliation barometer every two years since 2008. These surveys of the general and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations aim at tracking the progress of the relationship between the two groups. The findings in 2014 reveal that this is still an ambivalent relationship. The 2014 barometer found that “almost all of us [Australians] believe our relationship is important”. 96 percent of the Indigenous population agreed with this statement, while 64 percent of the non-Indigenous population agreed. Similarly, 87 percent of the Indigenous population and 72 percent of the general population agreed that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique place as the First Australians and [their] cultures are important to Australia’s national identity.” Therefore, there is a general consensus that the two groups need to move forward together in the interest of the nation. At the same time, however, the 2014 barometer found that while 85 percent of the Indigenous population were “generally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”,⁸³ only 57 percent of the general population was. While the point of view of the Indigenous population remains consistent, the way the general non-Indigenous population sees Indigenous people varies: a better relationship is desired but there is little pride in Indigenous cultures. This ambivalent perception is also visible in the way the influence of past issues is acknowledged or not. For example, while 85 percent of the general community agree that “it is important to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures”, 36 percent are still unsure about the role of the government in the removal of Indigenous children from their families. Both groups agreed that they did not trust each other enough: only 26 percent of the general population believed that trust was high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (39 percent of the Indigenous population did).

⁸³All above quotes from 2014 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, Reconciliation Australia, 2014, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/RR7200-Barometer-Brochure_WEB.pdf, accessed on 4 June 2016.

If many Australians now seem more willing to see Indigenous people and culture as a part of the Australian nation and identity and therefore support the idea of reconciliation, the low percentage of trust tends to show that the ten-year reconciliation process has not succeeded in truly challenging the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australian society. This could be a confirmation that the movement mostly remained symbolic and did not create enough personal interactions between both groups.

As a result of the redefinition of reconciliation from symbolic to practical, the Howard government turned away from a more personal approach, which was needed to create meaningful links between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. This is what Mick Dodson, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, called “the soft tissue of reconciliation – reshaping the inter-personal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, (...) a less tangible, more amorphous endeavour.”⁸⁴ The detractors of this new interpretation of the reconciliation movement⁸⁵ argued that achieving citizenship rights should not be confused with reconciliation: Mick Dodson criticised the fact that a practical reconciliation focused on “issues such as health and housing which (...) Aborigines are already entitled to as citizens of Australia.” Thus, he stated that “what is now being dressed up as ‘reconciliation’ is little more than what was previously basic government policy.”⁸⁶ Critics argued that reconciliation should involve the recognition of specific Indigenous rights such as land rights and sovereignty, and the building of a true relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Many non-Indigenous Australians do not interact with Indigenous people in their daily lives, as journalist Stan Grant’s earlier quote showed. I argued that the impact of this lack of communication is the persistence of old and generalised representations of Indigeneity in the minds of many non-Indigenous Australians. The participants in this study, despite an

⁸⁴ DODSON, Mick, “How well do we know each other?”, *The annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture*, Australian National University, Canberra, 5 June 2009, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Among them were Kevin Gilbert who “expressed anger at the expectation that Indigenous people reconcile themselves ‘to massacre, the removal of us from our land’” and who asked for justice, or the original chair of CAR, Patrick Dodson, who resigned after John Howard refused to change his perception of reconciliation as practical only.

MADDISON, Sarah, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relationships in Australia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132.

⁸⁶ DODSON, Mick quoted in MORAN, Elizabeth, “Is Reconciliation in Australia a Dead End?”, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

already advanced understanding of Indigeneity, remain influenced by these representations – a black skin, traditional way of life or necessary experience of various disadvantages to name a few. The barometer shows that only “30 percent of the general community socialise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians”. A consequence of this low degree of interaction is presented: “When people learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures through personal experience or education, they are more likely to believe the relationship is very important compared to when people learn from the media (48 percent vs 38 percent)”. This seems obvious and yet important to recall. I personally noticed that for all the participants who had been able to secure from an Indigenous person the acknowledgement of their right to claim their Indigenous heritage,⁸⁷ it had been an important step in starting to move away from old representations and feelings of illegitimacy caused by the said representations. On the other hand, the absence of interactions does not challenge the “sedimented knowledge”⁸⁸ about Indigenous people. Thus, contradictory feelings of desire and rejection continue to coexist.

5.3.2.1.2 Guilt

As this generation of Australians accepts its responsibility to construct a lasting reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and the rest of our citizens, the most pressing question is how we give that process some meaning. At this point in time I believe that, despite the shared sense of dedication among Australians about reconciliation, there is also a degree of uncertainty about how it is to be

⁸⁷ In her study of “how (...) light-skinned Aboriginal Australians experience racism”; Bindi Bennett also emphasised this aspect: “Many participants spoke about the importance and positive influence of having an Aboriginal person they knew accept them without question, support them and even teach them in the process of finding out more about their culture.”

BENNETT, Bindi, “How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?”, *AlterNative*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 2014, p. 188.

⁸⁸ JORDAN, Deirdre F., “Aboriginal Identity: Uses of the Past, Problems for the Future?” in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

See 4.0.2.3.

achieved. If we have identified the problem and begun a process of new national awareness, how do we make it meaningful and lasting?⁸⁹

Indeed, another element the barometer highlighted was the fact that although people felt reconciliation was an important issue, they did not know how to contribute to it. This is something several participants mentioned. For a few participants, this uncertainty about how to move forward was associated with a feeling of guilt. This is something Kate mentioned.

Kate *Yeah, I feel guilty and just...you know I guess it was kind of hard cause it's not within our generation, so it's not something we can really make, you know, make reparations for.*

In her study of the way guilt works in today's Australia, Sarah Maddison explains that Gillian Cowlshaw "has suggested that 'worry' about Aboriginal people and the injuries they have suffered in the past has become 'a distinctive element' of Australian national identity."⁹⁰ Maddison explains that in spite of this, "many non-Indigenous Australians seem to feel silenced by their lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. They feel they can only have an opinion when they have learnt (...) more."⁹¹ This was the case of Adina who, although she was very enthusiastic about her heritage and determined to embrace it, felt that she didn't know "the rules" – which her son helped her learn.

Adina *Yeah, I was interested. (...) If there was an article in a paper or whatever, that fascinated me, and the living conditions, and the health problems... I always wondered how that could be fixed because obviously education... So much is being thrown into that sort of issue, as people like to call that – issue – but it's not working. Why isn't it working? (...) What's the solution? You cannot bring the companies up to where they have jobs in the rural areas, just like you can't do it for the white people who live there. So how can you make the Aboriginal people – their identity and business – work in a way that... (...) I used to think about things*

⁸⁹ COURT, Richard, Premier of Western Australia quoted in the "ATSIC Final Report", *Australasian Legal Information Institute* website, 1999, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/finalreport/text09.htm>, accessed on 11 March 2015.

⁹⁰ MADDISON, Sarah, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relationships in Australia*, op. cit., p. 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 107.

like that, but it was very abstract. I didn't feel like I could get into their business, because it's not my business. As a privileged white person, you know, it's so wrong. (...) I didn't want to be one of those arrogant shithead white people who think they have the solution to all their problems.

As Maddison wrote, Adina feels she cannot emit an opinion without having the answer. She later told me, “I watch *Living Black*.⁹² I did that before I was black because I felt kind of guilty that I didn't know anything, even when I was white”. But the guilt she feels also stems from her dominant position. As Maddison explains, “our emotional responses to our national past (...) do not stem from our personal participation in past events but rather from our shared membership in the category of offenders.” This was clear in Kate's comment. Interestingly, Adina's feeling of guilt was alleviated when she became “black” – when she learnt about her Indigenous heritage and decided to claim it.

Adina *I felt like I could approach [Indigenous matters]. I never felt like I could approach it when I wasn't [black].*

After she had embraced her heritage, Adina noticed the same reluctance to ask questions about Indigenous matters within her group of non-Indigenous friends.

The weird thing is, they're trying so hard not to be racist that they don't ask any questions about it, because they don't know what to ask. It's ok to ask. “Can [I] ask what tribe you come from? Can [I] ask why you don't look more black? Can [I] ask what your father is? Is that ok to ask?” They don't know. Because, you know, they're Irish, or Australian, or whatever the hell they identify themselves as. All they know is, if they're not black, they can't ask you these questions. The Aboriginal friends that I do have or the ones that are not even Aboriginal – African or whatever – they can ask it. It's kind of like growing up in Wyong, you're allowed to insult Wyong because you come from it, but anyone else says anything about Wyong... Same thing with brothers and sisters: you're allowed to insult your brother as much as you like, but if someone else does, you punch them in the face.

Therefore, it is not only knowledge but the degree of identification with her Indigenous heritage which made Adina feel a little more legitimate in talking about Indigenous matters. In the same way, her friends who belonged to the “category of offenders” did not wish to

⁹² *Living Black* is a current affairs program broadcast on SBS which focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

insult her with ignorant questions and therefore stayed away from conversations about Indigeneity. Interesting here is also the fact that Adina defines the groups based on skin colour: a black skin, whether Indigenous or not, makes you part of what Pat Dudgeon called the “black club”. The black skin colour, however, points to a cultural identification since it is opposed to “Irish or Australian”, which indicate cultural affiliations, and which are themselves linked to white skin. Blackness is constructed in opposition to dominant whiteness.

According to Maddison, feelings of guilt should be confronted because they “create unbridgeable divides out of what should be unthreatening cultural differences.”⁹³ The change in settler nationalism described by Anthony Moran, and which he characterised as an “attitude of mourning and sorrow” and “desire to make reparations”, does not seem to lead to better interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The example of Adina’s friends’ reluctance to ask questions which could challenge stereotypical representations of Indigeneity is evidence of this. The guilt experienced by a part of the non-Indigenous population is proof of the positive evolution of feelings towards Indigenous people in Australia described by Moran. However, guilt can become as much of an obstacle as rejection to true reconciliation: it can paralyse “offenders” and confine them to political correctness.

The failure of non-Indigenous Australians, in spite of their goodwill, to interact with Indigenous people is something Gillian Cowlishaw has been noticing for some years. She analysed it in her study of a reconciliation group in Western Sydney in 2010.

For years I have noted the powerful, though controlled, emotions surrounding the perception of Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture among ‘progressive’, ‘concerned’ or ‘activist’ cosmopolitan people (...). On the one hand, there is automatic enthusiasm for anything signifying Aboriginality, and positive support for Aboriginal programmes is mandated in many institutions such as schools and universities and within local government circles where Indigenous Welcomes to Country have become routine. On the other hand, the existential

⁹³ MADDISON, Sarah, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relationships in Australia*, op. cit., p. 12.

and concrete realities of local Aboriginal life, past or present, attract limited interest and are even shunned unless they are both remote and scandalous.⁹⁴

Megan mentioned the difference in the way the inhabitants of two places where she lived reacted to Indigeneity. On the Central Coast where she resided at the time of the interview, Megan explained that people were used to seeing Indigenous people. On the contrary, in the Northern Beaches where she grew up and where the Indigenous population is less visible, the inhabitants, she felt, had less opportunities to meet individual Indigenous people. Thus, in the same way as Adina's former in-laws mentioned Indigenous people in a very intellectual way, Megan commented on the discrepancy between theory and reality. Both Adina's and Megan's stories illustrate Cowlshaw's analysis of a superficial interest in Indigeneity.

Megan *There's a lot more Aboriginal people on the Central Coast, and two streets away [from where I live], there's an Aboriginal community centre (...) Because they experience and see Aboriginal people more day to day, I think people (...) probably have firmer feelings – either positive or negative – about Aboriginality. Whereas down here [in the Northern Beaches], it's more like, "Theoretically, I love Aboriginal people." It's like, "But you don't know any Aboriginal people." It's more like, in theory.*

The result is that Megan feels more reluctant mentioning her Indigenous heritage on the Central Coast. In Cowlshaw's example, the participants actually met with Indigenous elders during the reconciliation group meetings. According to her, this did not prevent them from eluding some aspects of Indigenous reality which did not correspond to their vision of a higher form of Indigenous culture.

The injury to Indigenous people was the moral ground of our concern but their present circumstances were never discussed. (...) The reconciliators wanted to invoke a stylised past, and present conditions were not part of the sanctified Aboriginal culture they sought.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Mythologising Culture, Part 1: Desiring Aboriginality in the Suburbs", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, 2010, pp. 210-211.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 214 and 217.

Cowlshaw's analysis echoes Maddison's conclusion that "rather than an identity shaped by what is real – as confronting and difficult as the reality might be – we have instead chosen to shape an identity that is over-reliant on myth and folklore."⁹⁶ Cowlshaw's findings are further evidence of the discrepancy observed in the results of the 2014 reconciliation barometer between a desire for reconciliation and a difficulty to engage with Indigeneity beyond symbols. Perhaps guilt can explain this reluctance to engage with Indigenous people on a deeper level. This would mean facing responsibilities for past and present issues, which are more easily shunned.

5.3.2.2 Reconciliation for Whom?

Fiona Nicoll reflected on the ambiguous meaning of the term 'reconciliation'.

There is an important distinction within the verb 'reconcile', depending on whether the latter is conjoined by 'with' or 'to'. To reconcile 'with' conveys the meaning of 'harmonising', 'healing', or 'making friendly after estrangement'. To reconcile 'to' is to make [another] resigned or contentedly submissive. Thus, reconciliation 'to' implies a relationship of unequal power whereby a dominant agent can render another submissive, while reconciliation 'with' does not necessarily imply such a relationship.⁹⁷

Nicoll's analysis of the concept of reconciliation brings back the notions of control and of appropriation, which often follow on from non-Indigenous desire for Indigenous culture. Her comments point out that it is possible that even a movement of reconciliation can be dominated by non-Indigenous people's agenda.

The ongoing influence of non-Indigenous representations of Indigeneity – and here of reconciliation – is visible in the previously-mentioned analysis Gillian Cowlshaw carried out. She states that the refusal to treat what the members of the reconciliation group called the "symptoms" of the rejection of Indigenous people ("drink, drugs, poverty, problems with the law") limited the members' understanding of Indigeneity to a "sanctified culture".

⁹⁶ MADDISON, Sarah, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relationships in Australia*, p. 149.

⁹⁷ NICOLL, Fiona, "Reconciliation In and Out of Perspective: White Knowing, Seeing, Curating and Being at Home In and Against Indigenous Sovereignty" in MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen (ed.), *Whitening Race, op. cit.*, p. 18.

It also limited their goals for reconciliation to the need to revitalise this “sanctified culture” rather than to deal with other issues. The implied meaning is that this traditional culture is what defines Indigeneity. What Cowlshaw shows is that non-Indigenous people, despite a will to move beyond the divide between the general and Indigenous populations, can have an understanding and agenda for reconciliation which restricts the definition not only of reconciliation but also of Indigeneity.

As I explained, the debate over how to reconcile the nation was divisive during the 1990s. An example mentioned by four participants is that of Aboriginal athlete Cathy Freeman. Freeman was a popular sportswoman who, as Ben said, “carried the whole country’s weight on her shoulders to win gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games”. Freeman was a perfect symbol for reconciliation and was actually chosen to light the Olympic cauldron during the opening ceremony. Freeman refused, for a long time, to become embroiled in the debates around Indigenous history and present issues such as the debate over an official apology from the government, or the question of boycotting the Games. Before the Olympics, however, she had created a controversy by carrying both the Australian and Aboriginal flag after winning a race at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Canada.

Adina *My mum didn't like her carrying the Aboriginal flag. She said, "There's one flag for all. There's only one flag. (...) If they want to be part of the Australian community, they ought to come under our flag too. They should feel comfortable enough that they can use it."*

Miriam *In my community, the diatribe about her was, "Why can't she just run with the Australian flag, and (...) why the Aboriginal flag?" (...) There is this resistance against people being proud of who they are. (...) I think that's one of the reasons why Cathy Freeman ran with both flags, because Aboriginal is not necessarily Australia.*

Both participants remember the same reluctance in their families or communities at seeing Cathy Freeman embrace her Aboriginal identity and dissociate it from her Australian-ness, especially as she represented the Australian nation abroad. Miriam’s interpretation reveals the ambivalence of the movement of reconciliation: while there was

a desire to see Cathy Freeman as a symbol of reconciliation, she had to respect the non-Indigenous terms of the contract and not display a potentially divisive behaviour. This incident tends to show that Indigenous people are indeed expected to reconcile *to* the non-Indigenous vision of reconciliation and of national unity rather than to reconcile *with* the general population on equal terms. In their analysis of reconciliation in relation to the Olympic Games, Catriona Elder, Angela Pratt and Cath Ellis concluded that

the impending Olympic Games were deployed as a way of disciplining Indigenous people and maintaining a particularly conservative understanding of reconciliation; one that did little to change the unequal power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. We argue that, as a result, the meaning of reconciliation as a (white) nationalist story was reinforced.⁹⁸

Before the Games, the Indigenous voices which protested against this understanding and called for protests were represented as un-Australian. Cathy Freeman herself was criticised when she spoke against the government's insensitivity to the Stolen generations issue. Although it was during the 1990s that the debate over national unity was especially animated, I believe that the figure of the 'tolerated Indigene' can still be found in today's Australia. I will explain what this expression means by adding the example of the recent controversy around footballer Adam Goodes to that of Cathy Freeman.

Two 'incidents' sparked both support for and criticism against Indigenous footballer Adam Goodes. During a match, a teenage girl in the audience called Goodes an ape. The footballer stopped and alerted security. Unbeknownst to him, the girl was detained and Goodes later said he did not want to press charges, and talked to the girl on the phone about why he thought what she said was racist. During another game, Goodes, after scoring a goal, performed an Indigenous war dance during which he threw an imaginary spear at the fans from the opposing team. For both actions, Goodes received a lot of criticism. Goodes was also criticised for using his position as Australian of the Year to comment on past mistreatment of Indigenous people. In the same way that Cathy Freeman had been a disappointment to the nation, so was Adam Goodes.

⁹⁸ ELDER, Catriona, PRATT, Angela, ELLIS, Cath, "Running Race: Reconciliation, Nationalism and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, p. 182.

When he was named Australian of the year, he had a chance to be a conduit for reconciliation between white and black Australia. (...) Instead he called white Australians rapists, thieves and child stealers. Hardly words you use to reconcile two peoples. (...) I use to admire Adam Goodes, but he has become a decisive wedge in a country that is trying to heal. How can we heal if people keep opening old wounds and pointing out our differences instead of celebrating what is good between our cultures? We cannot be a united people if we squabble about our petty differences.⁹⁹

For this commentator, reconciliation is once again framed in terms of unity and sameness. However, it is Indigenous people who should become more 'mainstream', forget the past and not display too much Indigenous culture. Thus, it seems as if Indigeneity is desired in Australia but that only approved understandings of it are tolerated by the non-Indigenous population. Deviance from these can provoke surprise or even resentment. For example, Megan and I talked about the *Insight* programme 'Aboriginal or not?' in which the definition of Indigeneity was debated. One of the issues debated was the right for people like the participants in this study to embrace their heritage and call themselves Indigenous in the same way as people who had grown up identifying. Because the discourse of reconciliation has been framed in terms of unity and goodwill, and because it is assumed that Indigenous people desire reconciliation, Megan was initially surprised at the reluctance some Indigenous participants in the show expressed at welcoming 'new comers'.

Megan *I was surprised that a lot of the Indigenous people interviewed on the programme said, "I don't think you should be entitled to make the connection unless you can back it up." (...) I thought they'd be like, "Let's all join together!" You know, idealistically, you hope that everyone's like, "Hey, (...) let's just all be a big happy family!" But, of course, there's so much difference in the experience and... You know, we were talking about some people who had horrific upbringings, or horrific racism. How could you expect them to say, "Yeah, we're similar." (...) So (...) I still was surprised at the anger. Surprised, but then, thinking about it I don't think that it's wrong.*

⁹⁹ KROO SMITH's comments to SCOTT, Dallas, "The Wayland Smithers of Journalism", *The Black Steam Train*, 29 July 2015, <http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.fr/2015/07/the-wayland-smithers-school-of.html#comment-form>, accessed on 3 June 2016.

The discourse of reconciliation is another example of the ambivalence in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people: although many Australians agree that reconciling the two groups is an important goal, it often seems as if Indigenous people are expected to follow the non-Indigenous understanding of reconciliation. The example of Casey who rejects what he perceives as the ongoing attempt from the government at assimilating the Indigenous population into 'white' society shows that some Indigenous people refuse the current discourse of reconciliation. On the other hand, it remains an important project for other Indigenous people, as Michael Peachey, from the UNSW Indigenous centre Nura Gili, emphasised. He told me about the Walama Muru programme, which sends both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to work in a community and learn about the Indigenous culture of the area. It is interesting to see that, to him, reconciliation is about building links between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but also between different Indigenous cultures.

Michael *I suppose Indigenous students maybe once were indifferent, like, "I don't need to know about Indigenous culture. I am Indigenous." But I don't know about Noongar culture; I don't know about the different areas within New South Wales. I know about Wiradjuri people, but Kamilaroi are only next door to Wiradjuri, and what do I know about them? So it's about learning about others as well as looking at our own people. I think it just gives you a better understanding of even ourselves, you know. So yeah, it's also about building reconciliation within the university. So we've got a good mix of non-Indigenous and Indigenous now.*

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented another facet of Indigeneity and analysed it as desirable. I argue that the way non-Indigenous Australians have been representing Indigenous people and culture has always been ambivalent. Indigenous people can be rejected as fundamentally 'other', as chapter 4 revealed, but this otherness can also be attractive. This ambivalence is comprised in the expression 'the noble savage' which reveals how 'savagery' can be perceived as a quality. The ambivalent non-Indigenous perception of Indigeneity in Australia is visible from the first encounters between 'white' explorers and later settlers, and Indigenous Australians. In the eighteenth century, while Dampier called Indigenous

Australians “the miserablest people in the world”,¹⁰⁰ Cook marveled at the simplicity of their lifestyles. Today, still, two major contradictory perceptions of Indigenous people exist in Australia. On the one hand, Indigenous culture and symbols are increasingly adopted and regarded as authentically Australian, but on the other hand, Indigenous people are often relegated to the margins, seen as incapable of joining ‘mainstream’ Australian society and as unwilling to do so. Today’s perception of Indigenous people by ‘mainstream’ Australians is based on a blend of fascination and resentment. This tension continues to exist because of the lack of actual interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in today’s Australia. As Marcia Langton explained in chapter 4, “The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between ‘white’ Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors.”¹⁰¹ The ongoing fascination experienced for Indigenous culture comes from an idealised vision of Indigeneity which is reminiscent of the myth of the noble savage, while actual Indigenous people who do not fit this representation are rejected. This double perception reveals another ambivalence: a simultaneous desire for sameness and difference. Indigenous people and culture are both desired for their difference and rejected because of their failure to conform to ‘mainstream’ Australian society and to ‘get on board’.

In this chapter, I focused on the links between sameness and difference. These are more complex than the opposition I just described. I first explained how the attractive quality of Indigeneity lies in its ability to create a sense of belonging. This is based on a representation of Indigenous people as the ‘true’ Australians, possessors of a unique relationship to the Australian land which non-Indigenous people lack. Several participants were influenced by the representation of Indigenous people’s unique relationship to the country and therefore enjoyed knowing that they might partake in it. But in their hesitations, they also hinted at the issue of appropriation of Indigenous cultural elements which is visible not only at a personal but also at a national level, thus perpetuating the process of dispossession of Indigenous people.

¹⁰⁰ DAMPIER, William, quoted by THOMPSON, Stephen for the website of the *Migration Heritage Centre, NSW*, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime/1699-william-dampier-mariners-compass/>, accessed on 19 May 2016.

¹⁰¹ LANGTON, Marcia, *Well, I Heard it on the Radio Radio and I Saw it on the Television...”: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

I then demonstrated how the attraction to Indigeneity was also based on a desire for difference. In this scenario, Indigeneity appears as a remedy to the perceived lack of substance of the 'white', 'mainstream Australian identity. The participants who emphasised this aspect of Indigeneity associated their interest in their heritage with a love of multiculturalism, of diversity, while dissociating themselves from 'mainstream' Australia sometimes perceived as boring and above all intolerant. Whereas whiteness used to represent quintessential Australian-ness, it is now regarded by some participants who live in the cosmopolitan major Australian cities as rather bland.¹⁰² A problematic aspect of this vision of Indigeneity, however, is that it is often based on an idealised perception of Indigeneity rather than on actual interactions with Indigenous people. This representation of Indigeneity is nonetheless a powerful one.

Finally, I analysed the desire for Indigeneity by looking at the movement of reconciliation. I explained that in spite of expressions of goodwill towards Indigenous people, this concept remains problematic as its terms are often controlled by non-Indigenous Australians who are also the ones who benefit most from it. The project of reconciliation is supported by 'mainstream' Australia as long as it remains symbolic and does not threaten national unity or 'mainstream' Australian values. The impact of the movement of reconciliation is debatable. The lack of clarity about what reconciliation is in the participants' discourses, and their description of its presentation as tokenistic reveal that this movement, so far, may have had a limited impact on the non-Indigenous and Indigenous relationship, and been unable to truly shift the lines separating the two groups. However, the participants' relationship to their Indigenous heritage is much easier than that of their parents, which tends to show that even if the participants may not recognise the impact of the more positive discourse about Indigenous people and culture on their perceptions, it may not have been negligible.

¹⁰² It is important to stress once more that the participants in this study are university-educated and urban Australians, and that their points of view on Indigenous and Australian identities are shaped by their lifestyles.

Conclusion to PART II

In the second part of this thesis, I explained how the concepts of whiteness and Indigeneity were constructed in history and in relation to each other.

Chapter 3 analysed the evolution of the concept of whiteness, and its link to the Anglo-Celtic culture which is still dominant in today's Australia, in spite of the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism. The end of the assimilation era did not bring about equality between all ethnicities in Australia. Whiteness went from being dominant to being normal. Biological discrimination has given way to a hierarchy built on cultural criteria. While all ethnicities are now officially accepted within the Australian mosaic, the 'white' Anglo-Celtic voice remains the only one able to pass judgements on others without being questioned. Thus, according to Ghassan Hage, 'white' Anglo-Celtic Australians can be seen as "governors of the nation",¹ occupying a dominant position within Australian society.

Following this idea, I analysed in **chapter 4** and **chapter 5** the relationship between non-Indigenous – especially 'white' Anglo-Celtic – Australians and Indigenous people. I demonstrated that, like whiteness, the concept of Indigeneity was constructed and is a product of colonisation. While Indigenous people inhabited the Australian continent before the arrival of the British in 1788, Indigeneity as it is understood in this thesis, developed through the confrontation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and cultures.

¹HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 17.

I studied the construction of Indigeneity through the production of discourses which influenced the participants in this project. Non-Indigenous representations of Indigenous people and culture have had a strong impact on the definition of Indigeneity since colonisation. In **chapter 4** and **chapter 5**, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is analysed in a binary way designed to emphasise the ambivalence at its heart. I explained that the original opposition between two visions of Indigenous people, either seen as savages or as noble savages, still exists in today's Australia where Indigenous people are both revered and envied because they are the original Australians, keepers of the oldest living culture on earth, and yet described as drunks, lazy and living off the welfare state. This hesitation between rejection and desire is a recurring feature in the way Indigenous people are perceived by non-Indigenous Australians, and the participants in this study were influenced by both kinds of discourses about Indigeneity.

PART III

Authenticity and Legitimacy

In the second part of this thesis, I analysed the ambivalent way in which non-Indigenous – particularly ‘white’ Australians – have perceived Indigenous people throughout history. The participants were influenced by ambivalent representations of Indigenous people, which explains why they were both attracted to positive aspects of Indigeneity but also affected by the negative representations they were exposed to. The second part thus analysed how the participants had positioned and continued to position themselves as ‘white’ Australians with Indigenous heritage within the complex Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship of today’s Australia. Their experiences and perceptions helped explain the reasons why they were interested or not in exploring their Indigenous heritage.

In the third part, I will further investigate the reasons for the participants’ interest in Indigeneity but also look at the issues they are confronted with as they attempt to claim their heritage and/or identify as Indigenous. While the first part analysed the participants’ point of view on Indigenous people and culture in general, this part focuses on how the participants personally relate to Indigeneity. In the following chapters, I will look at the question of legitimacy. Feelings of illegitimacy were experienced by all participants in this study. Indeed, even though the participants may have been interested in their heritage, the idea of taking this interest further, and of identifying, created fears of being caught out as

‘inauthentic’. The notion of authenticity is at the heart of the following chapters. Indigenous people have been and continue to be judged by non-Indigenous people, but also sometimes by other Indigenous people, according to their perceived degree of authenticity as Indigenous.

I will look at the reasons why the participants doubted their legitimacy as Indigenous by analysing three major discourses presenting ‘authentic’ ways of being Indigenous.

Chapter 6 analyses the links between authenticity and colour and reveals that a dark skin is still synonymous with ‘true’ Indigeneity. In this chapter, I look at the ways the eleven fair-skinned participants related to this discourse and experienced being unrecognisable as Indigenous.

Chapter 7 explores the links between ‘authentic’ Indigeneity, time and space. Indigenous people are commonly represented in remote locations, at the heart of the country, and living traditionally, as if untouched by the passage of time. This “mythological”¹ representation of ‘authentic’ Indigeneity is far from the everyday lives not only of the participants, but also of a majority of Indigenous people who, like many other Australians, live in urban areas. The fascination for a traditional vision of Indigeneity, which nevertheless prevents the participants from feeling Indigenous themselves, is the object of my study.

Finally, **chapter 8** analyses authenticity and the discourse of disadvantage. Several participants felt they could not claim to be Indigenous if they had not experienced disadvantage. This included racism, a lack of education or poverty. The participants also feared being accused of identifying in order to get financial benefits reserved for more ‘authentic’ Indigenous people. Another aspect analysed is the ‘giving back’ discourse which implies that identifying as Indigenous is necessarily linked to working towards alleviating Indigenous disadvantage, something several participants did not envisage.

¹ A word used by Megan.

Part III

These three discourses offer representations of Indigeneity which are problematic, not only because they do not match the reality of today's diverse Indigenous population, but also because the elements composing them are presented as *essentially* Indigenous. In sum, 'authentic' Indigenous people should be black, living traditionally in remote locations, and disadvantaged. Any departure from such definitions can lead to accusations of inauthenticity, and caused feelings of illegitimacy among the participants.

CHAPTER 6

Authenticity and Colour

6.0 Introduction

Colour has played a major role in the definition of national identity in Australia. For years, the country strived to remain 'white', in colour but above all in culture. It was believed that only migrants whose skin colour – and therefore, as it was understood, culture – was 'white'¹ could assimilate into the Anglo-Celtic Australian society. Indigenous people were not originally regarded as a threat to the country's whiteness. Indeed, it was thought that while 'full-blood' Indigenous people would slowly die out, 'half-castes' would assimilate into 'white' society. In the 1920s, A. O. Neville, Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia, was one of the advocates of the absorption of Indigenous people into 'white' society through miscegenation.² In other words, at the same time as the black colour would be 'bred out', 'white' culture would be 'bred in'. As I explained, the supposed equivalence between white skin and superiority which underpinned colonialism evolved into an equivalence between whiteness and normality in today's Australia.

¹ As explained in Chapter 3, the term 'white' is not to be understood literally. First of all, what is designated as 'white skin' is never exactly white but rather of a light colour, varying from beige to pink. But above all, I have explained how the concept of 'whiteness' in Australia evolved over the years to include people whose skin could be browner than that of the first British migrants on whose skin colour the concept of whiteness was originally based. What this shows is that government policies intending to keep the country 'white' were less preoccupied with physical appearances than with the protection of a common culture – the Western European culture – believed to be that of fair-skinned people.

² HEABICH, Anna, REECE, R. H. W., "Neville, Auber Octavius", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/neville-auber-octavius-7821>, accessed on 8 October 2016.

The discourse associating blackness with inferiority may have lost power when race, as a scientific concept, was rejected.³ Nevertheless, the approach to identity in Australia still bears the marks of the long correlation between colour and culture. The references to blood, which still appear in sentences such as “What have you got in you?” or “How much of you is Aboriginal?”, attest to the continuing commonness of a biological outlook on identity. These two questions result from a first judgement the speaker passes on the identity of the person they are addressing, a judgement that is based on skin colour. The first question indicates that whiteness is still perceived as the norm in Australia. It is, more generally, the unmarked colour,⁴ the point of reference by which others are judged. As Richard Dyer writes, “white people created the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image.”⁵ As a result, any deviance from white skin can lead to questions about someone’s blood composition. The second question indicates that a white face cannot represent Indigeneity. Thus, someone claiming Indigeneity should ‘look the part’, that is to say look black. In the same way as a move from a biological understanding of identity to a cultural one did not erase race from common discourses, the participants’ knowledge about the existence of fair-skinned Indigenous people did not erase their doubts about identifying while looking white, or prevent them from experiencing judgement and/or rejection based on their skin colour. As Gillian Cowlshaw explains, “speaking of race was feared to reproduce racial inequality, but not speaking about race did nothing to destroy it.”⁶ In other words, race is very real for people whose physical appearance is associated with a particular identity, or for people whose identity is questioned because their physical appearance does not match preconceived ideas. There is a tendency to focus on skin colour as a signifier of culture, which leads to an inability to perceive diversity within a homogeneously-constructed group like Indigenous people. On the contrary, Dyer explains that people belonging to the group of whiteness are not subjected to colour-based stereotyping.

³ See 4.2.1.

⁴ TONKINSON, Myrna, “Is it in the Blood? Australian Aboriginal identity” in LINNEKIN, Jocelyn and POYER, Lin (eds) *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

⁵ DYER, Richard, *White, op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁶ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Racial Positioning, Privilege and Public Debate”, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

When I first started thinking about studying the representation of whiteness, I soon realised that what one could not do was the kind of taxonomy of typifications that had been done for non-white peoples. The privilege of being white in white culture is not to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one's whiteness. White people are stereotyped in terms of gender, nation, class, sexuality, ability and so on. (...) White people in their whiteness (...) are imaged as individuals and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing.⁷

Within the several discourses I will analyse in this second part and which are obstacles to the participants' identifications as Indigenous, colour was the most notable one in the interviews.

The colour of one's skin is an important marker of identity in many societies. Skin colour and physical appearance in general are the first elements through which we form hypotheses about someone's identity.⁸ Therefore, while several participants noted that "it's not because you look Aboriginal that you decide to identify; it's because that's how you feel", all those who took an interest in their Indigenous heritage were in one way or another affected by the colour of their skin, by how they perceived it in relation to their understanding of Indigeneity, and by how their skin colour was interpreted by others.

Within the Australian context, a white skin is attached to several things: first, it is regarded as un-Aboriginal by many non-Indigenous Australians. Secondly, it can be viewed with suspicion by some Indigenous people if they do not know the person's Indigenous relatives. Finally, it is attached to a colonial past in which 'whites' were the oppressors. Thus, having Indigenous heritage while looking white can lead to feelings of confusion. White is also the norm: it can be harder to relate to discrimination and racism experienced because of a darker skin colour when one looks white and can pass unnoticed in Australian society.

⁷ DYER, Richard, *White*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

⁸ "One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is. The fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize."

OMI, Michael, WINANT, Howard quoted by PERKINS, Maureen, "Editorial" in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, op. cit., p. 18.

In this chapter, I will explain how the participants deal with the colour of their skin in relation to their Indigenous heritage. I will first come back to the links between colour and culture which I have already addressed in chapter 3. I will then analyse what the conflation of these two concepts entails for the participants, who often feel that their skin colour does not give them the right to call themselves Indigenous. Finally, I will evoke the participants' points of view on the benefits or drawbacks of being able to pass as 'white'.

6.1 Linking Colour, Culture and Identity

6.1.1 Historical Conflation of Colour and Culture

I have explained in chapter 3 how the concept of whiteness in Australia was built by conflating skin colour and culture. This section explores the changing or varied ways in which this conflation took place in twentieth century Australia.

The policy of assimilation designed for migrants who came to Australia was also applied to Indigenous Australians. As explained in chapter 3, during the era of the White Australia policy, there was a belief that the colour of someone's skin reflected their ability to adapt to the 'white' Anglo-Celtic society. This belief also underpinned the policy of assimilation for Indigenous people. Jan Larbalestier writes that at the time of Federation in 1901, it was seen as "desirable, even necessary, for the Australian community to be populated by people of common appearance and imbued with a common culture."⁹ Therefore, in order to secure a mono-cultural society, it was seen as necessary to control biology. This explains the preoccupation with defining Indigeneity and controlling the fate of the 'half-caste' population. Henry Reynolds wrote about the obsession with "blood and biology"¹⁰ in Australia at the time of Federation. He argues that the classification of Indigenous people was based on blood quantum which was itself linked to skin colour. For

⁹ LARBALESTIER, Jan, "White Over Black: Discourses of Whiteness in Australian Culture", *Borderlands*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2004, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/larbalestier_white.htm, accessed on 1st July 2016.

¹⁰ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

example, Reynolds reminds us that Indigenous children were taken away from their families often less out of concern for their welfare than because their skin was lighter than their parents' or siblings'.¹¹

When he told the story of his stolen grandfather, Casey emphasised the links between colour and culture in the removal policy.

Casey *He was always sort of sitting on the fence, because that's the sort of effect that... (...) growing up the first eight years of his life with an Aboriginal mother, and then being chunked in a Catholic boys' home [had]; not allowed to speak your language, not allowed to live black at all. You've got to learn white man's language, the white man's religion, how the white man walks, talks and all that.*

Casey strongly associates colour with culture. In articles he wrote, he stated that assimilation was still a reality – if no longer an official policy – in today's Australia. During the interview, he said: “[In schools,] they'll spend money on some white persons to tutor black kids so that black kids learn how to be white”. According to him, his grandfather's decision to run away from his heritage and to New Zealand, and to deny any link to Indigeneity for the rest of his life stemmed from the government's attempt to force him to become culturally 'white'. Casey's will to revive his grandfather's Indigenous culture is a clear rejection of what he sees as a constant desire from 'white' Australia to erase Indigenous culture and identity. He expresses it this way: “I personally feel obliged to go and learn that stuff because that's been stolen; that's been taken away from us”. Casey's understanding of his European appearance is in itself a physical rejection of the assimilation principle which equated white skin with 'white' culture: although he looks white, Casey does not identify as Australian but as Anaiwan.

After Federation, the link between colour and culture was officially sanctioned by governments' policies. It also gained currency through academic works. Anthropologists whose studies originally focused on traditional and remote forms of Indigeneity (see chapter 7) adhered to the idea that Indigenous people of mixed-heritage who lived in urban locations were slowly giving up their Indigeneity and disappearing into 'white' society.

¹¹ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

Eighty-five years after Federation, and long after Casey's grandfather had been taken away from his family, academics were writing in ways that continued to link colour and culture. For example, in 1988, anthropologists Catherine and Ronald Berndt wrote:

Not only did the Aboriginal population in the south decline. The survivors were beginning to adopt some European ways (...) And a growing number were of mixed descent, offspring of European or other alien fathers and Aboriginal mothers. This dual process has continued all through the southern part of the continent: diminishing 'Aboriginality', in physical as well as in cultural terms; and on both these scores a growing resemblance to Europeans. A decrease in the full-Aboriginal population and the disappearance of most aspects of Aboriginal culture have been paralleled by a rise in the number of 'part-Aborigines', people only partly Aboriginal in descent, and with more complete and more widespread acceptance of Australian-European habits of living.¹²

The view that "part-Aborigines" were closer to "European" Australians than to Indigenous people, although contradicted by more recent studies of urban forms of Indigeneity, still survives in discourses about Indigenous people in urban areas. For example, when I lived in Sydney in 2015, a young non-Indigenous Australian who enquired about my research asked me what I meant by 'Indigenous people' since, he told me, "there are no longer any pure Indigenous people living in Sydney".

While the government, from the time of Federation to the middle of the twentieth century, endeavoured to promote assimilation for mixed-race Indigenous people, Reynolds argues that the general population often refused to welcome these people in their midst: "The belief that half-castes could become absorbed into the larger society paid scant attention to the hostility that they met when they sought employment, accommodation, healthcare or education. (...) Prejudice, [A. O. Neville] observed, [is] 'an almost impossible barrier to break down.'"¹³ The old opposition between a civilised 'white' population and black 'savages' (which I described in chapter 4) remained too strong. With so much prejudice based on physical appearance and preventing assimilation, in 1954,

¹² BERNDT, Catherine and Ronald quoted in GRAY, Geoffrey, *[The Sydney school] Seem[s] to View the Aborigines as Forever Unchanging': Southeastern Australia and Australian Anthropology*, op. cit., p. 177.

¹³ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, op. cit., e-book.

anthropologist Ruth Fink still supported A. O. Neville's theory of "breeding out the colour" as the best way for Indigenous people to survive in contemporary Australia.

The adult mixed-bloods of today have grown up in a society which looked upon them as the descendants of a primitive race, and which regarded them as incapable of living like white people. (...) Those who possess Aboriginal physical characteristics have very little opportunity for social mobility – their colour is a symbol of low status. (...) In such a situation, the only way in which coloured people can hope to attain status within the non-coloured groups is by trying to breed out the coloured element through marriage or liaisons with white and lighter individuals. For it is only by ridding themselves of their aboriginal features that they can escape the stigma of the caste barrier.¹⁴

Thus, this survey of attitudes across the first eighty years of the twentieth century suggests there seemed to be little chance for Indigenous people to become integrated into Australian society: assimilation which was encouraged as the way forward for Indigenous people with mixed-heritage was precluded due to racial prejudice against black – or not white enough – skin, itself associated with inferiority.

Passing – hiding one's Indigenous heritage and pretending to be 'white' – which some light-skinned Indigenous people chose in order to avoid discrimination was, Maureen Perkins writes, "widely believed to be fundamentally impossible." "[W]hite culture has long claimed that such people [who pass] can be unmasked, as not really belonging, by various non-white behaviours which will 'out' at moments of stress. In other words, although white in skin, their true character is coloured or black."¹⁵ Again, mixed-heritage Indigenous people were left in an in-between state, prompted to assimilate and at the same time prevented from doing so by entrenched ideas about race. This constant discrimination faced by Indigenous people over the years was noted by Miriam who compared Indigenous people's position in Australian society to that of other minorities.

Miriam *If I did a PhD, I would like to talk about Aboriginal people as the re-occurring blacks, not talking about blacks because they're black, but Australia always has a 'black'. At the moment it's boat people. They're the blacks. They're the people we*

¹⁴ FINK, RUTH quoted in REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

¹⁵ PERKINS, Maureen, "False Whiteness: 'Passing' and the Stolen Generations" in MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen (ed.), *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165 and 174.

hate. Before that, it was wogs. So we went through a period of hating, you know, Italian and Greek migrants, and before that it was the Chinese; they were the blacks. We call the Aborigines the re-occurring blacks because they're always there. They always do something bad. They're always hated. But the wogs, now, they're ok. The Chinese, they're ok. You know, one day the boat people will be ok, and we'll find someone else to pick on.

With this remark, Miriam exemplifies the conflation of colour and culture in Australia where 'black' has become synonymous with "the people we hate". Contrary to other minorities who end up finding their place in Australian society, Indigenous people always remain on the side. This is something Vanessa had already noted in her description of the hierarchy present in Australian society, and of the place of Indigenous people at the bottom of the ladder (see 3.4.3).

The conflation between colour and culture in Australian history, and the way Indigenous people with mixed-heritage were consequently treated influenced the participants in several ways. Not only were their families affected by policies of removal or by the consequences of discrimination – such as passing and losing one's connections with culture and community (see 2.2) – the way they think about Indigeneity was shaped by these discourses about colour and culture.

First of all, contrary to a common belief which persisted until the mid-twentieth century, Indigenous culture did not disappear and Indigenous people continued to identify as such.¹⁶ But while another understanding of the links between colour and culture might have allowed for the recognition of different ways of being Indigenous, the conflation of physical appearance and culture established Indigeneity as marked by essential characteristics from which it is still difficult to move away today. Among these, blackness of the skin remains an important signifier of Indigeneity for many non-Indigenous people. Because of discourses presenting black-skinned Indigenous people as the only ones still possessing their culture, no room was made for the acceptance of white-looking Indigenous people with a culture as 'real' as that of remote and darker Indigenous people. The

¹⁶ "Indigenous Australia's Rapid Rise is Shifting Money and Votes", *The Conversation*, 15 September 2014, <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-australias-rapid-rise-is-shifting-money-and-votes-26524>, accessed on 30 November 2016.

discourse conflating colour and culture had two consequences: first, it made fair-skinned Indigenous people invisible to the non-Indigenous population, and secondly, when these Indigenous people claimed their heritage, they were often accused of being 'fake'.

Howard Creamer explains how such a belief re-emphasised the reliance on colour to determine who is or is not Indigenous.

The problem in equating Aboriginal culture with traditions which are lost, is that the conclusion is reached that Aboriginality should have disappeared too. In the absence of a more pervasive theory of culture and cultural change, the public has generally fallen back on theories of race. (...) For many people, Aboriginality equates with skin colour. Culture is seen as related to and contingent upon gradations of colour. (...) The lightness of the skin of many NSW Koori people, and the fact that their lifestyles do not correspond with the images of traditional culture most people are familiar with, leads many to the conclusion that there is no real Aboriginal culture left in the state.¹⁷

Growing up with this equation between colour and culture made it difficult for several participants to understand how they could embrace their heritage while looking white. For example, Miriam told me that before she went to university and learnt about other definitions of Indigeneity, she dissociated whiteness from Indigeneity.

Miriam *I didn't start taking it seriously until 18 or 19. Because I wasn't educated. I didn't know that, just because I'm fair-skinned...that I'm Aboriginal. How could I know?*

Colour was never an indicator of identity for Indigenous people who rely on kinship connections and culture.¹⁸ However, this understanding of Indigenous identity does not prevail in 'mainstream' Australian society where non-Indigenous discourses about Indigenous people still dominate. These discourses have created a strong dichotomy between whiteness and Indigeneity. Thus, instead of resulting in the construction of the desired homogeneous society based on 'white' Anglo-Celtic culture, the policy of

¹⁷ CREAMER, Howard, "Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the Image of Cultureless Outcasts" in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁸ GRIEVES, Vicky, "Culture, not Colour, is the Heart of Aboriginal Identity", *The Conversation*, 17 September 2014, <http://theconversation.com/culture-not-colour-is-the-heart-of-aboriginal-identity-30102>, accessed on 1st December 2014.

assimilation was a source of divisions. It prevented mixed-heritage Indigenous people from finding a place in Australian society where they were not accepted as ‘whites’ but were also denied the right to be Indigenous. At the same time, those people who were removed or whose families passed into ‘white’ society (like Josh’s family who had “gone white”), when they later manage to locate their relatives, are not always welcomed back with open arms by the Indigenous community. They are sometimes perceived as ‘white’, in colour and above all in culture, and their motives for identifying become the object of suspicions.¹⁹ But beyond creating divisions within the Indigenous community, the assimilation policy and the conflation of colour and culture have entrenched a division between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australia, the very same division it sought to erase. Indeed, Indigenous people have often had to focus on their differences from ‘white’ Australians in order to fight against assimilation and assert their identity. Again, there seems to be little room for in-between positions. A combination of white skin with Indigenous heritage is still questioned by many non-Indigenous Australians. On the other hand, the combination of a ‘white’ way of life with an Indigenous identification is viewed with suspicion by some Indigenous people. For a lot of them, fighting back against assimilation and claiming a specific Indigenous identity is often synonymous with distancing themselves from – if not being in complete opposition to – ‘white’ Australia.

Gillian Cowlishaw explained the links between colour, identity and power and the opposition between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australia resulting from these links.

For those categorising Australian Aborigines (including, of course, Aborigines themselves), skin colour is a major signifier. In towns all over the country, those who identify as Aborigines and have light skin will often explain and stress, to outsiders at least, that they are Aboriginal. Those who have dark skins and reject their identity of interest with other Aborigines are applauded by some and reviled by others, and again will be conscious of how their skin colour is

¹⁹ Henry Reynolds stressed the difficult fate of many of these mixed-heritage Indigenous people: “Anyone who looked Aboriginal was treated with amused condescension or active hostility. One way out was to do everything possible to pass as a dark-skinned European. The other was to find the way back to kin, country and community – to cross back over the assimilationist bridge. For many mixed-descent people, neither option was possible or appealing. Government intervention had wrenched them out of secure positions in complex and comforting webs of kinship and made them what they were already thought to be – half-castes caught between two worlds.”

REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

related to their identity. (...) Everyone recognises that there is a process of classification going on which takes skin colour as a major sign and demands that one identify oneself with one or another category. It is not the nature of the particular sign which makes this process of classification curious but the intensity of feeling surrounding it. With significant and continuing struggles over wealth, status and power associated with the racial divide, it is important to everyone to know where each person's loyalty lies.²⁰

The conflation of colour and culture, then, has established strong divisions between 'black' and 'white' Australians and essentialised characteristics about Indigenous people the participants struggle to reconcile with their personal understanding of their heritage. The idea that black skin is a signifier of 'real' Indigeneity is one of the most enduring of all.

6.1.2 Indigenous Is Black

Amongst the representations about Indigenous people emanating from racialized discourses, the most powerful one for the participants was that of the dark-skinned Aborigine.

As Kate explained,

Kate *All the history stuff that we see in the textbooks and all that sort of things is purely just dark-skinned. They have these features, and you know, just like you would learn about, I guess, any other sorts of races: you just pick up the things that are common.*

However, the features Kate mentions are only those of some Indigenous people and do not represent the physical diversity within the Indigenous population of today's Australia. The majority of the participants grew up with images that reflected this simplification in the physical description of Indigenous people that Kate mentions.

Jeremy Beckett explains how the discourse about 'real', traditional and remote Indigenous people made other forms of Indigeneity invisible. He contends that the stereotypical representations of Indigenous people promoted by Australian governments

²⁰ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists", *op. cit.*, p. 228.

but also by various “authorities” have prevented the Australian population from forming a more complex and diverse understanding of Indigeneity.

In postage stamps, travel brochures, art catalogues and assorted tourist merchandise, the Aborigine was represented as black, male, bearded and scantily dressed, holding a spear and with his eyes fixed on some distant object – all against a background of scenic splendour. (...) This public [Anglo-Australians in the coastal cities] has been largely dependent on representations of Aborigines to be found in the statements of various “authorities”, the work of painters and photographers, the printed and recently the electronic media, or even in artefacts aimed at the popular and tourist markets.²¹

As Megan explained, the images she and other participants grew up with were often “two-dimensional”. On the other hand, Josh argued that having grown up “with computers and a good education” meant the picture of a “black, male” Indigenous person was not the only one he had access to. He emphasised ‘poverty’ as the main characteristic in representations of Indigenous people when he was growing up. Nevertheless, he still viewed his white skin problematically because he did not “look it” (Indigenous).

As children, most participants considered that Indigenous people were black-skinned. It is only as adults that they realised this was not necessarily so. This new knowledge was the result of having taken an interest in Indigenous people and culture and/or followed an Indigenous studies course at university. Developing such an interest cannot be, I believe, generalised to the majority of non-Indigenous Australians. Indeed, my – admittedly limited – personal experience instead tends to make me to think that many non-Indigenous Australians have a rather limited interest in Indigenous people and culture. The latter’s invisibility to the eyes of many partly accounts for this. As journalist Tim Dick wrote, “It’s not easy to embrace a culture if you can’t see it. But it’s not as if many of us have made much of an effort.”²² This may explain why, almost thirty years later, Beckett’s description

²¹ BECKETT, Jeremy, “The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality”, *op. cit.*, pp. 191 and 206.

²² DICK, Tim, “Talkabout: Time for Aboriginal Languages to Go Mainstream”, *op. cit.*

of the stereotypical vision of Indigeneity still rings true,²³ and why young non-Indigenous Australians like the one I met can still think in terms of “pure” Indigenous people.

Several participants did not remember seeing Indigenous people when they were growing up. This is partly due to the areas where they lived, where the Indigenous population could be small. But another reason could be that Indigenous people were present but not recognised because of their relative invisibility and the fact that in the eyes of the participants, only dark-skinned people could be Indigenous.

Megan *I remember there was a girl who lived on the main road in Newport and who was Aboriginal. She worked in the supermarket, and her brother was in a band. And (...) I remember thinking, “Those people are Aboriginal, and they’re really dark.” And I remember thinking, “Wow! They’re the only Aboriginal people I’ve ever seen around where I live.” And to this day, I don’t think I’ve ever seen – this is a very white-bread area.*

Delphine Do you think maybe there were other Aborigines who were fair-skinned and you didn’t know them?

Megan *Absolutely. (...) But I’ve never really noticed anyone walking around in Newport.*

Delphine So, when you were growing up, your idea of an Aboriginal person was someone with dark skin?

Megan *Absolutely, yeah.*

Once again, it is clear here that colour and culture are linked in Megan’s imagining of whiteness and Indigeneity. The term “white-bread” indicates a conventional, ‘white’ and middle-class lifestyle. Megan dissociates this kind of life from Indigenous people. Not only

²³ This representation is also kept alive by some Indigenous people who know what non-Indigenous tourists, for example, expect them to look like. As Beckett wrote, “These constructions have (...) had consequences for Aborigines, in the sense that they have provided the cultural context in which Europeans have acted upon them, and in which Aborigines have been required to respond.”

When Michael Peachey from UNSW’s Nura Gili talked about education as the way to move past such representations, he asked me how a French person could know how Aboriginal people look like. I admitted that I originally pictured them black and traditional, my first memory of an Indigenous person in Sydney being the dark-skinned, traditionally-clad-and-painted one playing the didgeridoo at Circular Quay near the Opera House.

did she not think that Indigenous people could be fair-skinned, she also did not picture them living a 'white', middle-class life.

The following quote from Adina shows that, to a certain extent, as an adult, she still considers black skin to be more Indigenous than white skin.

Delphine How did you feel when you found out you had Indigenous heritage? You weren't afraid of being associated with all the negative stereotypes?

Adina *No, not at all. I figured: number one, I don't look Aboriginal enough for people... (...) Maybe if I was really Aboriginal-looking, that would be different. (...) Maybe if I'd been very Aboriginal, it would have been different.*

Adina believes that, had she had dark skin, she could have faced more discrimination. She first associates dark skin with Indigeneity, which is unsurprising in a comment about discrimination – a dark-skinned Indigenous person will be more easily recognised as such and is therefore more likely to attract racist remarks. But with her move from “looking” to “being”, black skin no longer seems to be only one characteristic of Indigeneity but almost its quintessence. In other words, Adina seems to say that she is less Indigenous because she looks white.²⁴

Because of the common association of black skin with Indigenous culture and identity in public discourses about Indigeneity, the participants experienced disbelief, rejection and even accusations from non-Indigenous people. Indeed, based on these associations and on the definition of Indigeneity they create, non-Indigenous Australians judged the participants' identifications as Indigenous and found them wanting.

²⁴ I will come back to how this perception of Indigeneity as black affects the participants' feelings of legitimacy in 6.3.

6.1.3 Racism: From Disbelief to Rejection

6.1.3.1 Disbelief

A recurring feature of the participants' experiences were the surprised reactions they received when they talked about their Indigenous heritage. Many of the reactions the participants were faced with came from non-Indigenous Australians – friends, family or colleagues – who questioned the legitimacy of their claims. The reactions ranged from amused disbelief to suspicion or rejection. For example, Vanessa's high-school friends, upon learning about her heritage, refused her identification as Torres Strait Islander and accused her of having lied to them. These reactions are evidence of the ongoing right many non-Indigenous Australians feel they have to pass judgements on Indigenous identity.

As Myrna Tonkinson writes,

Many white Australians, while regarding most people of mixed ancestry as outside white society, also deny their claims to being Aboriginal. For them, authentic Aborigines are black, live in remote areas, and have exotic languages and cultural features. Persons lacking these characteristics cannot be 'real Aborigines'. (...) People who do not fit these physical, social and cultural stereotypes are rejected by many whites as opportunists or imposters if they claim to be Aboriginal or to speak for Aborigines. Whites' antagonism toward people of Aboriginal descent is greatest where the distinguishing physical and cultural features are blurred, probably because Australian policies toward Aborigines have given some validity to the colour-culture view.²⁵

The reactions from non-Indigenous Australians described by Tonkinson also mark the persistence of fixed representations of Indigenous people which leave little room for self-definition. Telling examples of this antagonism are given by Michelle and Miriam.

Michelle *[Students at university] would be intrigued. A lot of them would say, "Really? But you're so white! You're like the whitest person I know!" They were quite happy to talk about it.*

Miriam recounts a similar situation.

²⁵ TONKINSON, Myrna, "Is It in the Blood? Australian Aboriginal Identity", *op. cit.*, p. 208.

Miriam *It was a big joke, like, "[Miriam], she's the whitest blackfella we've ever seen."*

When I go for a job, if I'm going for an Aboriginal job interview, or when I started my internship, my mum was saying, (...) "Were there any other people there who were white?" I'm like, "Mum! I've told you before it doesn't matter." And she's like, "Yeah, yeah, I know. I just want to know." (...) "I've told you before you can be white and Aboriginal." And she says, "Yes, I know, but I just want to know."

These two participants' identifications were treated as jokes because of the discrepancy between their white skin and the traditional image of dark-skinned Indigenous people their friends or family had. Although these reactions were always taken lightly by the participants who excused them, they give renewed strength to simplified depictions of Indigenous people the participants tried to challenge, and from which they try to detach themselves. These reactions maintain the dichotomy between white skin and Indigeneity. They also signal to the participants that, in their interlocutor's mind, their Indigenous identity is not natural, that it looks as if they are identifying *in spite of* their skin colour. Therefore, what is implied is that their identification is not as authentic as that of a black person's. Indeed, since skin colour is often so powerfully associated with culture in discourses about whiteness and Indigeneity, looking white is antonymous with having an Indigenous culture. Miriam's mother's reaction is evidence that in spite of her daughter's explanation about skin colour and Indigeneity, she cannot help thinking that light skin and being Indigenous do not naturally go together.

Miriam also said she was not sure whether her parents or partner took her identification seriously.

Miriam *I don't know if my parents take me seriously, which is really disappointing, but I can understand why, the same way I can understand why, you know, my father won't identify, or understand my reasons for identifying, or don't know what I know about Aboriginal history or issues.*

Adam's experience shows this type of 'white' disbelief experienced by Michelle and Miriam – whether expressed through jokes or 'polite' questioning as in the following example – can still be damaging to someone's confidence in their identity. Adam considered that this milder form of racism was not very different from open rejections.

Adam *When I was in early high school, the reactions were quite childish, but it shows you the Australian attitude at the time, because they were (...) still coming out of these kids' mouths. Basically, me saying that I was Aboriginal was like, "Nah. Sorry, you're just not." And a whole bunch of things came along with it. "You're white. You can't be." "Oh, but no, look, I've got photos of my family!" (...) But outside of high school, the biggest things I've had have been more polite, as in telling someone that you're Aboriginal and them politely questioning whether someone with your skin tone could be Aboriginal. It's the same thing. It's just done more politely because they're adults and they're trying to step around the issue and not to be too direct. In the end though, I'm not sure it's much different. It's still questioning my identity. And... I'm trying to think of any particularly poignant example...but, I mean, it's constant – not constant for someone with fair skin like me. If you're an Aboriginal person with black skin, it's completely constant.*

6.1.3.2 Looking for Benefits

Often added to disbelief about the participant's Indigeneity based on their light skin is a form of antagonism based on the belief that their claim to Indigeneity is made to get financial or other benefits.

Michelle Carey shows how the issue of benefits once again demonstrates non-Indigenous Australians' power over the definition of Indigeneity, and Indigenous people's obligation to prove their authenticity.

The history of colonisation is, in part, characterised by non-Aboriginal's people 'fixation' with fractionalising, quantifying and qualifying 'Aboriginality' in an attempt to negate Aboriginal people's right to their own subjectivity. Even though the white obsession for determining Aboriginality with biologically determined racial categories has been replaced with a more palatable 'social' definition, Aboriginal people are still required to demonstrate that they satisfy specific criteria in order to gain access to certain government rights and benefits.²⁶

Indeed, the type of questioning I described followed the participants into their university and professional lives. Josh was awarded an Indigenous cadetship and worked for the government's Department of Environment. He describes how, even within this 'official' environment, his identification as Indigenous was doubted.

²⁶ CAREY, Michelle, "From Whiteness to Whitefella: Challenging White Race Power in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Josh *There was a bloke who worked in the Department, who was white, and he strongly hinted that... It was like, you know, "You're on a pretty sweet deal; you don't even look Indigenous... Are you? Are you just pointing it out to get this awesome deal?" – which bothered me. But (sigh), what can you do about it? I suppose, he was just one person. Everyone else just accepted it.*

In the same way, Miriam explained non-Indigenous people's 'polite' doubts about the authenticity of her claim to be Indigenous.

Miriam *And you see it in people's eyes as well...because they try to stay neutral, normal. You see them going... "Hm...", because, you know, you're mostly telling people in professional environments, and I mostly work in the public service, so people are informed enough to know that they can't put their personal views out...(laughs), so they kind of say, "Oh, ok, cool. Good job. You look really white."*

It is not uncommon for fair-skinned Indigenous people to have their identifications doubted when benefits are at stake. The following story from Andrew shows how a joke about looking European while claiming Indigenous heritage can lead to a more serious rejection.

Andrew *There have been occasions with friends when they tried to bring it up in a comical way, where it has attracted negative responses. So for instance, one time I went to a music festival, and one of my friends is like, "Oh, you should meet one of my friends. He's got red hair but he's actually part-Aboriginal." And the person he was saying that to was a navy person, and he had had a negative experience with someone who was claiming the benefits for being Indigenous, and in his eyes didn't represent the Indigenous community, based on appearance. So [the navy person's] mother was quite ill at the time; he wanted to go on leave, back to shore, to look after her, and his leave request was turned down because another person had taken his turn – of Caucasian appearance, but of Indigenous heritage. He asked for leave at the same time for an Indigenous festival or event that was close to him, and (...) [the navy person] saw it as, "These people don't work and use [benefits] for personal gain."*

Here again, the conflation between skin colour and culture is apparent. According to Andrew, it seems likely that the "navy person" would have better accepted a leave request coming from a dark-skinned Indigenous person. It is assumed that because his skin was

white, this Indigenous man did not belong to the 'real' Indigenous group of people for whom benefits are reserved and to which he was therefore not entitled.²⁷

Andrew's story illustrates an important debate happening today in Australia. With the adoption of the three-part definition of Aboriginality which focuses on self-identification and recognition by the community rather than on race, and with the end of policies of discrimination against Indigenous people, more Australians are now identifying as Indigenous. As a consequence, the ever-present need to define who is Indigenous or not has been reinforced. There are now fears that people will identify only to reap benefits granted to Indigenous people in order to alleviate disadvantage caused by colonisation and subsequent policies. It is sometimes assumed that these people are not true Indigenous people.

As Maureen Perkins writes,

views are divided about 'new identifiers', people who have chosen to reveal their Aboriginal ancestry in the less restrictive, but still difficult conditions that now prevail. Some Aborigines are welcoming, but others are suspicious of possible opportunism.

Perkins' words are illustrated by Jean Boladeras' personal experience of re-establishing contacts with her Indigenous family.

When I first approached members of my Nyungar family, if I expected a warm welcome, then I was to be disappointed. (...) Several Nyungars confronted me openly, saying, 'Your family thought they were white. They tried to pass as white. You forgot about us. What do you want to know us for now? Do you want to jump on the gravy train?' (...) People who publicly espouse an Aboriginal identity might be accused of being too white to be Aboriginal, and thought to be

²⁷ Note that in this case, we are not even talking about benefits reserved for Indigenous people since both men were entitled to go on leave. The man's resentment comes from a vision of Indigenous people as not taking work seriously, to the detriment of people like him who ask to go on leave for what he thinks are more valid reasons.

doing it for some undeserved or unearned political or financial benefits. If that person denies an Aboriginal identity, however, she or he may be denigrated.²⁸

Miriam also noticed the suspicion with which the Indigenous community sometimes look at newcomers. Despite defending her right as a fair-skinned person to claim her Indigenous heritage, she is also aware of the facts that being 'black' entails more than identifying – she later mentions the importance of having a “lived experience” of Indigeneity – and that the combination of a white skin, of a family who passed, and therefore of tenuous present links to the Indigenous community makes it difficult to avoid distrust. The following quote reveals these insecurities.

Miriam *Unfortunately, there's a belief that you would only say you're Aboriginal to take advantage of jobs, or scholarships. (...) I think there will be some Aboriginal people who say, "You're not black. Why are you saying you are now?", and things like that, and probably think they're just doing it for scholarships and jobs.*

With Casey who is now well integrated in his Indigenous community, I talked about the fear of having one's identification rejected by the Indigenous community because of one's “too-white” appearance. According to Casey, the stories of rejection stem from a worry that people who are unknown to the community will try to take advantage of benefits.

Casey *There are the dodge stories of people using certificates of Aboriginality to get scholarships and then they have nothing to do with the Aboriginal community whatsoever, or using it to get a job; the 9 to 5 blackfella who just goes and gets their job because they're black, gets the money from it, goes home and takes off the black, puts the white on. That rejection is because people think, "We don't really trust people who come along and haven't lived black before." That sort of thing. I think that's where that comes from.*

Echoing Miriam's comments, Casey confirms that being 'black' is a way of life more than a colour. Casey insists on the importance of “living black”: the Indigenous identity cannot be divided. In the same way as taking off one's clothes does not mean changing identities, it is impossible to be 'black' from “9 to 5” and then revert to being 'white'. Casey's comments show that having a 'white' lifestyle can create suspicions that someone's

²⁸ BOLADERAS, Jean, “The Desolate Loneliness of Racial Passing” in PERKINS, Maureen, *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, op. cit., pp. 59 and 61.

Indigenous heritage is only used for personal advancement. It is interesting to see that while Indigenous people previously had to pass as 'white' in order to get a job in Australian society, some Indigenous people now fear a reversed form of passing where 'white' people "put on the black" in order to benefit from identified positions, while keeping a 'white' identity. Casey looks at this behaviour with disdain, while, to Miriam, it is a source of insecurity: she fears her motives for identifying will be questioned. Although the situation is now reversed, the status quo remains: 'white' and 'black' identities are seen as fundamentally opposed, as incompatible, something which is problematic for most of the participants who occupy an uncomfortable space in-between 'white' and 'black' identities, as I will show in 6.3.

Also unchanged and apparent in the debate on benefits is the tendency to conflate colour and culture. This is particularly apparent on the non-Indigenous side of the debate. An example of this tendency can be found in recent articles written by journalist Andrew Bolt and for which he was later convicted, having breached the Racial Discrimination Act.²⁹ Bolt's argument was that many fair-skinned Indigenous people identify in order to receive scholarships or awards and boost their careers, to the detriment of darker-skinned and genuinely disadvantaged Indigenous people for whom the benefits were originally intended. He developed his point of view in two critical articles, "It's so hip to be black" and "White fellas in the black".

I'm not saying any of those [white Aborigines] I've named chose to be Aboriginal for anything but the most heartfelt and honest of reasons. I certainly don't accuse them of opportunism, even if full-blood Aborigines may wonder how such fair people can claim to be one of them and in some cases take black jobs. (...) I'm saying only that this self-identification as Aboriginal strikes me as self-obsessed, and driven more by politics than by any racial reality.³⁰

When a privileged white Aborigine snaffles that extra [money set aside by non-Indigenous Australians to help disadvantaged Indigenous people], odds are that

²⁹ "Bolt Breached Discrimination Act, Judge Rules", *ABC News* website, 29 September 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-28/bolt-found-guilty-of-breaching-discrimination-act/3025918>, accessed on 12 December 2016.

³⁰ BOLT, Andrew, "It's so hip to be black", *The Herald Sun* 15 April 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1109_herladsun09.pdf, accessed on 5 July 2016.

an underprivileged black Aborigine misses out on the very things we hoped would help them most. (...) What's a black Aboriginal artist from the bush to think, seeing yet another white man lope back to the city with the goodies? (...) When even academics and artists now spurn the chance to be people of our better future – people of every ethnicity but none – and sign up instead as white Aborigines, insisting on differences invisible to the eye, how much is there left to hold us together?³¹

Bolt put forward an argument that benefits reserved for Indigenous people are not going to those who need it most. This debate is not new and raises the question of the efficacy and fairness of affirmative actions. It also challenges the idea of using race as a criterion for reparative actions. If Indigenous people are given access to benefits, it is to alleviate the disadvantages created by colonisation and past policies which were racially discriminatory. This explains why benefits are granted to people who are identified as Indigenous, regardless of other criteria. As well as non-Indigenous Australians like Bolt, another person using the same framing is Indigenous Australian Dallas Scott, who encourages a need-based approach to the distribution of benefits and supports Bolt's ideas.

I have previously discussed cases of Aboriginal-identifying people who have been given race-based preferential treatment or opportunities, yet depart completely in appearance from the kinds of Aborigines you see when documenting the dysfunction and despair of a remote Aboriginal community.³²

In another publication, he said,

We have one section of the Aboriginal race – pale-skinned people – doing well, and another living as if in a third-world country. I will never apologise for believing this must change.³³

Questioning how the distribution of benefits works seems legitimate (although it is not a question I want to tackle here). However, the discourse about race that Bolt and Dallas

³¹ BOLT, Andrew, "White fellas in the black", *The Herald Sun*, 21 August 2009, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/white-fellas-in-the-black/story-e6frfif0-1225764532947>, accessed on 5 July 2016.

³² SCOTT, Dallas, "Listen to the Voices of True Need", *The Australian*, 5 April 2013, accessed on 8 July 2014.

³³ SCOTT, Dallas quoted in OVERINGTON, Caroline, "Not so Black and White", *The Australian*, 24 March 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/no-so-black-and-white/story-e6frg8h6-1226305047298>, accessed on 5 July 2016.

use is problematic. When attacked on the content of his articles, Andrew Bolt defended his right to freedom of speech. A lawyer for the plaintiffs, however, explained that this was not the issue at stake.

We see [this case] as clarifying the issue of identity – who gets to say who is and is not Aboriginal. Essentially, the articles by Bolt have challenged people's identity. (...) The issue is essentially about whether or not other people can define identity, and in particular Aboriginal identity, based on how you look.³⁴

Indeed, in his presentation of the issue of benefits, Bolt actually tackles the notion of identity. He bases his judgement of who can or cannot be Indigenous on biological and physical criteria. This is clearly visible in his choice of words: “full-blood”, “fair Aborigines”, “racial reality”.³⁵ According to Bolt's description, only “full-blood” and “black” Aborigines can be called Indigenous. Even more problematic than this denial of the evolution of Indigenous people's physical appearances as a result of colonisation, is the link that he once again establishes between physical appearance and culture. Bolt reproduces the binary opposition between so called authentic dark-skinned Indigenous people who also live in the “bush” and are disadvantaged, and ‘fake’ urban “white Aborigines” who steal their jobs.

Bolt also upholds the idea that there is no reason for a person with fair skin to identify as Indigenous. This is evident in the second quote above. His logic is that since these people's skins indicates that they also have European heritage, they should identify with these heritages as well. In the articles, Bolt attacked a number of prominent fair-skinned Indigenous people and cited their different heritages in contrast with their small percentage of Indigenous blood to prove his point. Again, while Bolt's questioning of how government benefits should be distributed is justifiable, I believe that his understanding of Indigenous identity is based on a discourse of simplified representations of Indigenous identity that fail to take into account the effects of colonisation and the way most Indigenous people understand identity – not based on colour, and not perceived as a choice.

³⁴ ZYNGIER, Joel quoted in CONNOR, Michael, “Andrew Bolt on Trial”, *The Quadrant Online*, 1st May 2011, <http://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2011/05/andrew-bolt-on-trial/>, accessed on 6 August 2015.

³⁵ BOLT, Andrew, “It's So Hip to Be Black”, *The Herald Sun* 15 April 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1109_herladsun09.pdf, accessed on 5 July 2016.

Indigenous writer Dallas Scott draws on a similar logic in his opposition between disadvantaged black-looking Indigenous people and the privileged white-looking others. As I will further analyse in section 6.3, equating disadvantage and Indigeneity with colour means that it can be difficult for the participants whose skin is white to dare claim their heritage or even to feel they can be Indigenous.³⁶ What the persistence of such discourses shows is that although race is no longer valid as a scientific concept, its impact on people's identity remains consequential.

6.1.4 “Race Is Very Real”

Faced with reactions of disbelief or rejection, most of the participants were annoyed but also demonstrated an understanding of where these reactions came from and often accepted them. In the same way as he dismissed racist jokes as usual in Australian culture, Josh excused his friend's reaction.

Josh *But then it was always ongoing jokes: so I remember telling one of my good mates that I was Indigenous, and he laughed! He laughed and said, “Shit, I don't really see it!” It was fair enough. But it wasn't like a slur or anything. It was just... That's just what people are like.*

Similarly, both Miriam and Megan understood that people would not accept their claims to Indigeneity right away.

Miriam *At that internship, last week, they were asking for our certificate, and one of the dark-skinned boys – he looks fully Aboriginal – he's like, “I don't have it. I've never been asked for it.” And she was like, “Oh...ok.” Then she looked at me; I was like, “I'll bring it in tomorrow!” (laughs) She probably wants mine!*

Delphine Did that offend you, that she doubted you? Or did you think it was normal?

³⁶ This was pointed out by Judge Bromberg in his judgement against Bolt: “Beyond the hurt and insult involved, I have also found that the conduct was reasonably likely to have an intimidatory effect on some fair-skinned Aboriginal people and in particularly young Aboriginal persons or others with vulnerability in relation to their identity.”

Judge BROMBERG quoted in FANNING, Ellen, “No, Andrew Bolt did not Have a Point”, *The Global Mail*, 9 August 2012, accessed on 12 July 2013.

Miriam *I didn't take offence to it. It was an offensive comment to make, of course, but I just thought, well, obviously it's a racist comment, but... (...) Fair enough, look at me! You know... Of course you would think that.*

Both Josh and Miriam, although annoyed, brushed aside these questions about their identity with the same expression: “fair enough”. They have come to terms with the fact that mentioning their Indigenous heritage while having a fair skin often means being doubted or made fun of.

Megan also accepted that people’s appearance plays an important part in the way we make sense of the world.

Delphine Would you think that it is an offensive question – I know a lot of people do: “How much Aboriginality do you have?”

Megan *For me it's not offensive because I find that, I think it's relevant (...) because, you know, when we look around, when we live our lives, we look at things, and we hear things, and we smell things. You try to piece together some kinds of realities, and the way you look does matter. That's why we've got eyes. You make judgements of the way things look – rightly or wrongly – so it is helping people piece together in their mind, “Why do you look the way you look?” Depending on your experience, it could be offensive, but it's not offensive to me, because I would ask that question too, “Why do I look the way I look? Oh, because I've only got a small...percentage of Aboriginal ancestry.” So to me, that's relevant.*

In the same line of thought, Maureen Perkins explained why it is that race remains an important tool to categorise people, even though the concept of race has no scientific foundation.

Even if race itself is not true, the human mind’s *need* for race is ‘true’; that is, the human mind has a deeply entrenched susceptibility to invent racialized categories. (...) While [the] scientific validity [of race] may be disproved, according to reputable science, it remains powerful as an idea and ‘folk’ belief; that is, you can tell people that it doesn’t exist, but their own eyes convince them that it does, because they see people of different physiognomy and skin colour and equate this with racial difference.³⁷

³⁷ PERKINS, Maureen, “Editorial” in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, op. cit., p. 17.

Growing up with discourses about identity focused on biology and on physical appearance makes the participants more likely to accept people's questioning of their heritage. They accept that black skin is still strongly associated with Indigeneity in the eyes of many non-Indigenous people. Moreover, as both Megan and Maureen Perkins pointed out, the way someone looks does matter in everyday life constructions of identities.

The fact that appearance is understood to signal a particular culture, however, is more problematic. While some people choose to give a certain image of themselves by working on their appearance for example, physical characteristics such as skin colour are not chosen. The conflation of colour and culture can lead to the misrecognition of someone's identity. For example, a speaker in the SBS *Insight* programme "Aboriginal or not?" expressed her frustration at the discrepancy between her Indigenous identification and her white skin: "I grew up my whole life being Aboriginal and my colour is not anything about my Aboriginality. My colour is something that was imposed through colonisation. (...) We shouldn't be judging each other by colour."³⁸ In the same way, a person commented on one of Casey's online articles in which he wrote about his family history and his present commitment to his Indigenous identity. The commentator wrote, "He may see himself as a black aboriginal, but unless preceded by a speech about his 'choice', few others will. Race is very, very real."³⁹ This person's comment about race illustrates Perkins' idea that this concept matters in everyday life interactions: according to the commentator, although Casey may feel he is Indigenous, his physical appearance will always prevent people from reaching this conclusion without an explanation from him. The necessary justifications fair-skinned Indigenous people have to provide are an illustration of the commentator's statement that "race is real" in today's Australia.

6.2 Colour and Legitimacy

In his study of "recognition", Charles Taylor explains the effects of misrecognition on identity.

³⁸ Participant in *Insight* programme "Aboriginal or Not", *op. cit.*

³⁹ In order to preserve Casey's anonymity, I will not quote the article from which this comment is taken.

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.⁴⁰

In the previous section, I explained how influential the discourse linking skin colour and culture was for the participants in this research project. In this section, I want to come back to the same discourse linking black skin to a more 'authentic' Indigenous identity in order to analyse its effect on the participants' personal journeys towards identification as Indigenous.

As Taylor analyses, being misrecognised – which is what happened to the participants when they experienced disbelief or rejection – can affect someone's perception of themselves and limit their freedom to identify as they wish. For most of the participants, their white skin was considered an obstacle to identifying or even to imagining themselves as Indigenous. Indeed, as I have shown, a black skin is still a marker of true Indigeneity because it is associated with having retained one's traditional culture. It also denotes an experience of Indigeneity – comprising racism – which the participants often feel they lack. Consequently, being misrecognised as 'white' when they want to claim their Indigenous heritage can make the participants feel hesitant or illegitimate.

For reasons which I will analyse in the following section, white skin – and the reactions it provokes – was often regarded as an obstacle to identification, even by those participants who were aware that skin colour was not necessarily an important criterion of identity to Indigenous people.

⁴⁰ TAYLOR, Charles, "The Politics of Recognition" in GUTTMAN, Amy (ed.), *Multiculturalism*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 25.

6.2.1 “I Don’t Look It.”

6.2.1.1 “How Can I Be Aboriginal? Look at My Skin.”

Yin Paradies argues in an article on essentialism that “despite assertions to the contrary, it is clear that skin colour and physicality are exceptionally important in the recognition and validation of Aboriginal identity.”⁴¹ In the previous section Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ reactions to the participants’ combination of a fair skin and Indigenous heritage were explored. I now wish to turn to issues of legitimacy the participants experienced as a result of these reactions.

Casey *I told my friends at school, “Yeah, my grandfather was Aboriginal.” And they were like, “You don’t look Aboriginal.” I thought, “Hm, yeah, that must be right.”*

I was working in a bakery at the shopping centre near where I live on the Gold Coast, and I remember seeing these... I don’t know if you want the term full-blood; these really, really dark Aboriginal people came through the doors, and I was just like, “Wow, wow” and I felt like a sort of pride in that but also, “How do I connect with that sort of stuff?”

The first comment, as well as earlier ones by other participants, shows that having their Indigenous heritage or identity questioned was a common experience for several of the interviewees. Casey’s experiences date back to his childhood and adolescence, when he was not yet aware of the less significant role of skin colour for Indigenous people. Casey’s greater knowledge of Indigenous people’s understanding of their identity was also apparent when he asked me if I wanted him to use the term “full-blood”, as this shows he now knows that blood is not a criterion which many Indigenous people use⁴² although it still has meaning for non-Indigenous people. During his childhood and early teenage years, Casey was prepared to believe people who told him he could not be Indigenous based on his European appearance. Both quotes show the internalisation of representations of Indigenous people as dark-skinned only.

⁴¹ PARADIES, Yin C., “Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity”, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

⁴² The discourse of blood, however, is now used by some Indigenous people as an empowering tool. I analyse this use of this discourse in chapter 9.

In the second quote, Casey's exclamation, "Wow, wow" seems to point out an ambivalent feeling of both admiration for the Indigenous people who entered the shop and for what they represent, and of intimidation. From this quote, it is clear that Casey could see more than the colour of the Indigenous people's skin. His worry that he would not be able to connect with the Indigenous men reveals, I believe, that for Casey, at the time, a dark skin was synonymous with a higher, more authentic form of Indigeneity. Having dark skin meant having retained your Indigenous culture. Thus, Casey who had not grown up immersed in Indigenous culture felt disconnected from Indigeneity both on a physical and on a cultural level. This reveals the influence of dominant non-Indigenous Australian representations of Indigenous people in today's Australia, and their detrimental effect on self-identification. Learning about Indigenous ways of conceiving their identity later helped Casey overcome his doubts.

In 1996, Fiona Noble conducted a research project on people learning about their Indigeneity. She interviewed south-east Queenslanders who were raised 'white' but had discovered they had Indigenous ancestry or suspected it. Regina Ganter who later analysed her work observed that,

Although these interviewees claimed that being Aboriginal is 'not about biology that much' and 'genetics doesn't really come into it', all of them made reference to the body (dark, black, look at my skin, olive skin, curly brown hair, sleek shiny and blond, red head, fair (...)), because it is from the body that cues are read that have been socially obfuscated.⁴³

I found that this remark could also apply to the participants in this study. For example, in the following discussion, Josh told me about the Indigenous people he worked with through his cadetship programme. Despite being comfortable with them, his and their physical appearances remained important in the way he felt.

Josh *I felt comfortable around these Indigenous people – as part of them, I guess. (...) Because they were exactly the same as me. (...) They had the same attitude to life... They make the same comments to me about Indigenous people. They used the*

⁴³ GANTER, Regina, "Turning Aboriginal - Historical Bents", *Borderlands*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2008, p. 2, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol7no2_2008/ganter_turning.pdf, accessed on 8 July 2016.

same slang. Things like that. (...)

Delphine And were they fair-skinned Aborigines as well?

Josh *Ah...they weren't dark. They were pretty fair, yes – not as fair as me.*

Delphine Did that help feeling comfortable with them?

Josh *No, because they still had the facial structure, and the skin, and they still looked more Aboriginal. They had dark hair and things like that. That was Stu anyway. Pete was quite... He wasn't black as the ace of spades, but he was...a brown... He looked Aboriginal.*

Delphine That wasn't a problem for you, thinking, "I don't look Aboriginal"...

Josh *That is a massive problem. (...) Because people... People will always question your integrity.*

Delphine But these people didn't?

Josh *No. Yeah, no, no way. Yeah, yeah, that's right!*

Josh states elsewhere that he will not always disclose his heritage for two reasons: he believes he does not look the part of an Aborigine, and this will in turn attract judgements and questions from people. He said earlier, "It is not something I willingly put forward, because it saves the massive explanations that you feel obliged to give or that people expect". I would argue, as Avril Bell does, that the preoccupation with physical appearance is greater for people who have not grown up "embedded in the community".⁴⁴ First, these people have grown up with representations of Indigeneity that promote dark skin as a necessary feature of authentic Indigeneity. Secondly, the discourses about Indigenous identity they are surrounded with still oppose white and black skins and cultures in essential terms. Considering that colour and culture are presented as inseparable, if it is already difficult to accept that it is possible to be Indigenous while looking white, it is even harder to envisage the possibility of learning about one's indigenous culture after having lived 'white'.

⁴⁴ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, op. cit., p. 75.

Yet, what Josh's story illustrates is that the representations which mainly originate in and are perpetuated by non-Indigenous Australia lose power when the participants have an opportunity to interact with Indigenous people. Thus, Josh, while still thinking that he did not look as Indigenous as the people he worked with, felt comfortable with them on a cultural level. As he said, "They're the same as me." He actually seemed to realise as he said it that these Indigenous people had not judged him based on his appearance although he generally expects this will happen if he discloses his heritage. By working with a group of Indigenous people, Josh was able to separate colour, culture and authenticity, three concepts that are essentially linked in representations of Indigenous people, and which maintain a seemingly unbridgeable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

6.2.1.2 Having Black Skin Means Having Indigenous Culture

Most participants in this study, as I explained, were already well aware of the way Indigenous people generally understand their identity. Therefore, they were able to dissociate colour and culture. This did not mean, however, that when it came to dealing with their own Indigenous heritage, they were free of representations linking dark skin to traditional culture and to authentic Indigeneity. Thus, while several participants told me they knew that it was possible to have a white skin and still identify as Indigenous, when I asked them if, consequently, they would not mind mentioning their Indigenous heritage, they often appeared reluctant to say yes.

Megan told me she started questioning the validity of traditional representations of Indigeneity when she went to university. Nevertheless, when asked about her personal experience, Megan returns to the idea that a darker skin colour is an indicator of a higher degree of Indigenous culture.

Megan *I really don't think if a very dark Aboriginal person walked down the street and we had the opportunity for that to come up that I would say, "Oh, I've got some Aboriginal heritage."*

Delphine What about a fair-skinned Aboriginal? (...)

Megan *Yeah, I feel more comfortable... You're on a bit more of a level playing field. (...) A dark-skinned Aboriginal person will say, "Oh, so where are your people from?" And then I'd say, "I'm not entirely sure." "Ok. So you're not entirely sure where your people are from, but you just..." It's just...weird and awkward.*

Megan still assumes that a black-looking person will have a higher degree of traditional knowledge than a fairer-skinned one. She bases this understanding on representations of 'authentic' Indigenous people and on her own experience. Yet these representations and experiences do not necessarily reflect the reality of Indigenous people: Dallas Scott, the Indigenous and black-skinned blogger I quoted earlier confesses that he lives a suburban life and does not speak his ancestors' traditional language (see chapter 7). On the contrary, several European-looking Indigenous people repeated during the *Insight* programme "Aboriginal or not" that Megan watched that colour had nothing to do with their Indigeneity.⁴⁵ Still, Megan assumes that a white-looking person will not try to probe into her past in the way a black Indigenous person could. She feels culturally safer with people who share her appearance.⁴⁶ In sum, to *look* Aboriginal still means to *be* Aboriginal for many people who grew up with traditional representations of Indigenous people. Being aware that these representations do not reflect the physical variety of Indigenous people in twenty-first century Australia does not necessarily make one feel more legitimate claiming Indigenous heritage. This last quote from Josh illustrates the association between 'looking' and 'being' in the eyes of others as well as in Josh's.

Josh *I suppose you have to be careful because you don't want to claim something if it isn't true. (...) People don't like it if you said that you're Indigenous but you're not.*

Delphine What do you mean "you're not"? Because you knew...

⁴⁵ On the other hand, some Indigenous speakers on the show based their judgements on colour. For example, Dallas Scott's uncle protested against his nephew not being granted a certificate of Aboriginality although he clearly looks Aboriginal: "You go into organisations like this and people are hired – the white administration comes out in Aboriginal organisations – and they bring out these fellas and these are the people who are going to be saying, "Prove your Aboriginality and prove who you are". These guys are fair-skinned: why don't they prove who they are? Why do you ask a person like Dallas his Aboriginality? Can't they see it?"

CARTER, Wilfred on *Insight*: "Aboriginal or not?", *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ I will come back to the idea of 'safe spaces' in chapter 10.

Josh *Yeah, I know I am. But people can't see that. So what am I going to do? Carry on a card that says "Approved Indigenous"? No.*

6.2.1.3 Skin Colour and Lateral Violence

The participants' representations of 'authentic' Indigeneity were also sometimes reinforced by reactions from Indigenous people supporting these representations. In a study on how light-skinned Indigenous people react to racism, Bindi Bennett found that several of her participants were victims of lateral violence.⁴⁷ This phenomenon described as "internalised racism" happens when "the colonised groups internalised the values and behaviours of their oppressors, leading to a negative view of themselves and their culture. This results in low self-esteem and often the adoption of violent behaviours."⁴⁸ As far as the issue of colour is concerned, this means that the Western tendency to judge identity in racial terms and therefore to base its understanding on physical features was taken up by Indigenous people. Consequently, some Indigenous people now value black skin regarded as a mark of Indigeneity, while the combination of a white skin and Indigenous identification can raise suspicion. This is due to several reasons mentioned before: white skin originally represented the oppressor and it remains a strong symbol of colonization. Again, 'white' is not only a colour; to many Indigenous people, it is the colour associated with a culture of dominance and violence. In a country where the marks of colonisation are still present, and where there is still a strong dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, skin colour becomes a convenient criterion upon which to categorise someone, to judge their identity, even though this criterion is often a misleading one. More recently, the question of benefits has come into play and, as I explained, non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike fear 'fake' Indigenous people stealing 'real' Indigenous people's money. While these reasons explaining lateral violence were previously analysed, in this section, I want to mention the effects of lateral violence on the participants' ability to feel Indigenous and/or to identify as such.

⁴⁷ BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ "Lateral Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities" in *Social Justice Report 2011*, Australian Human Rights Commission website, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/chapter-2-lateral-violence-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities-social>, accessed on 8 July 2016.

Skin colour was one of the elements on which Bennett's participants were negatively judged by Indigenous people.

The Aboriginal community asks intimidating and intrusive questions about your family and heritage, trying to catch you out in a lie. When I had Indigenous people questioning me saying "You have an accent", "Where are you from?" and when I told them I am from around here they were like "No you're not, you're not dark enough." It was really hard for me to say "Yeah I am" because they were darker than me and they seemed more in touch with the culture. So I felt like they were right. (...) My skin colour meant my Aboriginality was always questioned by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, it was so much harder hearing it from other Indigenous people in my community as it made me doubt myself and where I belonged.⁴⁹

In the same way as non-Indigenous people draw conclusions about someone's identity based on physical features, the Indigenous people Noble's participant, Thoomie, describes above assumed that because she looked whiter than them, she could be faking her Indigenous heritage. This testimony gives weight to Megan's earlier assumptions that a darker Indigenous person will judge her more easily. It is also evidence of the negative effects of misrecognition or non-recognition mentioned by Charles Taylor: like Megan and Casey (with the story of the Indigenous men entering the shop), Thoomie assumes that being darker means being "more in touch with the culture", which in turn makes her doubt herself.

Bennett thus concluded,

After experiencing these incidents of lateral racism (and violence), participants spoke about lowered self-esteem, feeling they should not be proud of their Aboriginal heritage, feelings of rejection, of being unwanted by the Aboriginal community and of being less worthy and less Aboriginal than dark-skinned Aboriginal people. These situations may preclude some light-skinned Aboriginal people from re-entering the Aboriginal community or seeking to strengthen and confirm their Aboriginal identity.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Thoomie quoted in BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186.

⁵⁰ BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, p. 186.

In this study, the participants who had interacted with Indigenous people had varied experiences. The earlier example of Josh shows that being in contact with actual Indigenous people could defuse fears of being judged according to traditional representations. Casey and Vanessa were also quickly welcomed within the Indigenous community which encouraged them to learn more about their heritage and to identify. On the other hand, Kate told me she witnessed cases of lateral violence at work.

Kate *I started working at the university, and I was interacting directly with the new incoming Indigenous students and I learnt a lot of things. I guess I learnt a lot about the negative things that students have to go through in terms of racism and also lateral violence within the Indigenous populations themselves, so students who are actually outcast by their own people because they don't look, you know, Indigenous.*

Kate generally dismissed the idea that white skin could be equated with a less authentic Indigenous identity. In her personal quest to find out about her Indigenous heritage, she also found her Indigenous colleagues supportive: "It's good to see that they're so supportive, and actually want to help me find the culture and trace my background and all that sort of things". Yet she was still a little reluctant to mention her heritage at work before having traced her heritage and acquired enough knowledge about her family, community and culture. She said, "I mean you're not going to identify until you know your background". One of the reasons for her reluctance was physical appearance.

We do have a particular staff member in our team who is very much... You have to look a certain way to be Indigenous in her eyes. (...) I think that if I were to come out as an Indigenous, it would really set her offside, and we'd have no working relationship, which can't really happen when we're in a team together. So that's probably another reason why I wouldn't do it, but it's not the only reason. I mean we still haven't traced anything back yet.

Although her colleague's beliefs are not the only reason Kate does not publicly acknowledge her heritage, the fact that she has to take these beliefs into account in her identification reveals a form of lateral violence. Kate's freedom to define what her heritage means is limited by others' understanding of it.

Depending on their knowledge of Indigenous culture and their level of involvement with Indigenous people, the participants were more or less affected by questions about the colour of their skin in relation to their heritage. Despite knowing that skin colour was not a valid definitional criterion for most Indigenous people, it seemed to me that many still considered blackness more legitimate.

6.2.1.4 Looking for 'Blackness'

I have explained the persistence of ideas about colour, culture and authenticity in spite of the participants' insistence, in this study as well as in Fiona Noble's, that Indigeneity was not about looks but about how you feel. Because they still gave credit to traditional physical representations of Indigeneity, having traditional physical traces of Indigeneity seemed to bring reassurance to a few participants.

Adina mentioned her son's surprise at discovering that Indigenous people can look white.

Adina *In some cases, [my son] comes home and says, "Mum! You wouldn't believe how white some of these people look! You have no idea!"*

Delphine What about the fact that *you* look white?

Adina *Ah, he thinks that... My eyes colour's ok for him. He says, "Well your eyes are brown, Mum, so that's alright. (...) But some of these kids have blue eyes, and that's really weird! You would never guess it!"*

Adina is one of the participants who feels legitimate identifying as Indigenous despite the fact that she looks white and who is still in the process of learning about her Indigenous culture. Even so, she thought that her son identified in a more natural way than she did because he learnt about his heritage as a child. Her remark shows, I believe, that despite learning that Indigenous culture is not about skin colour, Adina's son needs to find a justification for her mother's identification. He does this by noting that although she is fair-

skinned, her eyes are brown, which he sees as closer to traditional Indigenous features than blue eyes, and is therefore more acceptable.

Vanessa addresses a similar issue.

Vanessa *I remember having friends go up to Darwin – because Darwin's the only place I haven't been in Australia. And they were, "Oh, we saw little [Vanessas] running around everywhere. I went, "What do you mean?" (...) And my brother had taken photos of these little girls who looked identical to me as a child. And I went like, "Oh, that's heartwarming. That's awesome!" Because I had a little afro – I was very fair but with a little afro. And everyone was like, "Your younger photos, you can see as you grow older you looked more like your dad."⁵¹ I'm like, "Fair enough."*

This quote suggests that Vanessa was quite attached to this memory of her with “a little afro” as it is a link to her Indigenous heritage which is less physically visible today.

6.2.2 “I Don't Look Black; I Haven't Paid My Dues.”

Another key issue raised by the participants is that of lighter-skinned Indigenous people not having to deal with the negative aspects of being Indigenous. Both Adam and Miriam express the idea that not looking black protected them from discrimination but also changed the way they perceive their Indigenous identity.

Adam *Guilt's probably the thing that's driven me away for most of the last few years. (...) I'm privileged. I'm privileged because I've got white skin. (...) If you looked Aboriginal, you would have been much worse off. I [as opposed to darker-skinned people] had to admit I was before anybody could attack me.*

Miriam expressed a similar feeling.

Delphine Do you feel in any way that not having received any racist comments, not having been disadvantaged or anything, makes it harder for you to tell people “I'm Aboriginal”?

⁵¹ Vanessa's father is not Indigenous. According to what she says, when she was younger, she looked more like her Torres Strait Islander mother and she now looks more like her father.

Miriam *Yeah, yeah. (...) I don't know what it's like to be black and to be discriminated against because you look Aboriginal.*

Delphine Would you feel more Aboriginal if you had experienced all that?

Miriam *Oh, for sure, for sure! (...) I wasn't brought up Aboriginal, and I don't look Aboriginal, so how could I be disadvantaged because of that? So, yeah, that's an important point that I've always thought about: I haven't had – as an Aboriginal person – I haven't had the same experiences as a dark-skinned Aboriginal person. (...) I would feel quite comfortable with the fact that a dark-skinned Aboriginal person might think that it undermines my legitimacy to be Aboriginal. If a black Aboriginal person said that to me, I would say “Yep”. (...) It affects how I would see my Aboriginality, but it doesn't affect that fact that I am Aboriginal.*

For both Adam and Miriam, having white skin was associated with having lived an easier life than people with dark skins. Having explained how colour and culture are linked in representations of Indigeneity in Australia, it is not difficult to believe that people whose skin signals Indigenous heritage will be targeted more easily, and that the colour of their skin will be associated with the negative stereotypes about Indigeneity such as laziness, violence, or addiction to alcohol (see chapter 4).

White-skinned Indigenous people, however, also talk about being victims of racism. For example, Mark McMillan who was one of the Indigenous people attacked by Andrew Bolt in his articles, stated that where he grew up, he was criticised for being an “albino boong”⁵² and saw his family being “spat at”.⁵³ McMillan was strongly criticised by Bolt for playing the victim and having received money Bolt thought should be destined for darker Indigenous people.⁵⁴ Adam explained that according to him, fair-skinned and dark-skinned Indigenous people have different struggles. He regarded having his identity challenged by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as a form of racism. Moreover, identifying while he knows he will have to face this type of reactions and justify himself is a difficulty people who are physically recognised as Indigenous do not have. Adam saw this as willingly putting himself at risk. Contrary to the experience Mark McMillan shares, the participants in this study did not identify as Indigenous when they grew up. Avril Bell's argument that

⁵² “Boong” is a derogatory term for “Aboriginal person”.

⁵³ McMILLAN, Mark on *Insight*: “Aboriginal or not?”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ BOLT, Andrew, “White Fellas in the Black”, *op. cit.*

physical appearance matters more to people who did not grow up embedded in their community can be verified here. Because he was fair-skinned but recognised as Indigenous, McMillan experienced racism. This was not the case of the participants and they see this lack of experience as problematic. Adam felt guilty about being able to call himself Indigenous while having been privileged in a way darker Indigenous people were not. Miriam also felt that the absence of racism in her life made it more difficult to claim her heritage. But while Miriam did not think that it affected the fact that she was Indigenous, Megan, on the other hand, felt that this was one of the reasons preventing her from identifying.

Megan *I'm just guessing, but I think it's easier when you're fair, and I think that's why there was so much anger on that Insight programme. The people who were dark looked to the people who were fair and said, "You shouldn't be allowed to enjoy everything because you haven't experienced everything." That was the vibe that I felt. Why should you reap all the benefit – financial benefit, whatever – if you haven't actually had this experience your whole life of having racism and things like that? (...) And I think that's why people got fired up on the programme. (...) They were like, "I have paid my dues. I was brought up black; I suffered the racism, and I don't think it's fair, basically, that some people can just pop up and say, "Hey, I was brought up white, but Aboriginality is considered quite genuine, so I want to have that genuine association."*

I'm not entitled, I haven't paid my dues – because I don't look black – I'm not entitled to, now, like, reap any benefits or positive things about Aboriginality.

Megan felt that Indigenous identity was something to be earned. Overall, this is what all participants felt: none took identifying as Indigenous lightly; all took into consideration the potential reactions from non-Indigenous people, but above all from the Indigenous community. The participants were often more worried that their identification would offend Indigenous people than they were afraid of the negative consequences for themselves (such as being subjected to racial stereotyping). It feels as if some participants feared being caught out as inauthentic by what they saw as more authentic Indigenous people who could see through their too-flimsy identification. This was something that the participants thought would be disrespectful to these Indigenous people.

What is somewhat disturbing in Megan's comment – even though understandable – is the idea that in order to be truly Indigenous, one has to “pay one's dues” and experience racism and disadvantage.⁵⁵

Because a white face is a reminder of colonisation for parts of the Indigenous community, because it is still associated with the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture, it is an obstacle to feeling and being considered authentically Indigenous. This is even more so for people with tenuous links to the Indigenous community like the participants in this study.

6.3 Passing

“Tell them you're Indian.” Or Maori, or Islander. Anything but Aboriginal. Many Aboriginal families commonly practised such deceptions until the 1960s at least, in order to deny the State access to their children, sometimes to avoid a repetition of the parents' experience of removal. (...) Many Aboriginal people have grown up with the knowledge that their own parentage and heritage are stigmatised, marked with fear and shame by the wider society and exposing them to the unpredictable consequences of local authorities' random exercise of power.⁵⁶

As Mudrooroo writes, passing was a strategy of survival within the fair-skinned Indigenous population at a time when being known as Indigenous prevented someone from having the same opportunities as non-Indigenous Australians.⁵⁷ Several of the participants' family members, across different generations, decided to pass: Casey's grandfather left for New Zealand and hid his origins from his wife and children; Vanessa's mother decided not to tell her children about their Torres Strait Islander heritage before they were teenagers, for fear of how they would be treated; Adam's great aunt keeps insisting that the family is from African or Indian origin, etc. These examples demonstrate that fair-skinned Indigenous people have been passing as 'white' or as 'coloured' but not Indigenous for several

⁵⁵ I will come back to this idea in more detail in chapter 8.

⁵⁶ MUDROOROO, “Tell Them You're Indian” in COWLISHAW, Gillian, MORRIS, Barry (eds), *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'our' Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁵⁷ See for example BOLADERAS, Jean, “The Desolate Loneliness of Racial Passing” in PERKINS, Maureen, *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, *op. cit.*, JOHNSON and PERKINS, Maureen, “Editorial” in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, *op. cit.*

generations. As Regina Ganter explains, today still, many people “have ‘opted out’ of being Aboriginal (...) because they find it more advantageous not to be seen as being Aboriginal. Their numbers and proportions are impossible to gauge from any database.”⁵⁸

Marjorie Droste Ba explains some of the reasons why people would rather still “opt out”, and in so doing also rejects accusations of fake identifications.

There is a denial of Aboriginality on the part of many people with Indigenous heritage. This comes at a price. Sometimes the stakes are too high. People may wish to identify but are ridiculed in the broader community. They are expected to deny a heritage going back through eons of time on the basis that they don't fit the stereotype of what an Aboriginal person should ‘look’ like. (...) In my experience, very few people who do not have Aboriginal blood claim to be Aboriginal. Those who do falsely claim to be Aboriginal soon find that the price to do so is too high. The point has been made that sometimes it is easier not to identify as Aboriginal. It is easier to deny one's heritage and it is a lot more comfortable to not come under scathing attack from some quarters of Australian society.⁵⁹

Droste Ba's comments were often echoed in the participants' reluctance to embrace their heritage. As I explained, none of them took claiming their heritage and identifying as Indigenous lightly. Several of them, while lamenting their families' choice to pass in the past, felt this made it difficult for them to now identify. In this section, I will analyse the way in which the participants personally related to the act of passing, and whether they thought the combination of Indigenous heritage and a fair skin was something advantageous or detrimental.

6.3.1 Neither ‘Black’ Nor ‘White’: The Advantages and Drawbacks of Passing

The participants in this study are all fair-skinned. Three of them have olive skin and have sometimes received comments about it. However, none of them are instantly recognisable as Indigenous. This was sometimes perceived as an advantage, sometimes as problematic,

⁵⁸ GANTER, Regina, “Turning Aboriginal - Historical Bents”, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ DROSTE BA, Marjorie, “A Discussion Paper on the Issue of Aboriginal Identity in Contemporary Australia”, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, Vol. 24, Issue 6, November-December 2000, p. 11.

sometimes as both. Once again, the participants in this study can be described as being in an in-between position, neither 'black' nor 'white'. The specific problem associated with this position was outlined by Adam.

Delphine Did you feel any less Aboriginal because you are 'white' and you grew up as 'white'? Was that an issue?

Adam *Yes. Definitely. Still is. You don't have to identify. Does that make sense? You don't have to. I've never had to tell people I'm Aboriginal, and they'll never guess. (...) It's a choice, that's it. In some ways it's a harder choice. I have to choose to put myself in the position where I'm going to get... I guess that's the thing: it's not a choice for other Aboriginal people, and so it's much harder for them, but there's this factor of choice that comes into it and which makes it hard in some ways. (...) And I've often wondered that: how would I feel if I was actually black?*

Delphine Because then the choice is made for you.

Adam *That's it. So I think there's a unique position. I think they're two totally different positions: there's the Aboriginal person who's black, and there's the Aboriginal person who's white. They have different struggles.*

Contrary to most participants who made an active decision to embrace their heritage or not, Adam said that when he was a child, his parents were already "making [him] into an Aboriginal person." He said, "I never had to actually become Aboriginal myself to some degree." To a certain extent, the fact that the choice was made for him facilitated things. However, because he looks white, Adam could still decide to pass if he wanted to. Therefore, he explains that, in the end, feeling more strongly about his Indigenous heritage – because of the emphasis placed on it by his parents – did not make the choice any easier. Knowing on the one hand that he could avoid racist comments by not mentioning his heritage, but feeling on the other hand that the Indigenous component was an important part of his identity led to a sort of conflict of interests: he had to choose between protecting himself from the constant probing he described, and identifying as Indigenous because he felt this represented who he was. Thus, Adam's analysis emphasises that choice – a consequence of being un-identifiable – can be seen as an advantage or as problematic for fair-skinned Indigenous people not embedded in the Indigenous community.

6.3.1.1 Being Un-identifiable: Advantages

6.3.1.1.1 Playing with Misrecognition

Megan and Vanessa both have skins which are not as white as that of other participants. Consequently, they both experienced being questioned about their origins. These questions and remarks could be intrusive and demeaning. However, both participants also mentioned the advantages of not being identifiable.

Megan explained how her “olive skin” indicated that she had non-Anglo-Celtic origins. She was often asked what she ‘had in her’. She recalls being called a wog at school, a derogatory term for someone of southern European origin. But despite this, she explains how the not-quite-white colour of her skin could also make people envious.

Megan *At school, I got called a wog and stuff like that (...) because I was dark: I had dark hair and dark eyes. (...) I don't look Aboriginal – which is unsurprising because it is so far back – but (...) it was always commented on: “Oh, you guys are so dark. Oh, you’ve got lovely olive skin”. My mum’s fair, but she’s got dark hair: “Oh, you didn’t get it from your mum; “It’s on Dad’s side.” And then they’d start saying, “So, what’s Dad got in him that makes him dark?”*

Olive skin is really valued in Australia, and all over the world, you know. People go to tanning centres to look brown, there’s some kind of invisible cut-off where you go from being tanned brown to being... And I think we’re under that: we’re lucky that people will say, “Oh, you’ve got lovely olive skin”, but they don’t straight away say, “Oh, you look like you’ve got something in you”.

In the same way as having an ethnic background is now considered exotic by some (see 5.3.2), having a “lovely olive skin” is no longer decried. It was at the time of the White Australia Policy, when southern and eastern European migrants were the “blacks” Miriam mentioned, not as ‘white’ as Anglo-Celtic Australians.

Megan explains her in-between position: like her father who can enjoy his Indigenous heritage ‘safely’ because it is “so far back”, Megan was never in any real danger of being identified as Indigenous and discriminated against. She points out the paradox existing in the desire for tanned, olive skin but rejection of black skin. Again, this is because blackness

is not only a skin colour: it is a symbol of Indigeneity as a whole, and of the negative stereotypes about Indigenous people. Megan saw herself as on the safe side of the line between desirable olive skin and rejected black skin.

In their study of the perception of mixed-race identities in Britain, Peter Aspinall and Miri Song noticed that not all participants in their study felt that being misrecognised or non-recognised was detrimental to the control they had over their identities.

Many of these respondents, and in particular female respondents, said that they enjoyed the attention they received from others *because* of their physical ambiguity; for instance, they were considered 'exotic'. The guessing game involved in people's reactions to them was often a good 'conversation starter'. (...) Our respondents['] perceived status as 'exotic' – different, but not *too* different – effectively afforded them privileges ordinarily associated with Whiteness. (...) Although most of these respondents were unable to control how others saw them, (...) they enjoyed the fact that they were not easily categorized (...). For these 'positive' respondents, others' curiosity and/or inability to place them could be a source of fun or amusement because (a) their sense of belonging in Britain was primary and secure, and not challenged by others; (b) how others racially assigned them was not considered to be stigmatizing – rather, the fact that others found it difficult to 'place them' made them feel special and distinctive.⁶⁰

Aspinall and Song note that while the participants cannot control the way other people see them, they do not experience this as problematic but enjoy looking different and thus attracting attention. In chapter 5, I have already explored the appeal of ethnicity in a society where 'white' has become the bland norm. This idea is present in Megan's quote: her olive skin was envied by people whose skin was not tanned. However, as Aspinall and Song argue, it is only because Megan – as she pointed out herself – is on the safe side of the colour spectrum that she can enjoy being questioned by others. As both authors explain, it is because Megan's belonging in Australia is not often challenged that she can enjoy looking different. However, this was not always true, and Megan's position can also seem precarious: as she explained, she was sometimes called a wog at school, a derogatory term pointing to her non-Anglo-Celtic origins and to her deviance from this norm. At other times,

⁶⁰ ASPINALL, Peter J., SONG, Miri, *Mixed Race Identities*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 91-93.

her olive skin attracted positive comments. Therefore, Megan seemed to have little control over either positive or negative comments about her appearance and identity. The notion of choice developed by Adam seems less present when people's skin is less white. But somehow, Megan explained that looking slightly – but not too – different did allow her to choose what she wanted to be. The fact that people could question her but could not define where the colour of her skin came from gave her another form of control over her identity.

Megan *I can choose not to think about it, because when I look in the mirror, I can be whatever I want to be. I literally could. As I was saying: when I grew up, so many people used to ask me, "What have you got in you?" They wouldn't even say... People would say, "You look Italian." I could just choose what I wanted.*

Vanessa expressed the same idea. Although she told me she was often subjected to racism because of her slightly brown skin, she also used being un-identifiable to her own advantage in order to choose who she wanted to be.

Delphine Do you think it's easier sometimes to be un-identifiable?

Vanessa *Oh yeah, totally. I used to work in International relations, and used it to my advantage extremely, with other nations and their head to country. I'd say, "I'm sorry Prime Minister from Pakistan. Oh yeah, my mum's Pakistani." And they're like, "Oh yeah, ok, we'll wait for you!" And I'm like, "Oh, my mum's Mauritius", you know... "My dad's from the UK." You know, you get away with it. It gets you out of situations if you need.*

On the other hand, Vanessa later explained that being un-identifiable did not always favour her.

Vanessa *My ethnicity, that's a part of my identity, but it's not just Indigenous. It is being un-identifiable to anyone else, and coping the flack for the unknown. (...) Depending on the context, it's either positive, negative, or neutral.*

In the same way, in her 2007 thesis *"When you're black, they look at you harder": Narrating Aboriginality within public health*, Chelsea Bond explained that olive skin can also be perceived negatively or lead to suspicion if people know that it is linked to Indigeneity. Bronwyn Carlson thus explains that,

for Bond, 'olive' skin is an insufficient physical marker to confirm or authenticate her Aboriginal identity. But, recounting her school experience, her adolescent behaviour and lack of achievement were attributed to her Aboriginality.⁶¹

Both examples are further evidence of the precarious position of mixed-heritage people in Australian society.

6.3.1.1.2 Protected from Racial Discrimination

Therefore, beyond sometimes attracting positive attention, to several participants, an important advantage of not being physically identifiable as Indigenous was the ability to avoid attracting negative attention. This is something Adam already pointed at as he explained that identifying meant deliberately putting himself in a vulnerable position. Passing has the advantage of enabling a person to escape racism.

Both Megan and Adina explained that they were glad they had grown up not knowing about their Indigenous heritage and therefore protected from discrimination.

Adina *Thinking about it now, as an adult, (...) I understand why they did it [why her grandparents hid it from her]. I'm still not happy that they lied to me, particularly. But it wouldn't have been easy. Getting by as a brunette child in a white men's world is a hell of a lot easier. So I'm kind of pleased that they didn't tell me.*

Adina thinks that it is much easier to claim one's Indigenous heritage today than at the time she was growing up, and she is proud that her son identifies.

In the same way, Miriam explained that she did not identify when she was at school because she was used to hearing the negative comments fair-skinned Indigenous students received. Miriam also added that she would not have liked identifying as a child because the reactions against light-skinned Indigenous people were not always only jokes. For example, she recalled that at school, the identity of fair-skinned Indigenous children was openly questioned.

⁶¹ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* op. cit., p. 123.

Miriam *They would have Koori awards, or Aboriginal awards for Aboriginal students who had done well, and then those who got presented on the stage, you know someone would say, "Oh, she's whiter than me; how could she be Aboriginal?", stuff like that. (...) The general thing was like, "Why should they get awards? They also get subsidized or go for free to school excursions". Those are the general things that the non-Indigenous students wouldn't get. So people are quite...hostile towards that. But not so much if you were dark-skinned. That's ok, a bit, you know. So, yeah, it would have been hard, I think, to be fair-skinned at school, and say that you were Aboriginal. (...) I knew what people were saying about them. So why would I want them to say that about me? (...)*

You look white, why not be white? Because when [my parents] grew up, it would be more socially accepted to be white.

Several participants lamented the fact that discrimination against Indigenous people led their families to hide their heritage from their parents or even from them. Several also pointed out that they noticed a generational gap between themselves and their parents. While the latter were still likely to deny their heritage (Vanessa's mother still feared the government could take her children away from her; Andrew's mother and Adam's father are uncomfortable acknowledging their Indigenous heritage; Miriam's parents have trouble understanding their daughter's choice of identifying, etc.), the younger generation felt more comfortable doing so. However, while pointing out that things were improving (Miriam said: "The general tone is: 'We're trying to progress.'"), most of the participants remained lucid about the way Indigenous people are still treated by parts of the non-Indigenous Australian society. The views were divided about the level of racism towards the Indigenous population. While Kate thought that Australia was now a "sophisticated society", others like Megan were more cautious. Megan was glad she could enjoy her heritage safely, but she nevertheless lamented the ongoing conflation of physical and cultural characteristics and the fact that claiming Indigenous heritage could still lead to being pigeonholed.

Megan *If for example my son came out and he was darker, and he was getting around in a hoodie, skateboarding, doing graffiti, I'd probably then think, "I don't want to go tell his school teachers that he's got Aboriginality, because I don't want them to make some connection – some pseudo- connection – between his behaviour which has nothing to do with anything, with anything. I don't want them to have any*

ammunition to think and make judgements.

Megan's comment reveals a fear that non-Indigenous people could judge her son's behaviour based on his heritage. However, as I explained, it seemed to me that the participants now feared rejection from the Indigenous community more than discrimination from the rest of society. Passing today can also result from a fear of offending the Indigenous community. I have shown how some of the participants heard about or experienced Indigenous people doubting their reasons for identifying. Indigenous writer Jackie Huggins, for example, is particularly suspicious of newcomers.

We vindictively remember those who have passed and (unlike whitefellas and, largely, those who study us) can never forget nor forgive these traitors. Their jumping-on-the-bandwagon trips are questioned and usually not accepted by their staunchest critics whom they presume should now be their firmest allies and 'family'. Instant coffee doesn't mix easily with pure spring water.⁶²

The participants were well aware that becoming 'black' meant more than simply identifying since "being black" is much more about culture than it is about colour. In order to avoid being doubted in the way Huggins doubts newcomers' motives for identifying, several of them preferred remaining on the non-Indigenous side and thus, in a way, continue passing.

6.3.1.1.3 Exploring One's Indigeneity Safely

Passing, however, was not always a default option, chosen in order to avoid discrimination from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Several participants who noted the ambivalence of their position as people with white skin and Indigenous heritage explained that paradoxically, being able to keep their heritage to themselves could help them discover it and embrace it on their own terms and in their own time. Mabun, one of the interviewees in Bindi Bennett's study, explained that when he found people who accepted

⁶² HUGGINS, Jackie, "Always Was, Always Will Be" in GROSSMAN, Michele (ed.), *Blacklines: contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

his identification without questions and rejected racism, he felt more confident about learning more.

I just think not having to explain yourself all the time and not having to explain how I can be both fair and Aboriginal at once. It has allowed me to become a lot more confident about things. And maybe that explains exploring the elements of my own cultural identity that I might not have, given the situations that I have had before.⁶³

Andrew expressed a similar idea, but in relation to passing. Megan earlier explained how being un-identifiable gave her the freedom to choose who she wanted to be. It is the same with Andrew, but he uses the freedom his fair skin gives him to shape his own definition of Indigeneity. Because people do not see right away that he has Indigenous heritage, he can better control how, where and when he discloses his heritage, which in turn can give him confidence to explore it further. However, he also once again emphasises that looking white is a double-edged sword, and can at times benefit him and at other times damage his credibility.

Delphine Do you like the fact that you're not...identifiable right away as Indigenous? (...)

Andrew *On the negative, it provides me with a bit of a grey area where it's difficult to...just naturally belong to either white Australia or my Indigenous heritage. But on the flip side, it gives me the opportunity to identify with the parts that I want to, and to the groups that I want to. So I get to choose how I view my identity, or how I view myself, so what parts of my heritage I want to pronounce, and those that I kind of want to keep more in the back seat. So there's pros and cons to it. (...) It's a strange one... (...) It's like being a chameleon: you can bring out certain elements that you want to expose about yourself in certain circumstances, and vice versa: You may lose credibility or dilute your ability to communicate or have a connection with someone based not just on your physical appearance.*

Andrew personally feels that having a fair skin is advantageous as it gives him more freedom to define his identity the way he chooses. However, the freedom he takes to disclose his heritage according to circumstances or people is not always understood or well

⁶³ BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, p. 188.

perceived by Indigenous people whose heritage is immediately visible, or for those whose Indigenous identity is paramount.

6.3.1.2 Being Un-identifiable: Drawbacks

Having explored how the participants could benefit from not being recognised as Indigenous, I will now analyse misrecognition and non-recognition as problematic. Because their Indigenous heritage and/or identity is not recognised by others and because they have internalised the dichotomy between white skin and Indigenous identity, it is often difficult for the participants to find their place.

6.3.1.2.1 “Where Do I Fit in?”

Delphine Do you think [that because you’re fair-skinned], it can also be easier, to be able to choose who you can tell and define your identity yourself?

Josh *Yes, in some ways in that you never fully reveal yourself. In some circumstances you see and hear more racism while not being subjected to it. But also, no, in that where do you fit in? And people expect you to prove your heritage because you don’t look like you apparently are supposed to.*

6.3.1.2.1.1 Feeling Split

Megan earlier explained that she enjoys being different – having a slightly olive skin and knowing she has Indigenous heritage – while not attracting negative comments because she remains on the safe side of the colour line. In the same way, she also explained how seeing her reflection in the mirror reminded her that she was free to choose her identity, Adam also mentioned the effect of seeing his reflection. It is interesting to see that for Adam, the face he saw in the mirror did not bring a feeling of freedom of choice, but on the contrary, was a source of anxiety.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Several fair-skinned Indigenous people have described their personal experiences. I have already quoted Wendy Holland (“Rehearsing Multiple Identities”, “Mis/taken Identity”, *op. cit.*). Actress Darlene Johnson is another. Michelle Carey quotes her saying: “As a fair-skinned child, I used to look in the mirror, hoping one day my freckles would join up and I would look like a *proper* Aborigine.”

Adam *You look in the mirror and you don't see the same; you don't see an Aboriginal person, but you do feel you are, and so there's definitely a self-talk thing going on, trying to satisfy yourself that you're not...kidding yourself.*

Because their skin colour does not match the expectations a lot of people – often including themselves – have about Indigenous people, the participants were placed in an in-between position which, I have explained, can be perceived as advantageous or not. But like Adam – whose reflection did not match the way he felt – several participants mentioned that they felt it was neither. Their identity was split.

Identity is a combination of self-identification and the validation of it by others. In some of these participant's cases, this was made difficult by the discrepancy between feeling Indigenous but not looking it. This led to constant explanations about why they chose to identify as Indigenous rather than as English, Irish, French... or simply Australian.

The participants who were more confident about their identification tried to overcome the dichotomy by educating the people around them and therefore have them validate their identities. For example, Miriam who said earlier that she explained her mother about fair-skinned Indigenous people, also took the time to do so at work:

Miriam *Just last week, one of the legal secretaries at the Law firm I was working at – I kind of excused it because she was Chinese and had only been in Australia for, like, ten years. She didn't grow up here. She came into my office and said, "You know, a few of us were wondering how you are Aboriginal if you don't look Aboriginal." So I took the opportunity to give her a 40-minute information session.*

6.3.1.2.1.2 Where Does Your Loyalty Lie?

Because of the history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, the discrepancy between a European physical appearance and an identification as Indigenous is even more significant. Feeling 'black' but looking white is being partly oppressed and partly oppressor, and thus being potentially offensive to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as Andrew explained.

JOHNSON, Darlene quoted in CAREY, Michelle, "From Whiteness to Whitefella: Challenging White Race Power in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Andrew *I didn't have the visual characteristics or trace of what I had learnt Aboriginality or Indigenous people represented. And so I didn't feel like I'd fit into that group and on that note, felt that if I did open myself up and say, "Well I do have Indigenous heritage", I would be offending those people. And vice-versa, from the white, Caucasian perspective, by claiming that, it could be perceived by certain people in a negative context, so would I be excluded, or... I don't know the word for it but attract, yeah, attract negative comments, on the other side.*

The in-between position Adam and Andrew described is rarely accepted by either Indigenous or non-Indigenous people.⁶⁵ As Cowlshaw's earlier quote showed, an important part of minority identities lies in this opposition and in the need to choose a side, to let people know where your "loyalty lies".⁶⁶

This is problematic on two levels for people with Indigenous heritage but with white skin. First, as I said, they run the risk of not being recognised as Indigenous although this is how they identify. Secondly, the problem goes deeper for people whose identity is not fixed. While Casey may be able to fight off doubts about his identity because he feels very strongly that he is Anaiwan, this was not the case of most of the participants who were both interested in their Indigenous heritage but still felt that they were also 'white' Australians.

This sometimes put them in difficult situations. Looking white, as Josh explained, allowed them to avoid racism if they did not disclose their heritage. But because they did have this heritage, they sometimes felt more uncomfortable witnessing racism than a non-Indigenous person would be. In such cases, it could be difficult for participants to choose their side. This is one of the points raised by Andrew in the following quote:

Andrew *You're acutely aware... You're probably going to be more sensitive to discussions surrounding heritage, and Indigenous issues, and where, and who you speak with about it, and how you go about it, whether in a comical – and it sounds terrible, but – if you let those kind of jokes slide ("Oh, he's got red hair but he's Aboriginal – or Indigenous") and on the flip side, you choose whether or not to bring that up. I don't know... (...) You're acutely aware that it is a sensitive issue, so you're just a little bit more reserved.*

⁶⁵ I will come back to this in chapter 9.

⁶⁶ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists", *op. cit.*, p. 228.

Like Josh, Andrew knows about racist jokes, having grown up in 'white' Australia, but he feels uncomfortable letting them "slide" now that he identifies as Indigenous. However, not doing so would mean positioning himself clearly on the Indigenous side. This can be a difficult thing to do considering that in today's Australia, the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people still means that being on one side is being against the other.

This is something Bennett also noticed in her study of light-skinned Indigenous people confronted with racism.

Light- skinned Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are aware of racism towards Aboriginal people are faced with the dilemma of choosing between complicity and confrontation when present during a racist incident. This places individuals in a situation where they can avoid conflict or risk causing conflict to the point of being viewed by others such as family and friends as "eccentric or self-righteous or to be assuming moral superiority".⁶⁷

Thus, as Josh said, "Where do you fit in?" The difficulty of keeping control of one's identity, of not offending either Indigenous or non-Indigenous people, of protecting oneself, and the confusion resulting from the process is apparent in several participants' comments.

6.4 Conclusion

The people I interviewed tended to be aware that the normative images of Indigeneity did not represent the physical variety of Indigenous people in today's Australia. They also knew that not looking traditionally Indigenous did not mean that they could not identify as such. Several insisted that being Indigenous was about much more than skin colour.

⁶⁷ REYNOLDS, Henry quoted in BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, p. 185.

Kate *It's not based on the colour of your skin or anything like that. (...) I actually realised that the face of being Aboriginal is not just how you look, it's if you identify, and if you are involved in the culture and have that heritage.*

This chapter demonstrated that in spite of this knowledge, the participants remained influenced by fixed and simplified representations. Though the participants tended to agree that in theory being Indigenous is not about colour, when it came to personally revealing their heritage while looking white, insecurities arose. These insecurities diminished when their identities were acknowledged and accepted by others, especially by Indigenous people. This chapter explained that links between colour and culture are still strong and that authentic Indigeneity is still often associated with black skin. The opposition between 'white' and 'black' inherited from the colonial past continues to make it difficult for fair-skinned Indigenous people to identify and to be recognised as authentic. If the boundaries between colour and identity were blurred, people like the participants in this study could try and explore their heritage and reconnect with their communities without the doubts and pressures which formally identifying now implies. As it was, several participants, although interested in their heritage, preferred staying on the safer 'white' side.

CHAPTER 7

Authenticity, Time and Place

Contemporary indigenous experiences are marked by inconsistent expectations underpinned by fantasies of Indigeneity as exterior to history and uniquely non-modern. On the one hand, those who dress in feathers, face paint, “native costume” or otherwise publicly embrace their traditions risk self-positioning in the semantic extremes of exotic primitivism. (...) On the other hand, those who do not seem to measure up to stereotypical “feathers-and-beads” expectations often find themselves stigmatised as “half-breeds”, “assimilated”, or even imposters; wearing suit and tie risks accusations of false indigenouness.¹

7.0 Introduction

As well as being judged according to skin colour, Indigeneity has been and still is evaluated as authentic or inauthentic depending on how far it strays from ‘traditional’ characteristics. I have employed the word ‘traditional’ on several occasions to describe representations of Indigeneity as it was perceived when British settlers landed on the Australian continent.² Thus, traditional Indigeneity refers to a set of characteristics which together form an image

¹ DE LA CADENA, Marisol, STARN, Orin, *Indigenous Experience Today*, op. cit., p. 9.

² Quoting Giddens, Stuart Hall compares “modern societies” characterised by “continuous change” to “traditional societies”, thus revealing both the past and static qualities of traditionality – which I have outlined and will further develop in this chapter – in relation to the way Indigenous people and cultures are perceived: “In traditional societies, the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices.”

HALL, Stuart, “Introduction: Identity in Question” HALL, Stuart, HELD, David, HUBERT, Don, THOMPSON, Kenneth (eds), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Malden, Massachussets: Blackwell, 1996.

of what many Australians as well as non-Australians see as ‘real’ Indigeneity. As I did in the previous chapter and will do in the following, I will show that having a black skin, living in a remote community, speaking an Aboriginal language, having an intimate relationship with the land, adopting a communal way of life are examples of what is considered traditional Indigeneity in the eyes of many non-Indigenous people, as well as in those of some Indigenous people. ‘Traditional’ is also a term the participants used on several occasions. For example, they talked about traditional culture, traditional food, traditional country etc. In this chapter, I want to analyse how traditional Indigeneity is linked to time and place.

Adam *I think being a Sydney Aboriginal makes a lot of difference. We didn’t grow up in traditional culture at all.*

Josh *When we were children, we went out to the missions where the traditional country was, and where the fish traps and things were.*

Traditional aspects of Indigeneity do not belong to Adam and Josh’s urban lives. Indeed, traditional Indigeneity is not usually associated with a city life or with modernity. The reference to “fish traps and things” emphasises the difference between Josh’s urban lifestyle and that of his extended Indigenous family in “the traditional country”. He also mentions the surprise, as a child, at seeing someone presented to him as his “auntie” cooking differently to how his parents cooked at home.

Josh *You see that she doesn’t cook inside; she cooks on a frying pan on a fire.*

The images of traditional Indigeneity are, as I wrote (see 5.4.1.2), what the participants were often presented at school, and, as shown by the discourse of the interviewees, they linger in the minds of many non-Indigenous Australians and are adopted by some Indigenous Australians as well. Traditional Indigeneity is what the participants say they do not possess, which creates a questioning as to their right to legitimately identify as Indigenous. Indeed, the participants were sometimes judged by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on their lack of traditional characteristics, or at least felt they would be judged should they declare their Indigeneity without being able to display enough traditional qualities.

For some participants, there is therefore a longing for traditional Indigeneity (also analysed in chapter 5) which is perceived as more authentic than other versions of Indigeneity. It is particularly opposed to an urban form of Indigeneity associated with violence, drunkenness and/or disadvantage in the discourse of several participants. Moreover, a modern way of life often seems incompatible with the representation of Indigeneity the participants grew up with.

Thus, time and place are significant concepts in the analysis of so-called authentic or inauthentic forms of Indigeneity. The authentic version of Indigeneity is seen as located in remote locations and in the past: traditional Indigenous people are perceived as similar to those the British met in the eighteenth century, with unchanged cultural practices, as if stuck in a time Megan described as “mythological”. On the other hand, what is often considered a downgraded version of Indigeneity is that of urban Indigenous people, those perceived as half-assimilated, having lost a great part of their culture, and behaving in many ways like ‘white’ Australians.

The dichotomy between an urban and modern Western way of life, and the traditional, natural Indigenous lifestyle is nothing new. It was built, like other discourses, over the years through a representation of Indigenous people as fundamentally different from ‘white’ Australians and as a homogeneous group whose differences were erased to produce the single image of the traditional Aborigine. In academic writings as well as representations from popular culture, the authentic Aborigine has for a long time been located in the desert, standing on one leg and holding a spear to hunt kangaroos.³

I have already given examples of the present use of traditional images of Indigeneity (in 5.3.1, in Baz Luhrmann’s ad for *Tourism Australia* for example). I will here explain the importance of anthropological accounts of Indigeneity in the formation of the dichotomy between an authentic, past and remote definition of it, and its inauthentic modern and urban counterpart. After having analysed these two representations of Indigeneity, I will

³ Michael Peachey, Student Services manager at the UNSW Indigenous Centre Nura Gili told me, “When I was at school, that’s what you were told: [Indigenous people] were still the ones in the desert, standing on one leg with a spear, hunting kangaroos.”

explain the importance of traditional representations of Indigeneity and of the past in general for people like the participants whose Indigeneity did not come to them naturally. Finally, I will analyse the effects of such representations on the participants' ability to identify, and ask to what extent they are able to move beyond them and broaden their understanding of Indigeneity.

7.1 Remote and Timeless, Urban and Cultureless

In this section, I will explain how a dichotomy was created between authentic remote and traditional Indigenous people on the one hand, and inauthentic urban Aborigines on the other. I will analyse how the discourse thus presenting Indigeneity influences the participants' understanding of this concept.

7.1.1 The Meaning of Traditional Indigeneity

In this section, I explain how the concept of 'traditional' Indigeneity was formed, and I explain its significance to the participants.

Josh *A good mate of mine grew up out of Bourke on a property which happens to fall in within the home range of the tribe that my heritage comes from, and we were talking about it, and he was like, "Yeah, I feel quite Indigenous." He does because he saw himself... He sort of ticks the boxes of what an Indigenous person is: he felt he was a custodian of the land; he grew up out in the bush; (...) he knew a few Indigenous people, and the way he sort of behaved – plus he was born and bred in Australia.*

Andrew *My understanding [of Aboriginality]? Probably until university, it was close to (...) the traditional idea of an Aboriginal: rural or country-based, more so the traditional ideology.*

Megan *Until maybe I was a teenager, it would have just been like a cartoon kind of idea of tribal people with paint on their bodies and things like that.*

Both Josh and Andrew cite living in the bush, in the country, as a traditional Indigenous characteristic. Josh reaffirms the link Indigenous people have with their land, and the

possibility of this land being an urban location does not seem to be envisaged. Megan's description of her old representation of Indigenous people as cartoon characters is a good illustration of the two-dimensional nature of the traditional representation of Indigeneity. "Two-dimensional" is actually an expression Megan used to convey the lack of reality of her connection to Indigeneity. She said, "The only thing I can take from it is just a historical, kind of theoretical association. (...) It's kind of two-dimensional.". The cartoon Aborigines from older history books cannot leave their pages because they do not evolve in time or in space: they are forever stuck in an idealised, remote – both in time and space – Australia.

In his analysis of the construction of representations of Indigeneity, Barry Morris explains how Indigenous culture is "fetishized", "presented as an aspect from the past separated from everyday existence. The accent on 'traditional' culture suspends contemporary cultural forms, privileging those of the past."⁴ Thus, it is traditional aspects of Indigeneity which are perceived as representing true Indigeneity. For example, when Josh and his friends imitated Indigenous people, they played music, danced, and used a didgeridoo and clapsticks to have "pretend corroborees".⁵

As I will show, the absence of less traditional definitions of Indigenous culture in most of the participants' discourses could be less due to a lack of interest from their part than to a lack of visibility of the said forms.

As well as being frozen in space and time, the traditional representation of Indigeneity is also simplified. In its basic form, the cartoon Indigenous people Megan described have fixed characteristics which guarantee their authenticity. Before they went to university or met Indigenous people, most of the participants had in their minds this representation of Indigeneity. As Robert Tonkinson writes, "what is perceived as the 'traditional' culture of

⁴ MORRIS, Barry, "The Politics of Identity: From Aborigines to the First Australians" in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵ In her reflections about her identity, Lynette Rodriguez explained how she does "not fit into the little boxes Anglo-Saxons have in their minds": "They hear me say I am Aboriginal, but they see someone who does not, in their mind, fit their picture of an Aboriginal person. According to many non-Indigenous perspectives, real Aboriginal people have dark skin, speak an Aboriginal language, generally live off the land, use spears, and dance the corroboree to the accompaniment of the didgeridoo and clapping sticks."

RODRIGUEZ, Lynette, "But Who Are You, Really?" in PERKINS, Maureen (ed.), *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 65.

remote Aboriginal Australia has tended to function for other Australians as a kind of baseline, a set of absolutes of colour and culture against which to measure Aboriginal people's fitness to be so designated."⁶ The remote and timeless version of Indigeneity still represents, in the minds of many non-Indigenous Australians, what an authentic Indigenous person should be.

There is, however, another representation of Indigeneity which is still often regarded as a corrupted version of traditional Indigeneity, and which therefore acts as its counterpart: urban Indigenous people whose main characteristics are portrayed as negative (drunkenness, violence, loss of culture, laziness). Megan explained that she discovered this version of Indigeneity later in life.

Megan *The kind of welfare state version of Aboriginality, I would have probably just started to understand before university, I think, when I was old enough to watch the news. (...) I think if you saw something in a programme about alcohol and Aboriginal people, I thought, "Oh, so they're the Aboriginal people who are alcoholics...a different category." They've been exposed to alcohol for some reason. And that's why as a child, I guess you think, "Oh, and there's the ones... There's Aboriginal people who live in the country and who don't have alcohol, and then there's these Aboriginal people here in the city, and they do." And then they're like little categories.*

Megan clearly explains the dichotomy between the two predominant visions of Indigeneity in non-Indigenous Australia. Not only are there two separate categories of Indigenous people,⁷ these categories also seem to be impermeable. In Megan's imagination, country-based Indigenous people retained a purity which urban Indigenous people have lost after having been exposed to alcohol. Megan's account shows the clear cut between the two categories, leaving no space for other forms of Indigeneity, whether combinations of these two definitions or different ones. However, Megan does not seem to judge these two separate categories in terms of authenticity. Probably as a result of a better understanding

⁶ TONKINSON, Robert, "National Identity: Australia after Mabo" in WASSMANN, Jürg (ed.), *Pacific Answersto Western Hegemony*, op. cit., p. 295.

⁷ This quote from Andrew also reveals the entrenched dichotomy between 'good' traditional Indigenous people and 'bad' urban gangs: "Where I grew up we heard some of the seniors talking about how their brothers had been gang beaten by groups of Aboriginals there. And then on the flip side, I had Aboriginal – traditional Aboriginal friends from the area that were absolutely genuine and beautiful people, but there was this kind of conflict or divide in the area."

of issues within the Indigenous community, she says that “[Urban Indigenous people have] been exposed to alcohol”, which explains the problems they have. The blame is not put on Indigenous people. Megan said she later questioned the validity of both fixed versions, asking whether there was such a thing as an opposition between the noble-savage kind of Indigeneity and the urban kind she saw on the news.

Megan *And then because of what I did at uni, I started to have that, “Well, is this real or not, the noble-savage type, painted Aboriginal person you’ve got, and the one which is on the news which is like drunk or living in a run-down...or in Redfern or something?”*

7.1.1.1 Anthropological Constructions of ‘Authentic’ Indigenous Culture and People

The representations Megan, Josh or Andrew grew up with are part of discourses which have been present for a long time in Australian society. One of the significant influences on the creation of discourses about Indigeneity is that of anthropologists. In this section, I will focus on the role of academic descriptions of Indigenous people in the creation of representations of traditional Indigenous culture and people.

Gillian Cowlishaw argued that while in the nineteenth century, anthropology was based on the idea of a hierarchy of races and consisted in the study of “primitive people by those who lived in more developed societies”,⁸ the movement away from race towards the study of culture did not lead to a new approach in the study of Indigenous people. The Indigenous people who were studied were those remote ones whose culture, anthropologists feared, was being absorbed into the Australian ‘white’ culture.

Geoffrey Gray explains how the study of anthropology in Australia started with the 1923 Pan-Pacific Science Congress which created a chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney, occupied by A.P. Elkin. During this congress, a resolution was taken to record Indigenous culture before it disappeared. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the interest in Indigenous culture still lay in its primitive quality.

⁸ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists”, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

[In] view of the great and particular interest of the [Aborigines] as representing one of the lowest types of culture available for study, of the rapid and inevitable diminution of their numbers, and the loss of their primitive beliefs and customs under the influence of a higher culture, (...) that steps be taken, without delay, to organise the study of those tribes that are, as yet comparatively uninfluenced by contact with civilisation.⁹

Gillian Cowlshaw explained that the early approach used by anthropologists in their studies of Indigenous people was also underpinned by their understanding of culture. They understood this notion as static and well delineated, which explains their focus on traditional forms of Indigeneity rather than on its evolution.

Until recently, the authoritative voices on the identity of Aborigines have been those of the anthropologists, and it is the traditional culture which was the mark of that identity. That is, the dominant image and understanding of Aborigines depended on one popular usage of the term culture – that referring to the exotic practices of other societies. Thus discussion of Aboriginal culture has been largely limited to those forms which were forged in pre-colonial times (...) and which remain only visible in the remoter parts of the continent. (...) There was virtually no interest in the active part Aborigines were taking in adjusting (or adapting) to the situation they found themselves in. (...) While there is more subtlety in the presentation today, the quest for cultural continuities is still the conceptual basis for a good deal of anthropology in Australia.¹⁰

The definition of Indigenous culture as “the exotic practices of other societies” and as “traditional” had an impact on the way Indigenous people and cultures were understood and presented in both academic and public discourses.

The definition of culture by non-Indigenous experts has borne a great influence on the definition of Indigenous identity. As Cowlshaw wrote, anthropologists have been very influential voices in the creation of discourses about Indigeneity. And for a long time, what these voices said was that whereas remote people perceived as ‘truly’ Indigenous had retained their culture – “Aborigines as they were before colonisation caused them to

⁹ GRAY, Geoffrey, “[The Sydney school] Seem[s] to View the Aborigines as Forever Unchanging’: Southeastern Australia and Australian Anthropology”, *Aboriginal History*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

¹⁰ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “The Materials for Identity Construction” in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 89 and COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists”, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

change”¹¹ – urban Indigenous people were in the process of assimilating into ‘white’ culture, and of losing their culture, as Cowlshaw wrote, rather than adapting this culture to new lifestyles. Because they were losing their culture, they were no longer interesting objects of study to anthropologists, except when it came to help them assimilate completely. In this case, it was understood that they ceased to be Indigenous.

The focus on traditional Indigenous culture as the only valid definition of Indigeneity has become part of common public discourses. As Cowlshaw explained, the anthropologists’ focus on traditional culture as the only form of Indigenous culture worthy of being studied had already restricted the definition of Indigenous culture and identity. But as traditional Indigeneity became synonymous with authenticity in public discourses, the definition of Indigeneity was even further restricted. This happened with the singularisation of the concept of culture. Indeed, while anthropology was interested in several traditional Indigenous cultures, with time, these cultures all blended into one and formed a set of traditional elements which now represent a traditional and authentic Indigeneity. This process is part of the tendency in ‘mainstream’ discourses to homogenise all Indigenous cultures. There has never been only one Indigenous culture in Australia but rather a multiplicity of them reflecting the various groups of Indigenous people across the continent. However, as I already mentioned (see chapter 4), there is a tendency in non-Indigenous discourses to homogenise both Indigenous culture and people, thus erasing their complexities. With the singularisation of Indigenous culture, not only does ‘traditional’ Indigenous culture become the only valid definition of culture, the differences between specific Indigenous cultural groups are also often erased.

I would like to show how, following the anthropological definition of culture and the subsequent influence of public discourses, for most participants, Indigenous culture was associated with traditional cultural elements.

¹¹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists”, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

7.1.1.2 A Fascination for Traditional Indigeneity

As I explained, the representations of Indigeneity as traditional were what the participants grew up with. For several participants who have identified as Indigenous, the traditional representation of Indigeneity was – and sometimes still is – what best represents Indigeneity, an Indigeneity which seems far from the versions they are trying to create for themselves. It is once again a distant Indigeneity, both in time and space, and it is therefore all the more attractive. I have already given examples of the attraction felt for traditional Indigenous culture with the references to the discourse presenting the special relationship Indigenous people have with the land (again, for most participants, a natural land rather than an urban environment (see 5.3.1)). The following examples confirm the idea that traditional Indigenous cultural elements still have a strong hold on the participants' imaginations.

Josh *I have no idea how old I was, and I don't remember knowing about Aboriginal people back then – there was a group of Aboriginal dancers from...somewhere in Australia, remote. They still live a traditional life. They had come to Canberra for a month or so, and every week, they'd put on two different shows, and it was their traditional dancing. (...) Seeing those guys dance was pretty amazing.*

One of Josh's powerful memories is a display of traditional Indigenous dancing. Today, Josh has a more extended knowledge of the variety of Indigenous groups. At the time, however, his understanding of Indigeneity seemed to be the simplified representation of traditional Indigenous culture I described earlier. As I explained, in the discourse of traditional Indigeneity, a single figure emerges which does not convey the diversity of Indigenous cultures – even traditional ones – across the Australian continent. Perhaps for the young Josh, it mattered little to know the specific place where these Indigenous people came from. Josh, then, seems to have created connections between what he saw, and traditional Indigenous representations which many non-Indigenous Australians carry in their minds. Thus, the fact that the dancers lived in a remote location and practised

traditional dancing is associated with a more general traditional life.¹² Josh seemed to be attracted to this display of traditional dancing.

Another example of the fascination for traditional Indigenous culture is provided by Casey.

Casey *I remember one day, there was a school assembly, and they had some traditional Aboriginal dance performances, and I had the biggest smile on my face, I don't know, the biggest amount of pride possible to see them get up there, and the music, the didgeridoo, and all the clapsticks going, and the red, black and yellow on the flag... I don't know, just that sort of real...pride in knowing that that's a part of me. And at that time, I felt like it was a part of my identity. It was just a part of me, just there. It wasn't like, like it is now.¹³*

Casey's memory is from his time at school. He explained to me that he thinks there were no Indigenous students at his school, and not many on the Gold Coast: "Gold Coast is like... *(laughs)* There's Aboriginal people there, but it's like way behind the scene. (...) I guess it's not an ideal place to grow up as a black person". Consequently, at the time, Casey did not seem to have crossed the paths of many Indigenous people before these dance performances. What seems to have impressed him back then was the display of traditional Indigenous culture: as for Josh, the didgeridoo, the clapsticks and the dancing made a strong impression on him.¹⁴ It seems as if the fact that Casey had not been raised in a traditional Indigenous culture increased his pride in knowing that it was "a part of [him]." I

¹² Nevertheless, when I asked Josh whether he had grown up with "that idea in [his] mind that an Aboriginal person was a 'black guy in the desert'", he answered, "No. I suppose, for me – I was born in 1987 – you know we grow up with computers and all that sort of stuff, and a good education, so the main problem for Indigenous people in my lifetime has been poverty, predominantly in the remote communities. But then you hear of and see communities that are thriving."

My interpretation of the influence on Josh of traditional representations might be wrong, but I believe that the importance of "poverty" (which Josh mentioned several times) may have developed later whereas this is one of his early memories of Indigenous people and culture. Moreover, the fact that Josh does not fit the traditional appearance of Indigenous people (being fair-skinned) is something which he sees as problematic, as we saw in chapter 6. This tends to show that traditional Indigenous elements still have some weight in his definition of Indigeneity.

¹³ Casey now identifies as a "first-nations" man and no longer perceives his Indigenous heritage as only a part of himself. He is fully Indigenous.

¹⁴ The Aboriginal flag, however, does not belong to the traditional elements of Indigenous culture: created in 1971, it is a symbol of the unity of Indigenous people asking for recognition and rights. However, Casey being the youngest participant, he may not have linked it to political struggle when he was a child in the way other participants did, remembering the Cathy Freeman controversy. Alternatively, he may include it in the list of important Indigenous symbols because it has taken up a stronger meaning now he is an Indigenous activist.

interpret Casey's reaction as an illustration of my argument that, for participants who did not grow up immersed in Indigenous culture, the power of traditional representations of Indigeneity lies in their association with what they perceive as an authentic form of Indigeneity.

Traditional Indigeneity was not only more real than other versions of it, it was, for the young participants who had not yet developed a more complex understanding of Indigeneity, the only positive representation of Indigenous people available. The alternative to this positive traditional representation of Indigeneity was urban Indigenous people often presented not only in negative terms (see chapter 4), but also as being less Indigenous than their remote brothers (see 7.2.2).

It is important to put this fascination in context, however. The attraction for traditional Indigenous culture is not experienced by every non-Indigenous Australian even though many are probably familiar with the representations described by Casey and Josh. Both participants came from families where their parents encouraged, to a certain extent, the development of an interest in Indigenous culture: Josh's parents took him and his siblings to the community where his family is from, while Casey's father researched his own father's heritage.

A different account is that of Michelle who developed an interest in Indigenous culture later in her life. When she was growing up, it was never mentioned at home, and in the small Victorian town where she was raised, she recalled Indigenous people being treated poorly. Therefore, from her family's perspective, the display of traditional cultural elements was not perceived as attractive. The 'exotic' aspects of Indigenous culture which appealed to Josh or Casey are here regarded as deviations from the 'white' norm.

Michelle *I had an uncle that used to live as a hermit on a river. So he had no electricity, no contact with any people. He used to live off the land basically, fishing or hunting, or whatever, and he too basically had a lot of the cultural aspects of Aboriginal communities, and he wanted to live off the land and on his own and that sort of stuff, and we always used to sort of look down on him a little bit (...) because he was the one in the family that didn't conform to what everyone else did.*

In this story, Michelle's uncle is not regarded as a positive figure, as a kind of noble savage, living a simpler life on the land. On the contrary, his behaviour is perceived as outlandish by Michelle's family. Thus, the fascination for traditional Indigeneity I have described is conditional upon an already favourable outlook on Indigenous people and culture. In Miriam's home where her father's Indigenous heritage was never mentioned, this fascination was not encouraged.

7.1.1.3 Safe Distance

An interesting aspect of the attraction felt for traditional aspects of Indigenous culture is its link to distance which I will analyse in this section.

Different kinds of distance come into play: Indigenous people, in their traditional representations, are geographically and culturally distant from a great number of non-Indigenous Australians who live in cities.¹⁵ It is probably not only because Josh or Casey's families were more accepting of Indigenous culture that the two participants developed an attraction for traditional Indigenous culture. Josh grew up in Canberra while Casey lived on the Gold Coast. These are places where the effects of colonisation have rendered urban Indigenous populations mainly invisible to many non-Indigenous inhabitants.¹⁶ These populations can also go unnoticed because urban forms of Indigenous culture are not the traditional culture most non-Indigenous Australians expect to find and therefore do not look for. Perhaps the fact that Casey and Josh initially had little contact with Indigenous people where they lived emphasised their reliance on traditional representations rather than on actual Indigenous people, which in turn created a distance between the said Indigenous people and themselves. This distance may have allowed Josh and Casey to enjoy traditional representations of Indigeneity in a more positive way.

¹⁵ In 2015, 89.4 percent of the Australian population lived in cities.

"Urbanization by Country", *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urbanization_by_country, accessed on 12 December 2016.

¹⁶ BECKETT, Jeremy, "The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality", *op. cit.*, p191

On the contrary, Michelle who crossed the path of more Indigenous people in the rural area where she lived may have been exposed to more racism. Indeed, Indigenous drunkenness or violence may have been more visible where she lived. Indeed, her high-school friend whom she visited her a few years ago shared a racism comment about Indigenous people: “Ah the fucking coons that live down the street, and who cause so much trouble in the town...”.

The second type of distance is temporal. As I explained, the traditional Aborigine is pictured in a timeless zone which knows no evolution. Traditional Indigenous people are sometimes perceived as following ancestral laws, or even as living in a parallel Dreamtime. On the contrary, Indigenous people who have adopted a Western lifestyle and evolved are considered inauthentic, or even no longer Indigenous at all.

Finally, there is distance in the participants’ connection to their Indigenous heritage: for the majority of them, it is a tenuous connection which needs to be re-activated in order to become real. However, this very distance may be one of the reasons explaining their attraction to Indigeneity. This is something I will analyse in the following quote.

Megan *[My dad] loves, he loves outback Australian history and everything, so I think he was quite – I wouldn’t say proud – but, like, invested in it as an identity, but I think it’s only because he wasn’t sure that he could enjoy the association. Does that make sense? Because then he could step away from it a bit more. I think if he looked more Aboriginal, maybe he wouldn’t have... enjoyed identifying with it so readily. Because he didn’t have to carry around any of the negative associations, because he kind of looks like he could be Aboriginal, but not definitely.*

I think I do enjoy having that to identify with, but because it’s so far back; there’s no...risk associated with it, because we haven’t been brought up with any Aboriginal history or real, like, culture per se. So...yeah, it’s almost like you get the benefit of having an interesting connection in your history, but you can choose whether you want to reveal that to people or not.

Megan’s comments first confirm the surface engagement with Indigeneity which non-Indigenous people can develop. Here, Megan believes that one of the reasons her father was attracted to his Indigenous heritage was because he loves “outback history”. This is a vague expression which can convey different images such as those of outlaws, bushrangers

and remote Indigenous people. But it could be precisely the vagueness of it which renders it attractive. All these typical figures representing different facets of the Australian mythology and associated with the outback have been romanticised and stripped off their individualities. The romanticising process which I mentioned in 5.2.1 creates a distance from reality which is what allows fascination to be born. In the same way, distance from 'white' culture was what motivated anthropologists to study remote Indigenous communities. As Cowlshaw's earlier comment showed, they were looking for "exotic practices of other societies".

Once again, in Megan's comment, Indigenous people are linked to a remote location. However, during the interview, Megan was always able to distance herself critically from simplifications. Thus, here, her reference to "real culture per se" makes her take a step back as she believes that a romantic vision of Indigeneity is not enough to claim her heritage. Although it is this distant, tenuous connection with her Indigenous heritage which allows her to enjoy it in a safe, uncomplicated way, the very tenuity of the connection is what prevents her from identifying as Indigenous. What Megan puts behind the word "culture" is not obvious. It is not a list of traditional elements such as those forming the stereotypical image of the remote Indigene her father enjoys. As I explained in chapter 1, what most participants understand by "Indigenous culture" is a stronger sense of Indigeneity than the one they have. It is growing up in an Indigenous community, immersed in Indigenous stories and values. However, it does not follow that traditional representations no longer influence the participants in significant ways.

The idea of distance I have analysed has been theorised by Patrick Wolfe (here paraphrased by Avril Bell):¹⁷

¹⁷ Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis also mentioned the role of distance: "It is only through placing the native as part of pure nature (for example in "the bush") that the westerner can experience the Other without anxiety. Thus, (...) the Aborigine can be imagined as pure (that is not abject) only in the context of the desert, conceived as pure nature. As long as Indigenous space is rendered so distinct, even proximity to the Other does not disrupt the equilibrium of whiteness."

SCHECH, Susanne, HAGGIS, Jane, "Terrains of Migrancy and Whiteness: How British Migrants Locate Themselves in Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 187.

In Australia Patrick Wolfe has argued that the authentic indigene remains spatially separated (...). Their authenticity depends on this spatial separation. As soon as they become urban, indigenous people are expected to be either 'just like us', or are seen as problematic troublemakers and welfare recipients. Difference either disappears or becomes demonized. Indigenous difference continues to be positively evaluated only so long as it is 'somewhere else' in a direct continuation of the logics of nineteenth-century primitivism. Authenticity is then 'repressive' in effect for indigenous peoples.¹⁸

Wolfe's analysis echoes Megan's binary representation of Indigeneity (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) with authentic remote Indigenous people on one side, and alcoholic urban Indigenous people on the other. Indigenous people who are "just like us", that is to say banal Indigenous people, neither living a traditional life in a remote location, nor drunks and disadvantaged in a city, were not part of Megan's early understanding of Indigeneity. As we saw, they remain invisible to many non-Indigenous Australians.

I will now turn to the representation of urban Indigeneity – the negative counterpart of traditional Indigeneity – and show how this representation can also be "repressive" for the participants since it represents another extreme vision of Indigeneity. As Wolfe writes, "the narrative structure of repressive authenticity is that of the excluded middle".¹⁹ Being caught between extreme representations leaving no place for in-between-ness is a major issue for the participants in this study.

7.1.2 Urban Indigeneity

White reconstruction anthropology (...) has provided a mental straightjacket for whites and blacks: a physical prototype, head-banded, bearded, loin-clothed, sometimes ochred, one foot up, a clutch of spears, ready to hunt or exhibiting eternal, mystical vigilance. Libraries of material – often of great value and scholarship have helped create, or re-create, a pristine, pure, before-the-white-man-came-and-bugged-everything, idealised type. THAT, says the academic

¹⁸ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁹ WOLFE, Patrick, "Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era", op. cit., p. 112.

orthodoxy, is Aboriginality: any deviation therefore gives white society licence to deny people that which they are and believe themselves to be.²⁰

Colin Tatz's delineates and criticises the influence anthropology has had on the construction of a representation of Indigeneity equating authenticity with tradition. At the time when traditional Indigeneity was established as authentic, both in academic and public discourses, other forms of Indigeneity – especially urban – were simultaneously being constructed as inauthentic.

7.1.2.1 Anthropological Constructions of 'Inauthentic' Indigenous People

While the study of traditional Indigenous populations was meant to rescue some of their knowledge before their predicted extinction, the study of the 'half-caste' population which anthropologist A.P. Elkin started in the 1930s was carried out with the aim of helping the government implement its new assimilation policy. Elkin supported it and considered it a desirable future for Indigenous people whom the general society still thought were condemned to disappear.²¹ Therefore, in the beginning, the study of urban forms of Indigeneity was not premised on the belief of their existence. On the contrary, it was believed that Indigenous people who stopped living traditionally ceased to be Indigenous. Anthropologist W.E. H. Stanner reflected in 1968 on the salvage approach to anthropology he had adopted earlier in his career and which had led to overseeing the development of non-traditional Indigenous cultures.

We thought it our task to salvage pieces of information and from them to try to work out the traditional social forms. Such were my interests. They help to explain why an interest in 'living actuality' scarcely extended to the actual life-conditions of the aborigines. (...) What was missing was the idea that a major development of aboriginal economic, social and political life from its broken down state was a thinkable possibility. How slowly this idea came to us . . .²²

²⁰ TATZ, Colin quoted in HOLLINSWORTH, David, "Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia", *Oceania*, Vol. 63, Issue 2, December 1992, p. 140.

²¹ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

²² STANNER, W.E.H. quoted in LANGTON, Marcia, "Urbanizing Aborigines: The Social Scientists' Great Deception", *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1981, p. 19.

Stanner describes an approach to the study of Indigenous cultures that helped entrench the dichotomy between 'real' Indigenous people and their traditional culture in remote parts of Australia, in the centre and the north, and Indigenous people on the way to assimilation in the south and on the coasts – especially on the east coast where the destructive effects of colonisation were greater.²³

Marcia Langton was one of the early critics of the lack of recognition of urban Indigenous cultures. In 1981, she both asserted the vitality of urban Indigenous cultures as well as the need for 'white' anthropologists to stop analysing these from a 'white' and assimilationist perspective only.

The pervading popular and government assumption that 'detrribalized', 'remnant', 'half-caste' Aboriginal populations have been 'assimilating' into the European population and adopting white lifestyles, has been rarely examined critically in the literature. Most of the work has described adaptations to the European socio-economic environment, but within the framework of assimilationist assumptions. (...) White researchers, shackled by their ethnocentric values (...) too often ignore the fact that for most ethnic minorities expectations of cultural competence, ideals and values differ from the ideals of the dominant society.²⁴

Bronwyn Carlson more recently (2011) documented the evolution in the academic studies of urban Indigenous people's cultures. Like Langton, she argued that until the 1980s and in spite of a slow recognition that Indigenous people living in settled areas had developed new forms of culture by adapting traditional cultural elements to an urban life, anthropologists still tended to perpetuate the "tribal/detrribalised dichotomy"²⁵

²³ Geoffrey Gray explained that in southeast Australia in particular, because of "dispossession, death, dislocation and forced removal of Aboriginal people", "the main defining characteristic of (...) anthropology [was that] it viewed Aborigines in the southeast as not authentic, people who did not live as Aborigines, people who had lost their 'Aboriginal' culture and had only a fragmented memory of their (past) culture."

GRAY, Geoffrey, "[The Sydney school] Seem[s] to View the Aborigines as Forever Unchanging: Southeastern Australia and Australian Anthropology", *op. cit.*, p. 176.

²⁴ LANGTON, Marcia, "Urbanizing Aborigines: The Social Scientists' Great Deception", *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18 and 20.

²⁵ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *op. cit.*, p. 73.

Carlson also explains that in the 1990s and early 2000s, several Indigenous writers offered an insider's view into urban Indigeneity.²⁶ According to her analysis, these writings confirm the entrenched "precarious position of urban, light-skinned, 'dual-heritage' and/or newly identifying Aboriginal people and how they are positioned by discursive practices that continue to regulate and police Aboriginal identities as either Aboriginal or not."²⁷ Therefore, the discourse positioning urban Indigenous people as less authentic – as well as that linking authenticity to black skin – are still influential in today's Australia.

Avril Bell notices that Indigenous academic Larissa Behrendt points out "the implicit spatialisation of indigeneity in the frequent conversations in which she is asked as an academic living in Sydney how often she visits indigenous communities (to which she replies 'every day when I go home')." ²⁸ Behrendt's comment goes against the assumptions many non-Indigenous Australians still have about the location of community. What is perceived as an authentic Indigenous community is often associated with a remote location. For example, for the participants, learning more about their heritage often implies going back to their community. For the majority of them, it does not mean learning about Indigenous culture in the urban area where they reside. The second assumption in the question Behrendt is often asked is that because she is an academic working in 'mainstream' society, she must not live with her Indigenous community but only visit it now and then. Thus, even when an Indigenous community can be conceived as urban, distance remains because it can never be completely integrated to the rest of society.²⁹ It is

²⁶ Carlson's examples include:

LAMBERT-PENNINGTON, Amanda Katherine, *Being in Australia, Belonging to the Land: The Cultural Politics of Urban Aboriginal Identity*, unpublished, Doctoral Thesis, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 2005.

GREENOP, Kelly, *Place Meaning, Attachment and Identity in Contemporary Indigenous Inala, Queensland*, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, School of architecture, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Queensland, 2009.

BOLT, Reuben, *Urban Aboriginal Identity Construction in Australia: An Aboriginal Perspective Utilising Multi-method Qualitative Analysis*, unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Sydney, 2010.

FREDERICKS, Bronwyn, "Urban Identity", *Eureka Street: A Magazine of Public Affairs, The Arts and Theology*, Vol. 14, No. 10, December 2004, pp. 30-31.

BEHRENDT, Larissa, "Aboriginal Urban Identity", *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Vol. 4, 1994, pp. 55-61.

²⁷ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁸ BEHRENDT, Larissa quoted in BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁹ This remark also applies to ethnic communities. Multiculturalism has led to the re-creation in Australia of several ethnic communities, and specific areas of Australian cities are known for hosting a large number of

perceived as a separate enclave, and Indigenous people like Behrendt or the participants must navigate between non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities.

The spatialisation of Indigeneity analysed by Bell and the doubts about someone's legitimacy as Indigenous which it entails can be noticed in some of the participants' discourses. In spite of a knowledge about urban Indigenous communities and cultures, the participants still refer to the old opposition between remote and urban Indigeneities. Both Adina and Andrew feel legitimate claiming Indigeneity but also express reservations when they compare their version of Indigeneity to that of more traditional and remote Indigenous people.

Adina *I feel just as much Aboriginal as – probably not as much as someone who's lived in the Top End.³⁰*

Andrew *It's an insecurity. (...) If I'm going back to an actual tribe or community that is in a rural area or kind of outback setting, you would start to say that their understanding of what it means to be Indigenous can be different. They wouldn't have exposure to – in some cases – Indigenous people growing up in an urban environment. So I think the whole idea of what is Indigenous is going to change from person to person.*

In both Adina and Andrew's cases, the questioning of their legitimacy as urban Indigenous people comes from a fear of not being regarded as truly Indigenous by a more traditional and remote Indigenous community. Although Andrew concludes with the idea that there are different ways of being Indigenous, his feeling of insecurity and fear of rejection makes me think that the community located in a "kind of outback setting" seems to him to have slightly more legitimacy than the urban version of Indigeneity. Both

Italian-Australians, Vietnamese-Australians etc. However, it seems to me less likely that ethnic Australians would be asked how often they visit their communities. Although these communities do exist, they do not seem to be distanced from the rest of society in the way Indigenous communities are in the minds of many non-Indigenous Australians.

Another comparison can be made between the status of Indigenous people and that of ethnic minorities in Australia. During a class I attended at the University of Sydney in 2014, anthropologist Belinda Burbidge asked students who were second-generation Australians whether they thought they had more or less culture than their parents. The question left most students puzzled and unable to answer. Burbidge thus attempted to show that the question of having lost or retained one's culture is not one which ethnic Australians are often asked. At least, the question does not imply that because someone is less aware of the culture of his/her country of origin, he/she should be considered less Australian. This is the case with Indigenous people.

³⁰ The Top End is the north part of the Northern Territory.

participants project a non-Indigenous perception of Indigeneity – the opposition between remote/authentic and urban/inauthentic – onto Indigenous people.

As I explained, this dichotomy originated in non-Indigenous discourses, and especially in the anthropological approach to the study of Indigenous culture. Indigenous academics such as Larissa Behrendt or Bronwyn Fredericks fight against the common idea that urban Indigenous people have lost their culture. Nevertheless, the spatial division and ensuing lack of legitimacy urban Indigenous people are made to feel are also relayed by some Indigenous people. For example, in the *Insight* program following the TV series *First Contact*, Indigenous representatives whom the six non-Indigenous participants had met on their journey were present. Among them were Marcus Lacey, traditional owner, teacher and tourist business operator in the remote Nyinyikay community in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, and Victor Morgan, senior educator at the Education Centre Against Violence in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, and Chair of Link-Up NSW. After having heard Lacey's story, Morgan made the following comment followed by a reply from Indigenous journalist Stan Grant:

Morgan You know, I have grown up in an urban city and all I know is how to live in the white man's world. I feel a little bit jealous of my brother (Marcus Lacey) here because what he's got, you can't buy.

Grant But you have something else as well, equally as valid and I think this came out in the discussion, and what's reflected in the program are the range of lifestyles and experiences and choices that Indigenous people make, that there is not one Indigenous community.³¹

Thus, the idea that, as Megan said, there are different categories of Indigenous people, and more problematically a hierarchy based on perceived authenticity, is also felt by some Indigenous people. Despite the discourse of survival to colonisation and pride in urban forms of Indigenous culture which Grant emphasises in his reply to Morgan, the feeling that being an urban Indigenous person is not being as real an Aborigine as those who live in their traditional communities lingers. Indeed, as I explained, the problem with the spatial

³¹ MORGAN, Victor, GRANT, Stan, *SBS Insight: First Contact*, *op. cit.*

divide between the two categories of traditional and urban Indigenous people is how it is linked to culture. Following past anthropological representations, cultures developed by urban Indigenous people still tend to be considered less authentic than that of traditional, remote Indigenous people.

The definition of who is Indigenous or not now relies heavily on culture rather than on race and biological criteria (see 4.2.2.1). Therefore, culture is now fundamentally linked to Indigenous identity. The power of judging who has retained or lost their Indigenous culture is the power to arbitrate who is Indigenous or not in today's Australia. Erasing race from official discourses and focusing on culture was meant to give Indigenous people more control over their own definitions. However, as the enduring influence of anthropological definitions of Indigeneity shows, it did not remove the power non-Indigenous Australians have over the definition of Indigeneity. The criteria changed – culture and its presence or absence have become central – but the non-Indigenous tendency to pass judgements on Indigenous people has remained.

7.1.2.2 The Illegitimate Urban Indigenous Culture

As the comments from Marcus Lacey reveal, the anthropological division between remote and authentic, and urban and cultureless Indigenous people has made its way into 'mainstream' discourses about Indigenous people, both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

In 2012, then Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared,

I would love to think that a highly traditional Australian Aboriginal, who is nevertheless charismatic and inspirational in modern Australia as well, might enter the Federal Parliament. I think it would be terrific if, as well as having an urban Aboriginal in our parliament, we had an Aboriginal person from central

Australia, an authentic representative of the ancient cultures of central Australia in the parliament.³²

Abbott compared elected 'urban' Indigenous member of the Liberal Party Ken Wyatt to Northern Territory Government Minister Alison Anderson. Abbott's statement implied that an Indigenous person coming from a remote community in the Northern Territory is more authentically Indigenous than someone from a city. It also linked spatial remoteness to the past and opposed both to a modern and urban Australia: Anderson is described as "highly traditional" and *nevertheless* able to work in "modern Australia". Once again, authentic Indigenous people only seem to reside in a distant place and time separated from today's Australia. Abbott's vision of a less authentic urban Indigeneity is part of a common discourse equating living in a city with losing one's Indigenous culture. It is this discourse I will analyse in this section.

The following comment to an online discussion on Indigenous identity illustrates this discourse and complements Abbott's statement:

I am still waiting for someone to enlighten me on urban indigenous culture, and even if someone does come up with some unique practise, it still would not be an aboriginal cultural thing, it would be a mixed race one.³³

As these two comments show, the division between authentic and inauthentic Indigenous cultures is present at all levels of society, within the political sphere, as the comments from former Prime Minister Tony Abbott reveal, or within the general community as the above example taken from a blog shows.

The questioning of culture on which the second quote is focused is problematic in today's Australia. As I wrote in 7.2.1.1, the definition of Indigenous culture is in itself problematic: first of all, the phrase is often employed in the singular even though there still are many different Indigenous cultures in Australia. Secondly, a strong focus on traditional

³² ABBOTT, Tony quoted in "Abbott Criticised for 'Urban Aboriginal Comment'", *ABC News online*, 13 November 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-13/abbott-criticised-for-urban-aboriginal-mp-comment/4369688>, accessed on 21 June 2016.

³³ BIG NANA, commentary to SCOTT, Dallas, "Who is More Aboriginal?", *The Black Steam Train*, 5 April 2013, <http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.fr/2013/04/who-is-more-aboriginal.html>, accessed on 21 June 2016.

aspects remains, which tends to disqualify urban Indigenous forms of culture from being accepted as equally valid.

This was commented on by Adam. He is one of the participants who seemed the least influenced by discourses linking Indigeneity to remote Australia, and who embraced an urban version of Indigeneity. This was visible in his earlier quote about the importance of the places where he lived, including the urban location of Western Sydney. However, even though Adam thought that being an urban Aborigine was not without value, he still perceived this as a slightly downgraded version of Indigeneity.

Adam *All throughout high school, I remember connecting more with Aboriginal stories about the land and things like that. You know they're all different stories because they're all from different tribes. And again, I've got access to the overall knowledge, not the individual tribe knowledge, so none of the stories would necessarily have any particular relevance to my tribe, but it gives you an overall sense of being an Aboriginal person. And that's probably the best you have access to as a Sydney Aboriginal.*

It's all commercial, that stuff, because I'm a Sydney Aboriginal. We only had access to either our family or general culture, which is an interesting point in itself actually. I think being a Sydney Aboriginal makes a lot of difference. We didn't grow up in traditional culture at all. There's no connection to traditional culture in that way.

Again, a clear distinction is made between traditional cultures from individual tribes, which are not associated with living in Sydney, and the culture Adam had access to, that is to say a blend of various Indigenous cultures. In the same way as he embraced the urban locations where he grew up and lives, Adam does not reject this type of culture. He talked about the efforts his mother made to introduce him and his sister to Indigenous culture:

Adam *Even though she's not the Aboriginal person, she was the one who put a lot of effort into giving us that knowledge, into buying books and taking us to Aboriginal cultural events, just to instil in us that it was a good identity.*

Nevertheless, his previous comment indicates that by learning about a general Indigenous culture, he could only get “a sense of being an Aboriginal person” rather than simply be one.

In Adam's comment, there seems to be a missing piece between the family's Indigenous culture and general Indigenous culture. This missing piece may correspond to the link to a specific community – or, as Adam said, a “tribe”. His comment opposes the idea of an “individual tribe knowledge” to being a “Sydney Aboriginal”. Jeremy Beckett's analysis of the effects of colonisation on the east coast of Australia³⁴ substantiate Adam's comment: Indigenous cultures from this area have indeed tended to blend more than in more remote locations where individual tribes were not displaced. However, what Adam's comment also points to is the difficulty to envisage that culture coming from urban communities is as valid as traditional cultures coming from individual tribes, and which are no longer available in the Sydney area. Although Adam mentioned seeing his community at family gatherings, for example, he does not seem to associate culture with this community, perhaps because it is an urban community. In Adam's comment, culture does not seem to be understood as something in evolution, as being produced in the present. On the contrary, he sees it as something set in the past and either transmitted or lost. In this way, to a certain extent, he perpetuates the idea that urban Indigenous people's culture is made of remnants of traditional cultures from individual tribes. Although Adam makes do with this kind of culture, he does not consider it as authentic as “individual tribe knowledge”. He emphasises the idea of loss instead of looking at urban Indigenous cultures as evolving forms of Indigeneity, changing with circumstances. Adam's vision reflects the still dominant discourse presenting Indigenous cultures as static entities. When these entities meet and blend or when they evolve, they are seen as losing some of their authenticity.

The absence of connection to a community or an Individual tribe highlighted by Adam stands as an obstacle to identification for almost all the participants in this project. It is very often the missing link between their interest in their Indigenous heritage and the activation of their Indigenous identity.

Damita McGuinness from the UTS Indigenous centre Jumbunna explained this to me.

Damita *You get a lot of students who have grown up not sort of really knowing much –*

³⁴ BECKETT, Jeremy, “The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality”, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

they know they're Aboriginal – but they haven't really connected to community for whatever reason, and there's many, many reasons why that happens. (...) It could be that they actually don't live in the community, you know, so they never get that interaction.

Damita's comment does not imply that communities cannot be urban or that culture cannot be formed and learnt there. However, it is often what the participants in this project seemed to believe. They are indeed influenced by the discourse presenting urban Indigenous communities as not truly authentic. Therefore, they often envisaged community as both remote and traditional, which explains why some participants like Adam were dissatisfied with the forms culture takes in urban settings, or why some did not even conceive being able to learn more about Indigenous culture in urban communities close to where they resided.

Because they were not embedded in their local urban communities, the majority of participants developed their knowledge about Indigenous culture in the same way Adam did, or through following a course at university. Michael Peachey from the UNSW Indigenous centre Nura Gili explained that for students in the process of discovering their Indigenous cultural heritage, a way to familiarise themselves with it is to access this general knowledge available in books and through studies.

Michael *I mean you can learn a lot about Indigenous culture by reading and going into Indigenous studies class, but to get them back into their own communities, it's difficult. (...) We try to encourage that.*

However, Michelle, like Adam, pointed out that the type of Indigenous knowledge she learnt at university did not completely satisfy her.

Michelle *[I had] found out that there were Aborigines in the family and I thought, "Well, actually, I'm going to do Aboriginal history because I want to learn more about it." I think I was a little disappointed, though, because it was more an academic study of Aboriginal history. (...) They used to argue about (...) who had the right to talk about what Aboriginal was, how history is being talked about through white men's eyes etc. That didn't interest me so much. I actually wanted to learn about the stories. But of course you know, Aborigines, – and this is probably why a lot of it is diluted in the family – you have to have the right to tell a story. It's an oral history.*

Part III

If you don't have the right to pass on a particular story, then you don't talk about it. And I think that factor came in a little bit in my family: no one talked about it because you didn't have the right to tell someone about it.

The longing for “stories” and the reference to an oral history point to a desire for a more personal and intimate relationship to Indigenous culture than the one available through books or studies. The same idea was present in Adam’s lack of “individual” knowledge. Adam’s comment explicitly linked traditional culture to a more authentic form of Indigeneity as opposed to the less authentic “commercial stuff” with which he had to make do while living in a city. Knowledge, as well as identity, are, in Michelle’s words, “diluted”. The non-Indigenous discourses about remote authenticity and urban inauthenticity, and the representation of culture as fixed rather than in movement continue to influence the participants’ perceptions of Indigeneity and of their right to call themselves Indigenous.

Indigenous blogger Dallas Scott explained how being an urban Indigenous person did not have, according to him, the same value as being a traditional Indigene living on an ancestral land.

I don't speak language (hasn't been the practice in my family since my Great-Grandparents), live in the suburbs and would completely agree with traditional Aboriginal people when they say they don't see me as truly Aboriginal. By their standards, I'm not, and I understand and accept that. My children wouldn't be either. Although I've never been mistaken for anything other than Aboriginal, and despite my genetic lineage, Aboriginality is as much a system of lore and living and traditions to those who know what they are talking about when they say the word 'culture', as it is about genetic lines. (...) Our worlds are completely different and to ignore that is nothing short of being disrespectful. I'm far more 'whitefella' than 'blackfella' in their eyes. (...) Based on my own opinion of Aboriginality, my children have part Aboriginal heritage. They live with me in the suburbs (they visit but don't live on the land their Aboriginal ancestors did), speak only English, and therefore, to me, they are 'less' Aboriginal than those children who live a traditional life, or have heritage that is solely Aboriginal.

Scott places a lot of importance on traditional cultural signs. His comments show how important culture is in the recognition of Indigenous identity. While colour is still a strong indicator, it is more so for non-Indigenous people than it is for Indigenous communities for

whom the last two criteria of the official definition have more value: self-identification and recognition by a community. Although Scott is physically identifiable as Indigenous, he believes that his living in the suburbs and his not speaking the language of his group definitely take away from his right to call himself as Indigenous as more traditional Indigenous people. He even says that his way of life brings him closer to the 'white' side than to the Indigenous one (the dichotomy between "whitefellas" and "blackfellas" is reaffirmed). Thus, Scott follows the discourse claiming that urban Indigenous people have assimilated into 'white' society, and that their culture and identities are therefore not much different from those of 'white' Australians. His comments also re-affirm the idea that there are different degrees of Indigeneity and therefore of authenticity. This idea originated in non-Indigenous perceptions of Indigenous people. The latter were defined according to their percentage of blood and according to the degree of Indigenous culture they possessed. Dallas Scott, when he calls himself and his children "'less' Aboriginal than those children who live a traditional life", adheres to the assimilationist non-Indigenous discourse. According to the vision of Indigeneity this discourse presents, it is only possible for Indigenous people to lose some of their Indigeneity. It is not possible to transform it.

Adam's, Megan's and Dallas Scott's comments, instead of mentioning *different* ways of being Indigenous, present Indigeneity in terms of *degrees*. The emphasis on a static traditional culture as the only way to remain a real Indigenous person could not be clearer in Scott's analysis (the word "lore" in itself carries a sense of traditionality).

What is also apparent in Scott's comments and more generally in the discourse about cultural loss is the significance of time in the discourses about authenticity and Indigenous identity.

7.2 Finding Authenticity in the Past

In the previous section, I explained the links created between time, place and authenticity throughout history and their ongoing influence in today's Australia. I now wish to pay

particular attention to the past as a location of authentic Indigeneity and therefore and as the location of a legitimate Indigenous identity for the participants.

The past as the place where true Indigeneity resides is a recurring feature in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous discourse as the following comment from Mudrooroo reveals.

Scratch an Aborigine and beneath his or her apparent modern skin, or the persona he or she shows to the white world, you will find the old hunter or gatherer. (...) The past is of the utmost importance in that it is there that true Aboriginality resides.³⁵

Mudrooroo's comment is another example of the discourse placing authentic Indigeneity in a remote time and place. His description of Indigeneity emphasises an essential link with traditional forms of Indigeneity and with the past. His description reinforces the image of Indigeneity as static rather than as evolving.

While the importance of the past was already clear in the discourses previously analysed, which associate a traditional and static culture to authentic Indigeneity, an example of the concrete importance given to the past today is the role it plays in land rights claims. In order to ask for the return of their lands, Indigenous people must prove that they have maintained an unbroken connection with it. Patrick Wolfe noted the irony of asking people who were dispossessed of and removed from their lands to now demonstrate this connection: "[T]he more you have lost, the less you stand to gain. To fall within land-rights criteria, it is necessary to fall outside history."³⁶ This process denies the impact of colonial history on Indigenous people in the same way Mudrooroo's comment discarded Indigenous people's adaptation and evolution since the arrival of the British. This example reveals the complexity of linking past and present in the perception of Indigeneity.

The process of land rights claims also highlights the ambivalent role of anthropologists whose work was aimed at preserving dying cultures and who are now called to provide evidence that Indigenous people's connections to their land are still alive. Similarly, the

³⁵ MUDROOROO quoted in LATTAS, Andrew, "Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity", *Oceania*, Vol. 63, No. 3, March 1993, p. 254.

³⁶ WOLFE, Patrick, "Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era", *op. cit.*, p. 126.

attempts at cultural revival through which urban Indigenous cultures and identities are partly formed also make use of anthropological findings.³⁷ These examples show that the past plays an important part in present constructions of Indigeneity.

I will first come back to the notion of 'traditional culture' to show how its absence induces feelings of illegitimacy. The fact that traditional culture is often considered the only valid form of culture is problematic considering that culture has become a necessary criterion to identify as Indigenous. I will then focus on the importance of turning to the past for participants lacking a present connection to Indigeneity.

7.2.1 Traditional Culture and Legitimacy

7.2.1.1 The Problematic Lack of Traditions

I explained how urban Indigenous culture was often not considered as authentic as the cultures of remote Indigenous communities. There is an inextricable link between place and time in the way Indigenous culture is perceived. This is obvious in the way 'remote' is essentially linked to 'traditional'. In this perspective, urban cultures are not regarded as legitimate forms of cultures but as mosaics made of pieces of static traditional cultures. It is as if culture could not be created, only retrieved.

Echoing Dallas Scott's point of view on the weight of traditional culture, Darlene Oxenham, one of the academics discussing her experience of Indigeneity in *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts 'n' All*, wondered why she sometimes felt insecure about her Indigenous identity.

What conditions would need to exist or what would make me feel comfortable with my identity? (...) The measurement that I ultimately use still comes from a traditional cultural base. (...) What would consolidate my identity as an Aboriginal person is if I did actually relearn, reclaim, re-establish some sort of

³⁷ CREAMER, Howard, "Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the Image of Cultureless Outcasts" in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, op. cit., p. 54.

cultural practice, because then I would know how I related to everybody else. They would be overt signs and I would take that into my total being.³⁸

The “overt signs” mentioned by Oxenham are even more important to the participants whose skin colour does not allow instant identification as Indigenous. To Oxenham, practising culture is a way of experiencing true belonging and to really be Indigenous (“I would take that into my total being”). The participants, although influenced by discourses about skin colour, were in most cases, also well aware that possessing culture – and in their minds traditional culture – was an important criterion in the recognition of Indigeneity. As I explained the lack of traditional culture was one of the main barriers preventing confident identification.

Several participants explained the lack of legitimacy which lacking culture entailed.

Michelle *I would never feel confident enough to actually integrate the community, because you feel like... (...) you don't have the right to be Aborigine. (...) Because you can't actually prove that you're Aborigine. You can't... You don't actually have any knowledge of the language. You don't participate in what they do culturally.*

[The Maoris] dig a hole in the ground; they put in hot rocks; they cook their meat for three days; they do a bit of a festival and that sort of stuff. They have specific cultural things (...) that they participate in, and it may help them with their identity. They feel like they are part of the Maori community. The Aborigines, that was all broken in Australia.

Michelle regrets seeing the culture of her family ‘diluted’. In her comparison of Australian Indigenous and Maori cultures, Michelle yet again uses examples of traditional culture. To her, retaining these traditions is the key to forming a sense of belonging to the Indigenous community. Michelle’s reflection on belonging echoes Darlene Oxenham’s want for “relating” to other Indigenous people: it is through traditional ceremonies that both women feel they could belong to their communities.

Just like Dallas Scott and Michelle, Miriam and Casey highlighted traditional language as a cultural element contributing to a strong Indigenous identity. Miriam compensates her

³⁸ OXENHAM, Darlene in OXENHAM, Darlene et al, *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts 'n' All*, op. cit., p. 67.

lack of knowledge of traditional culture by acquiring another form of culture through work. However, in her eyes, this type of culture does not seem to be able to replace a more traditional form of culture.

Miriam *I couldn't learn [Wiradjuri language] but always wanted to. I guess things like that: you could get a bit of language. Apart from that, like, it's hard. But I've learnt a lot about Aboriginal culture through working at the Aboriginal legal service, and talking to a lot of Aboriginal people and things like that, so, yeah. It's something that really bothers me, not having any of that culture.*

Casey also highlighted the importance of being able to speak the traditional language of his tribe.

Casey *The first question I asked my uncle when I went down there [to Armidale where his Indigenous family comes from] at the start of the year was, "How do we say 'Hello'?" Because my mate who's in Musgrave Park right now, whenever he gets to talk at a march, or at a rally or whatever, he'll announce himself in his own language. So he'll say his skin name, his tribe, his clan groups and say 'Hello' – 'Yaama' – that's in a neighbouring tribe³⁹ to mine. And so he'll say 'Hello' in their language. So I thought I want to find out how to do that.*

Learning to introduce himself in the language of his tribe was a defining step in Casey's process of identification. This was a way for him to vocalise his belonging to his Indigenous community. In this quote, we can see how Casey links traditional elements of Indigeneity, such as language, to an Indigenous identity anchored in the present – through marches, rallies, political activism. The combination of both past and present is what allows him to confidently identify as Indigenous. He explained it this way: "I think it is cultural. It's involvement. (...) It's about your conviction of who you are, the advancement of your own people". Although Casey is passionate about cultural revival and Indigenous traditional cultures, he does not envisage identifying as Indigenous without taking an active part in the defence of his people's rights in the present. I will come back to this idea later.

³⁹ The Kamilaroi people of south west Queensland.

7.2.1.2 Reviving the Past

Casey's reliance on the past goes beyond being able to speak the traditional language of his ancestors. He declared that cultural revival was one of his passions. More than once, Casey mentioned how the past was a driving force in the construction of his identity: it is because Casey's grandfather was a stolen child who spent his lifetime denying his Indigenous identity that Casey feels so strongly about reclaiming his past. When Casey asked his uncle how to say 'Hello' in his Indigenous language, his uncle's lack of knowledge sparked off Casey's desire to research the traditional language and culture of his ancestors.

Casey *[My uncle said,]"Yeah, we don't know any of that stuff. That was all lost." So that really gave me the urge to go dig it up, and find out where all that stuff was. So, now I've got a 300-word dictionary on my phone of all these words.*

I personally feel obliged to go and learn that stuff because that's been stolen; that's been taken away from us. But, I don't think any of my mob had thought about... Well, they had thought about it but they hadn't had that urge to go and sit in a university library and dig it up. But then I showed my uncle all the stuff that I'd dug up and he was like, "Wow! I didn't even know we had that stuff!" He was getting all psyched and excited. He's like, "It's taken this long for someone to come and do this, and it's you, someone who's just started identifying with all this stuff", and he's like, "That's really, really good."

To Casey's uncle it was surprising to see a young man educated in 'white' culture become interested in reviving his Indigenous people's culture. But I thought, and Casey confirmed it, that not having been able to grow up with this culture was a major reason for Casey's strong "urge" and feeling of obligation to revive it.

Because the east coast of Australia was so hard-hit by invasion and colonisation, and there's very few full-bloods on the east coast left, because they've tried to take all of that away from us for so long, people cling on to it. And, the more you had it taken away from you, the more you try to cling back. So I never grew up with that... I really desire, I really want to know, I really want to know how to speak the words that my ancestors spoke. Whereas I think people from more rural areas where they still speak language and stuff, if they come to more urban areas, they'll be, "Yeah, whatever, talk English now." That's probably a hasty generalisation but that's something that I have seen. The more we've lost, the more we try to bring it back.

Two kinds of losses come into play: on the one hand, Casey mentions the general loss of traditional cultures suffered by the east coast of Australia as a result of colonisation. But it is also Casey's personal loss – due to his grandfather being stolen, and thus also linked to colonisation and its subsequent policies – which sparks off his desire to revive his tribe's traditional culture.

The opposition between a rural, traditional Indigeneity – where Indigenous people still speak their languages – and an urban, dispossessed one also appears in Casey's discourse. It is interesting to see Casey pointing out that rural Indigenous people do not actually feel the need to speak their traditional language since they still possess it and therefore use English un-problematically. This confirms that the degree of significance given to traditional culture depends on the degree of loss experienced.

In Casey's case, traditional aspects of Indigeneity are not only desired because they represent a distant and exotic version of Indigeneity, but also because together they form the Indigenous culture Indigenous people should possess had colonisation not destroyed it. As Victor Morgan's earlier comment showed, there is still a longing among some Indigenous people for a more traditional culture, for a past stolen from them and in which true Indigeneity – “before the white man came and bugged everything”, as Tatz wrote – is believed to reside.

Casey further explained what being 'black' means to him and the reasons why it is important to recover his people's culture.

Casey *To me, being black, or being a First-Nations person is more than just saying "I'm black. I've got a little bit of blood somewhere back." It's what made First Nations people, pre-colonisation, pre-invasion: language, culture, tribal identity, and all these sorts of things.*

To Casey, the importance of traditional culture also resides in its opposition to colonisation and to 'white' culture.⁴⁰ Therefore, his goal of reclaiming this pre-colonisation culture becomes linked to his fight against what he perceives as ongoing attempts from non-Indigenous Australia to assimilate Indigenous people and culture into 'mainstream' society. The closer Casey can get to this unspoiled version of Indigeneity, the further away he can step from 'white' culture, the more he can assert a proud and distinctive Indigenous identity.

Casey's desire to distance himself from 'white' society is also visible in the following quote.

Casey *I go with Boe [an Indigenous friend] or whoever to sit in the park by the fire, just to be there, with that idea that no matter how many buildings there are around, no matter how many paternalistic policies, or whatever, we're still here, and that's really something I value.*

In this comment, it seems as if Casey's desire to draw closer to a traditional Indigeneity leads him to recreate the traditional and remote environment in which this culture is so commonly envisioned. By sitting in a park around a fire, it seems as if Casey can disregard the urban setting of Brisbane which symbolises colonisation.

7.2.2 Anchoring Identity in the Past

I believe that the attraction for a traditional representation of Indigeneity partly stems from the in-between position in which the participants are: although they are of Indigenous descent, not having been raised in Indigenous culture and more often than not struggling to find relevance for their heritage in the present leads them to approach it via the past. It seems natural that our identities should be partly based on images from the past since

⁴⁰ In Beckett's *Past and Present*, Robert Ariss wrote: "In emphasising traditional culture, its otherness, Aboriginal discourse establishes itself firmly in opposition to the dominant culture." *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

ARISS, Robert quoted in NOBLE, Fiona, *Who do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, Master Thesis, Griffith University, p. 48.

these are a starting point from where we can develop. However, for Indigenous people, the reliance on the past can be even stronger for several reasons which are the subject of this section.

7.2.2.1 Drawing a Positive Identity from the Past

The first reason, Casey explained, is the need to recover a past the dominant culture has tried to erase or appropriate. Thus, embracing the Indigenous past is a way for Indigenous people to assert their presence in the face of colonialism and to regain control of their identity by distancing themselves from 'white' society. This is particularly obvious in the use of pronouns in Casey's earlier quote in 7.2.1.2 starting with "Because the east coast...": Casey distances himself from colonisers – "they" – who took the culture away from "us".

Andrew Lattas defended the right for Indigenous people to rely on past representations, something others discouraged:⁴¹

An enormous amount of intellectual energy is currently directed at establishing Aboriginality as something that is invented through European involvement. What is often ignored is the sense of autonomy from the control of the 'Other' conferred by images of the past and images of primordiality and indeed the necessity to have an image of the past if one is to have a sense of ownership of oneself. (...) The past provides the imaginary alternative ground from which human existence can reflexively grasp and constitute itself. (...) It is through memory images that we transform the various discrete aspects of our lives into synthetic meaningful totalities which have the effect of depth because they connect the present with something beyond it.⁴²

Lattas defends the need Indigenous people have of anchoring their identity in the past in order to give it stability. The need for stable foundations for identity may especially

⁴¹ Among others, Lattas criticises Kevin Keffe for encouraging a development of Indigeneity as resistance against the dominant culture rather than Indigeneity as persistence which, according to Keffe, is "founded on a particular notion of culture as a fixed body of knowledge and concepts that are described as being genetically transmitted and reproduced" and is therefore perceived by Keffe as a return to an essentialist perception of Indigeneity.

KEEFFE, Kevin, "Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence", *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁴² LATTAS, Andrew, "Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity", *op. cit.*, pp. 247 and 250.

apply to Indigenous people for whom the concepts of fluctuation and evolution – which the theory of postmodern identity values –⁴³ have been, in their case, linked to a loss of culture and identity and to forced assimilation into ‘white’ society.

With the use of “imaginary”, Lattas acknowledges that the past is idealised. Yet, as Ronald Berndt explains as he writes about the reconstruction of Indigenous cultural traditions, “whether we think of this as a ‘mirage’ or not is really beside the point. Certainly, it is a mirage in relation to traditional Aboriginal life as it existed in the past. (...) But as a viable view, believed in by those who wish to believe in it, it has a reality of its own.”^{44 45} Lattas explains how using images of the past can help transform present Indigeneity and make it meaningful. This is what the participants seek to do when they research their families’ past or take an interest in traditional Indigenous culture. In sum, without the past, identity in the present cannot be meaningful.

Lattas’ comment revealed how the past helps construct identity in general; the following quote by George Morgan illustrates this idea by looking at the reality of urban Indigenous people in New South Wales, and their reason for turning to the past in their quest for identity: the lack of positive representations of present – and especially urban – forms of Indigeneity.

For Aboriginal people living in cities and towns today, ancient symbols provide a point of anchorage against the pressures to assimilate, a counterweight to bland modernity. (...) The stereotype of the fringe dweller, demoralised and culturally bereft, prompts Indigenous urban dwellers to seek to reconstruct

⁴³ For example, see HALL, Stuart, “Who Needs identity?” in HALL, Stuart, DU GAY, Paul, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications, 1996.

This notion is further analysed in chapter 10.

⁴⁴ BERNDT, Ronald quoted in CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ In his analysis of cultural revival, Robert Tonkinson reaches a similar conclusion: “The specific content of ‘tradition’ may be less important than desired outcomes relating to confidence-building and pride in an Aboriginal identity, especially since this process may entail the borrowing and creative adaptation of cultural elements from neighbouring groups or other parts of the continent – most commonly in ‘settled’ areas where very little may be known in detail of local Aboriginal cultures at the time of the European invasion.”

TONKINSON, Robert, “The Pragmatics and Politics of Aboriginal Tradition and Identity in Australia”, *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, Vol. 109, No. 2, 1999, p. 140.

aspects of the distant past rather than celebrating the residual collective forms of the present because those forms do not appear sufficiently distinctive.⁴⁶

Traditional Indigeneity has long been presented as the only form of positive Indigenous identity – or even as the only existing form of Indigeneity, since evolution or adaptation has often been regarded as mere assimilation and loss of culture. Thus, according to Morgan, the focus on traditional culture stems from a disenchanted vision of present Indigenous cultures. Once again, the continuing influence of the discourse linking urban cultures to assimilation and the loss of Indigenous identity is obvious. Morgan explains that Indigenous people living in cities, like non-Indigenous Australians, are only shown negative images of urban Indigeneity, that of the “fringe dweller, demoralised and culturally bereft”, or, as Megan explained at the beginning of this chapter, that of violence and alcoholism. These depictions of urban Indigenous cultures focus on problematic aspects and are still presented as downgraded versions of traditional Indigeneity. If they can raise concern or pity, they cannot be something the participants can identify with personally. Because positive portrayals of contemporary Indigenous cultures often remain invisible, the search for a connection with Indigeneity lies in the past for most of the participants. This explains the hold which remote and timeless representations of Indigeneity have on most participants. Without present links to Indigenous communities which can provide a sense of identity in their everyday lives, the participants take the past as a starting point in the process of the discovery of their Indigeneity. In the different phases of identification outlined by the participants, researching the past was always an early and fundamental one.

7.2.2.2 Knowing One’s History

The history of their families (see chapter 2) often left the participants with little connection to their past. As Michelle and Megan explain, having a stolen member in the family, someone who refused to talk about his/her Indigenous heritage or simply no records resulted in the participants focusing on their other heritages.

⁴⁶ MORGAN, George, “Unsettled Places: Aboriginal People and Urbanisation in New South Wales”, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

Michelle *If you ever did a project at school on genealogy, that was cool and easy. (...) I used to bring Mum's side of the family, the Scots, because we'd know so much about them; that side of the family is so well documented. (...) We had stuff that we could actually show and everything else. On my dad's side, we just didn't know, so we didn't talk about it.*

Megan *Someone in my family has done that side of the family tree – the English and Irish – because I think they were interested in kind of convict past. (...) And I think they found out a little bit on the way about the other side (...) which is where the Aboriginality is – but they haven't actually focused on that side. (...) It's because – there is a legitimate reason – (...) it's because there's a dead end after. After Dad and uncle Keith's grandmother, there's just nothing. There's no records.*

Consequently, for most participants, the process of reconnecting with their Indigenous heritage started with researching their Indigenous ancestors in order to fill the gaps in their family history. It seemed obvious to many that they had no legitimacy claiming Indigeneity based on a flimsy genealogical history. Thus, Kate said:

Kate *I mean you're not going to identify until you know your background, and then you can't really be recognised by your community until you can prove your background either.*

Although being able to substantiate one's claim is a condition that can be applied to any search for ancestry, it is particularly important in the case of Indigenous identity. This is something Megan realised as she watched the SBS *Insight* program "Aboriginal or not?" She expressed her surprise at the negative reactions of Indigenous people on the show.

Megan *I was surprised that a lot of the Indigenous people interviewed on that programme said, "I don't think you should be entitled to make the connection unless you can back it up."*

But she later understood that Indigenous communities could sometimes be suspicious when faced with the greater number of identifications as Indigenous of people whose families had passed into 'white' society. Consequently, Megan said that she would not mention her Indigenous heritage without being able to give evidence of it.

If I met someone and I couldn't say where my people are from, I probably wouldn't mention it. If you don't know where you're from, that seems to me to be

like...number one, basically.

The fear of offending Indigenous people by too casual a mention of their heritage often prompted the participants to research their heritage.

Vanessa personally experienced the fear I described and felt that she was perhaps judged negatively because she only had a shallow knowledge of her history.

Vanessa *When I'm in a room full of, you know, at an Indigenous conference or...and someone says, "Where are you from? Who's your family? Who's this?", and you, like, stop after two sentences: "I'm from this island. This is my family...That's all I have." And there's a little bit of lateral kind of...disappointment that that's all you know. And that's the thing in Indigenous communities: some are really accepting and are like, "Yeah, I can understand", and some are like, "Oh you don't know. So why do you identify?" So internally, there's fears.⁴⁷*

Indeed, Yuriko Yamanouchi, in her study of urban Indigenous identity in south-western Sydney, noted the importance for Indigenous people of establishing connections, and the suspicion which could arise when someone was not able to justify his/her Indigeneity.

Demonstrating an Aboriginal family connection is crucial among Aboriginal people in south-western Sydney: when Aboriginal people meet each other, they first ask their family names and their places of origin in a bid to determine if they share common knowledge of (at least) some Aboriginal families in said places of origin. Failing in this practice could lead to the accusation of being a 'wannabe'.⁴⁸

For his part, Andrew thought he was allowed identify as Indigenous without knowing about his ancestry. But he nevertheless wished he could explore his connection with the past in more depth in order to give more legitimacy to his claim.

⁴⁷ In his analysis of Sally Morgan's *My Place*, Bain Attwood writes that Morgan turned to the past in order to legitimate her Indigenous identity because the present Indigenous community was unwilling to do so. Because her claim was not well accepted by Indigenous people who saw her family as traitors who chose to pass into 'white' society, Morgan focused on traditional Indigeneity, something which, according to Attwood, is a common strategy for newly identified Indigenous people.

ATTWOOD, Bain, "Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, Issue 99, 1992, p. 304.

⁴⁸ YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *Oceania*, Vol. 82, 2012, pp. 62-63.

Andrew *For me, personally, while I feel comfortable in openly identifying as an Indigenous person, I'd like to track my lineage back to get a firm understanding of where my heritage has come from. That's not necessarily requiring a certificate, but actually identifying with an actual tribe, and reaching out would be the next step. I'm not sure if or how I would do that, but that's probably something that would be important to me at this point, reach out, research and understand where I've actually come from, from an individual tribe respect and community.*

Thus, while acquiring a general knowledge about Indigenous culture through books or at university may be a starting point, the participants felt that their sense of belonging to the Indigenous community rested with a more personal connection to it. Although several of them envisaged to visit the community where their family came from, a first step was to turn to the past and find out about their ancestors.

Megan insisted on the importance of knowing about the past of her Indigenous family to make her heritage “real”.

Delphine Making it “real” to you would mean meeting people from your community, or go there?

Megan *No... Look at photos, know the people's names, and know where this has all happened. (...) [My father] went there. (...) [He] did meet some people in the street, and they knew who [he] was talking about, and they said, “Yeah, we're twenty times removed cousins or something.” And he felt like that was enough for him. He felt like, “Ok. That's real.” (...) But for me, I've only got his experience of telling that to me. (...)*

Delphine So do you want to go yourself?

Megan *Yeah. (...) But I think the first step for me would be to talk more to dad about it, and do what you're doing and document it.*

As Megan's comments show, for several participants, building a connection to their Indigenous heritage started with understanding their family's past. This seemed to be the easiest doorway into the exploration of their Indigeneity. But it was also prompted by the knowledge that, for Indigenous people, placing someone both geographically and genealogically is a significant means to recognise him/her as Indigenous. This is the idea

Kate expressed earlier, and which Damita McGuinness reaffirmed when talking about the advice the UTS Indigenous centre could give to students like the participants in this project.

Damita *We can only say... you know, "Go to your community, where you're known", and if they're not known by the community, well, then they're in a bit of trouble, because they will find it very, very hard to get someone to authenticate their Aboriginality – they might look Aboriginal straight up, but if they're not known to anyone as an Aboriginal person, they can have a lot, a lot of problems in life to identify.*

For the participants who managed to trace back their Indigenous lineage, the sense of legitimacy was increased.

Adina *They said, "Well, that's where you're from. You're part of one of the biggest clans, which was very legitimising. I was really afraid of going there with my last name and then not finding anything. And they were like, "Oh, no! You're huge! You're really common!"*

It is interesting to see Adina, for whom the attraction of Indigeneity partly lay in its difference, now mentioning the relief at being "really common", at belonging to an Indigenous group.

As Kate put it, "it's just important for everyone to know, at a minimum, their family history." Looking into one's past is part of any discovery of one's heritage. However, a connection to the past is particularly meaningful in the case of Indigenous identity. This is due to the importance of family connections within Indigenous communities and to non-Indigenous attempts in history at erasing them. The colonial history thus renders the connections to the past both fundamental in order to be recognised as Indigenous, and all the more desired that they can be difficult to establish.

7.2.2.3 Finding One's Place

Adina *You talk occasionally about where your family comes from: "My family comes from the middle of the country. What about yours? Well, we're on the Coast, or whatever" but that would be about 1 percent of the interaction. That's just more of an establishing where you are, within the group.*

Adina's quote reveals how family connections are linked to a specific place for Indigenous people. This is due to what is described as the special – and timeless – relationship Indigenous people maintain with the land – or country – they come from. Therefore, identifying as Indigenous not only implies establishing a connection to the past but also to a place. Once again, time and place are inextricably linked in the definition of Indigeneity.

As Darlene Oxenham explained, a defining trait of Indigeneity is "locality, where we were actually born, and our claims to land, not necessarily in the sense of land rights, but our belonging", "our mob".⁴⁹ Although the majority of the Indigenous population now lives in urban areas, Indigenous communities are often pictured as traditional and remote and some Indigenous people long for a stronger connection to a traditional land (as seen in Marcus Lacey's comment earlier in this chapter). The link between time and place was present in the participants' discourses and in the process of discovery of their heritage. For example, Josh's family trip to "the traditional lands" was also a return to the past.

Josh *We went on a massive trip through the traditional lands when I was 8, and I think there was a fair bit of discovery of where we fitted in then. (...) We went out to the Aboriginal museum and they had like a family tree, and they could fill in the blanks of where we sat in, and they had written (...) on the family tree 'gone white'. (...) And Mum said, "Mum has" – my grandmother has – "But not anymore." So we sort of fitted in the family tree then.*

For Josh's mother, finding her place in the family tree meant going back in time as well as to the traditional community. The family's trip to the traditional land allowed them to understand the past – Josh's grandmother's passing – and to take back their place in the history of the family. Interestingly, the expression "gone white" involves a movement: leaving behind one's Indigeneity implied a geographical move to 'white' society and to a

⁴⁹ OXENHAM, Darlene, *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Wart's 'n' All*, op. cit., p. 107.

city. Going back to one's country or community is also going back in time. Again, this is particularly true for Indigenous families who have experienced dislocation in the past. For them, an authentic Indigenous identity lies in the discovery of both their Indigenous family's history and the place where they came from.

7.3 Authenticity, Time and Place: Controlling One's Identity

"What are the implications of defining Aboriginality retrospectively in terms of a continuing adherence to values and behaviours presumed to compose pre-contact traditional culture?"⁵⁰ What are the implications of locating Indigeneity in a remote past and place which the participants have difficulties relating to? In this final section, I will explain how this particular discourse of authenticity is another one which limits the participants in their ability to embrace their Indigenous heritage. I will also examine to what extent they are able to detach themselves from it.

7.3.1 Repressive Authenticity

Earlier in this chapter, Megan said:

Megan *Because of what I did at uni, I started to have that: "Well, is this real or not, the noble-savage type, painted Aboriginal person you've got, and the one which is on the news which is like drunk or living in a run-down...or in Redfern or something?"*

Like her, several participants started challenging their understanding of Indigeneity in the course of their studies or at work. However, on both personal and societal levels, the old representations of Indigeneity are still influential. Both Jeremy Beckett in 1988 and Bronwyn Carlson in 2011 affirmed that in spite of the actions taken by governments to promote a definition of Indigeneity controlled by the Indigenous community, both the traditional image of remote and timeless Indigenous people and that of their corrupted urban counterparts remained vivid in many non-Indigenous Australians' minds.

⁵⁰ HOLLINSWORTH, David, "Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia", *op. cit.*, p. 145.

In formulating a national policy for Aborigines, the Commonwealth avoided making distinctions among people of Aboriginal descent, opting instead for self-identification and/or recognition by a community. The remote Aborigine nevertheless remained the touchstone of Aboriginality: the point of ultimate reference in definitions of Aboriginality by descent; and the source of fetishized forms of Aboriginal culture, enshrined in museums, galleries, demonstrations and institutionally framed “sites of significance”.⁵¹

[In spite of the new definition], a long-standing logic about who and what ‘Aborigines’ are persisted. This logic recruits common and popular perceptions in the wider community, that who and what constitutes a ‘real’ Aboriginal person are those who still look and live like the traditional, remote Aborigines of colonial imagination.⁵²

As the participants explained, as a result of these prevailing discourses, their identifications as Indigenous are often questioned or denied. As Adam said, “it would be challenged in one of those two ways. It could be either “No, you’re not.” Or “Yes you are, and you’re terrible because you are.””

Indigenous academic Wendy Holland recounted the same kind of experience at school in the 1970s: “When I explained in class that some of my mother’s family were Aboriginal and that we did not live like the Murris⁵³ depicted in the textbook, I re/member feeling really embarrassed and confused when the teacher dismissed my family as not real ‘aborigines’.”⁵⁴

In the same way that not looking Indigenous can raise questions about someone’s authenticity, living in an urban environment and not having enough links with one’s traditional community, land, and cultural practices can limit someone’s ability to be recognised as Indigenous by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people.

⁵¹ BECKETT, Jeremy, “The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality”, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁵² CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵³ “Murri” is a generic term for the different groups of Indigenous people of northern New South Wales and Queensland.

⁵⁴ HOLLAND, Wendy, “Mis/taken Identity” in VASTA, Ellie, CASTLES, Stephen, *The Teeth Are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996, p. 101.

Jeremy Beckett noted that "Aboriginal people are caught between the attribution of unchanging essences (with the implication of an inability to change) and the reproach of inauthenticity".⁵⁵ In sum, Indigenous people are forced to adhere to traditional and static representations of Indigeneity in order to be considered Indigenous. This can be observed in different situations: for example, as I explained, a claim for land rights will be based on the demonstration of traditional connections; in the media, Indigenous voices chosen to speak in the name of Indigenous people are those of Indigenous people considered traditional.⁵⁶ A failure to conform to traditional representations can exclude people from the definition Indigeneity.

More recently, Sarah Maddison re-affirmed the difficult in-between position in which contemporary urban Indigenous people often find themselves.

Part of the challenge of contemporary indigeneity is to assert an identity that both engages with and resists cosmopolitanism, remaining rooted in some fundamental ways in ancient cosmologies, traditional narratives and attachments to land. For many Indigenous peoples subjected to the structural violence of settler colonial regimes, this means that tradition and modernity exist uneasily alongside one another. The concept of tradition is still used to divide Aboriginal people or at least to maintain a hierarchy of authenticity.⁵⁷

While discourses dividing Indigenous people along the lines of authenticity still influence the participants, in her analysis of the workings of a reconciliation group in Western Sydney in 2010, Gillian Cowlishaw emphasised the fact that there is also a desire from non-Indigenous Australians to recognise that urban Indigenous culture is as authentic as remote and traditional forms of Indigeneity.

I suggested earlier that the assertion that western Sydney has the largest Aboriginal population in Australia entails a startling factor that cannot be spelled out. This is because the place and appearance of this population contradict the populist imagery that associates Aboriginal people with the north of the continent, where black people display culture in remote places. This imagery

⁵⁵ BECKETT, Jeremy, "The Past in the Present; The Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality", *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ BULLIMORE, Kevin, "Media Dreaming: Representation of Aboriginality in Modern Australian Media", *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ MADDISON, Sarah, "Indigenous identity, 'authenticity' and the structural violence of settler colonialism", *op. cit.*, p. 292.

has become deeply embarrassing to reconciliators who automatically defend suburban Aboriginal people from the affront of being refused the symbolic space accorded to 'Aborigines'.⁵⁸

Thus, Cowlshaw explains that today, "Aborigines (...) are pitiable citizens to be helped, managed and encouraged to revive their own culture, at least in places where it appears lost." The desire to recognise urban Indigeneity is therefore limited by the ongoing assumption that urban Indigenous people have lost their culture – instead of having adapted it – and by the perceived need to revive *traditional* forms of culture.

The reconciliators wanted to invoke a stylised past, and present conditions – welfare dependency, intense and conflicted sociality – were not part of the sanctified Aboriginal culture they sought. Aboriginal 'ways of being in the world' would have contradicted this Culture. (...) The attribution of Culture to suburban Aboriginal people can operate as a revamped form of racial essentialism, posing an identity problem for those Aboriginal people for whom traditional symbols have become irrelevant.⁵⁹

Therefore, even when the revival of Indigenous culture is promoted in urban areas as a positive step helping Indigenous people reclaim their culture, because only traditional culture is envisaged as authentic, and because it disregards urban Indigenous people's realities, the process can be perceived as a repressive one.⁶⁰

The concept of repressive authenticity was developed by Patrick Wolfe. He argued that the settler nation produces an authentic Indigeneity constructed as a "pristine essence" which actual Indigenous people cannot embody – as in the example given by Cowlshaw

⁵⁸ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Mythologising culture, Part 1: Desiring Aboriginality in the suburbs", *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 217 and 219.

⁶⁰ This idea is also developed by Deirdre Jordan: "The emphasis by European academics on the past as currency for constitution of identity pushes urban people into a mythologising of the past". More recently, Bronwyn Fredericks also expressed the same idea: "It seems that some people assume that Aboriginal people don't belong in the city or big regional centres. (...) In spite of such comments, Aboriginal people are still asked to give a 'welcome' or an 'acknowledgment to Country' in cities and in other urban areas. We may be asked whether we know, or could we organise, a group to do traditional dancing or play the didgeridoo, or whether we can get an artist to paint a mural or display some art? Our involvement in these contexts is generally placed in the positioning of what is deemed 'traditional', 'authentic' or 'tribal'. That is, we are asked to be involved in ways that portray the artistic and material cultural images of the past. What if we don't depict the cultural and social stereotypes of what some people in society believe, perceive or expect of us?"

JORDAN, Deirdre, "Aboriginal Identity: Uses of the Past, Problems for the Future?", *op. cit.*, p. 127.

FREDERICKS, Bronwyn, "Urban Identity", *op. cit.*, p. 30.

and showing the discrepancy between the non-Indigenous imagined representation of authentic Indigeneity and reality. Repressive authenticity follows a “logic of elimination” which allows the settler nation to both get rid of actual Indigenous people constructed as inauthentic while appropriating their symbols constructed as authentic for national identity purposes.⁶¹

Academics have debated whether Indigenous people should rely on essential and traditional characteristics in order to form an Indigenous identity in the present.⁶² As we saw, Andrew Lattas defended the use of the past from which pride in a distinctive identity could be derived. On the contrary, Deirdre Jordan, like Cowlshaw, expressed doubts as to the relevance of the past in the present.

Urban people select from the past to establish identials, characteristics that mark them off as Aboriginal. The problem becomes one of how to integrate these elements into a model of ‘lived’ life. (...) The remote past is a part of their world of meaning as history. It cannot be built into their world of meaning as part of the construction of contemporary identity that inserts itself into the present.⁶³

Whether there is, as Wolfe argued, a “logic of elimination” or, according to Cowlshaw, “no cunning plot by faceless officials and bureaucrats” behind the developing interest in and recognition of restricted forms of Indigenous culture, these scholars agree that only only some forms of Indigeneity are recognised as authentic.

Apart from Casey, the participants in this study did not embrace cultural revival in their everyday lives. For them and Indigenous people who do not rely on traditional aspects of Indigeneity, doubts can be raised about the authenticity of their identity. But as I explained, finding a positive representation of urban Indigeneity can prove difficult since urban Indigeneity is mainly represented as negative. This lack of of positive urban model may not be problematic for people whose Indigenous identity is stable and recognised by

⁶¹ WOLFE, Patrick paraphrased in BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶² The debate around the use of essentialism in the construction of Indigenous identity is analysed in chapter 9.

⁶³ JORDAN, Deirdre, “Aboriginal Identity: Uses of the Past, Problems for the Future?”, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

their communities. For others, like the eleven participants in this study, since there is no visible, positive model of urban Indigeneity, it can be difficult to envisage understanding Indigeneity as other than traditional. But, as Miriam and others said, traditional Indigeneity is not always easy to access. Traditional culture in their families is sometimes lost or kept from them. Unable to access a traditional Indigenous culture or to find in urban Indigenous cultures a positive representation of Indigeneity, the participants are therefore left with no alternative. They can be forever stuck with an identification which never seems quite as legitimate as that of more traditional Indigenous people.

7.3.2 Questioning Dominant Discourses and Oppositions

7.3.2.1 Urban Indigeneity As a Positive Identity

Some participants have had the opportunity to reflect on the discourse portraying urban Indigenous people as inauthentic and they started questioning it.

Andrew *Maybe my ideas – and probably Mum's ideas to an extent – about traditional Aboriginals were...obsolete, in the sense that there are different types in our generation. So the idea of the urban Indigenous person, or what not, and I can pick and choose the extent to which I identify with it. (...) Some of the courses that I studied did have elements that would look into that. One of the areas – I think I had to write an essay on this – was the gentrification of Redfern and the redefinition of what Indigenous culture represented. So from an old-school thought of in-the-bush, tribal, nomadic, dark in appearance, to the idea of generations that growing up have only experienced urban dwellings but who would still identify with an Indigenous heritage.*

Kate *[Not looking Indigenous] is not a problem for me personally, in particular because there are so many great role models amongst our students who don't look Indigenous but who are so heavily involved, and know more about the cultures than the ones that do, who were growing up in the city maybe.*

One of the interesting things that I've experienced here is when the new Indigenous students each year meet the older students. You know the first thing they say is, "Who's your mob and where are they from?" because that's how the students relate to each other. And it's quite interesting to see in particular the city kids not being able to answer that because they've got no idea. And, you know, that

doesn't make them any less Indigenous. It's just, I guess, a bit ignorant. Just like for any Australian: if you didn't know our history, if you didn't know about your family, you know, you're pretty ignorant, and it goes for any person anywhere I guess, but...yeah, I definitely wouldn't say they're any less Indigenous.

Both Andrew and Kate have been studying Indigenous culture or have been working with Indigenous people so that they have been able to hear a greater variety of discourses about Indigenous identity.

Learning about urban forms of Indigenous culture helped Andrew move away from traditional representations and gave him more legitimacy to claim his heritage. Kate witnessed positive examples of urban Indigenous people and of their relationship to culture. Moreover, she adopts a more open definition of identity which takes into account the effects of colonisation on Indigenous people: like her, other urban Indigenous people may have been robbed of their past. To her, not knowing enough about one's culture or community should not be a barrier to identifying.

With the examples of Andrew and Kate, we can see that new discourses about urban Indigeneity have appeared in Australian society. However, they may only be available to people willing to take a broader view of Indigenous identity and to those who have access to knowledge about urban Indigenous cultures and people.

7.3.2.2 Rethinking the Meaning of Culture

In this chapter, I have pointed out that the understanding of culture as a set of fixed characteristics plays an important part in perpetuating discourses of authenticity and inauthenticity. Therefore, other understandings of this concept should be taken into account.

Both Larissa Behrendt and Bronwyn Fredericks emphasised the continuity of Indigenous culture in urban environments. In her defense of urban Indigenous culture, Fredericks insisted on the right for Indigenous people to enjoy the benefits of 'white'

society – “buying goods and services, finding a job, participating in sporting groups”⁶⁴, etc. – without abandoning their Indigenous identity or culture. For Fredericks and others who have attempted to redefine urban Indigenous culture, diversity seems to be the best answer. The reason why it can be hard to regard an urban Indigenous identity as completely authentic is perhaps because it cannot be summed up by a list of attributes in the way traditional Indigeneity often is. As I explained, it is instead a blend of traditional elements coming from diverse parts of the country and transmitted to Indigenous people by their own communities or retrieved from non-Indigenous anthropologists’ accounts, but also of invented traditions. This diversity can be viewed in a positive light: to Andrew, Fredericks’ definition of Indigenous identity as diverse was what allowed him to identify with more confidence. He could “pick and choose” what was relevant to him.

As I explained, while cultural changes are a sign of progress in Western culture, they are a mark of inauthenticity when applied to Indigenous people. It is the definition of culture which is therefore at stake. Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics Bronwyn Fredericks and Gillian Cowlshaw both insist on a dynamic rather than fixed definition of culture which would help modern and urban Indigenous people be regarded as authentic as well.

Culture cannot stay the same, it is dynamic and there are many cultural configurations. Aboriginal people live in the contemporary world and weave in and out of two, three and even more cultural domains. We are part of colonisation, just as it is part of us. Aboriginal culture has needed to adapt, adjust and modify itself in order to survive within the contemporary world. This does not mean that our cultures are not and that we are not, Aboriginal. You might have to look and listen more closely, but culture is always there in some form, always was and always will be.⁶⁵

Instead of the depiction of Aborigines as having lost their culture, or as clinging passively and pathetically to its remains, it is possible to present the process in the active voice. (...) Such a view begins with an active conception of culture. If culture is a creation, an expression of a human’s group’s response to their social existence, then the changing conditions of that existence do not mean a loss of

⁶⁴ FREDERICKS, Bronwyn, “Urban Identity”, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

culture. One could as well lose one's biology. Rather, it means a cultural response to a different situation.⁶⁶

Vanessa's story and approach to Indigenous culture reflected "the changing conditions of existence" Indigenous people have gone through because of colonisation. Like the people Kate mentioned earlier, she and her brother had lost their connection to their Torres Strait Islander history and identity. Vanessa learnt about her heritage as a teenager, when she lived in Adelaide in South Australia. When she and her brother were told about their heritage by their mother, they decided to explore it but had no way of going back to their community in the Torres Strait Islands.

Vanessa *We didn't even really know the difference between an Aboriginal and a Torres Strait Islander person. Their cultures are completely different. And yeah, we just went... My brother had just started university. So he went to Wirrtu Yarluy at Adelaide University – that's the Indigenous [centre] (...) He was like, "I don't really know where to go to find out about [my heritage]. I'm really curious. My sister's really curious as well." (...) [Later], my brother [who] had gone to elders and had, really... You know, he went through secret men's business, really liked it and said [to me], "Would you like to do it as well?"*

(...) And basically [an elder working at the university] took my brother under his wing and just introduced him to the local Land Council, and then to the local men's group, and then just tried to immerse him and find someone who was Torres Strait Islander to come speak to him.

Vanessa and her brother were lucky to be in contact with Indigenous people from the Adelaide region who attempted to reconnect them with their Torres Strait Islander heritage. But Vanessa also recalled going on a camp with other Indigenous students from her university in Adelaide: "It was like 'get to know all the Indigenous students of the university through the university centre'. It's beautiful and we got to go back to country and learn about it – great experience, and really good to bond." Thus, Vanessa learnt about her own culture as well as other Indigenous cultures at the same time. The Indigenous people who helped her and her brother reconnect with their heritage seemed to welcome them in the Indigenous community as a whole. Indeed, the ease with which Vanessa now

⁶⁶ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists", *op. cit.*, p. 233.

seems to move from one culture to another points to a more general conception of Indigeneity. This is visible in the way she later approached Indigenous culture at work.

Vanessa *I've lived in Canberra, worked in Perth, born in Queensland, Adelaide. Now I'm in New South Wales. So I'm just like, "Cool, alright. I don't know anything here. Can I have any contacts? Who could I go to really learn about NSW culture?" Because if I'm going to give an Acknowledgment of Country, I want to know whose land I'm on.*

Vanessa both recognises the importance of differences in Indigenous cultures – which is not always the case of many non-Indigenous Australians who tend to homogenise Indigenous people – but feels free to intermingle with different groups. Her story is an illustration of the evolution and adaptation of Indigenous cultures to modern Australian society. While her grandparents left the Torres Strait Island of Poruma to find fishing work in Malaysia, her mother came back to live in Australia and settled in Adelaide with her husband. Vanessa later lived in New York before moving to Sydney where she resided at the time of the interview. In spite of this, she and her brother reconnected with their Torres Strait Islander heritage. On another level, Vanessa connects with different Indigenous cultures in Australia. In her case, authenticity is still linked to traditional culture, but it is not bound to a particular place or group of people.

7.4 Conclusion

Representations of Indigenous people living a traditional life in a remote location still abound in 'mainstream' Australian society. Evidence of the influence of this discourse about Indigeneity is the importance of traditional cultural elements to the participants in this study, and to some urban Indigenous people quoted in this chapter and longing for more connections to traditional aspects of Indigeneity. Although traditional images may represent the reality of some Indigenous people, they do not reflect the variety of ways of being Indigenous in today's Australia. Nevertheless, just like a dark skin is considered proof of authentic Indigeneity, remote and timeless aspects of Indigeneity are regarded as quintessential traits of this identity. Because of the prevalence of the remote – both in time

and space – discourse about Indigeneity, the participants in this study relied on these traditional aspects of this identity. The traditional vision of Indigenous people and culture was often considered a benchmark to which they compared their versions of Indigeneity. A traditional Indigeneity is even more important to people who have experienced dispossession and dislocation. These people turn to the past not only because their absence of links with Indigeneity in the present prevents them from basing their Indigenous identity on it, but also because they long for a distinctive Indigenous identity which traditional attributes seem to offer, and which their present urban lives seem to lack. Indeed, urban Indigenous identity has historically been equated with assimilation and a loss of Indigenous culture and identity. It is now represented in ‘mainstream’ Australian discourses about Indigeneity as problematic – linked to violence, alcohol abuse and more generally to what Gillian Cowlishaw named “oppositional culture”.⁶⁷ In these conditions, it seems difficult for a present and urban Indigeneity to provide positive material for the participants’ identity constructions. The problematic aspect of the lack of alternative models to the traditional one lies in the emphasis placed in today’s Australia on culture, and no longer biology, as the defining criterion of Indigeneity. Although the participants in this study have Indigenous ancestry, they were well-aware that possessing Indigenous culture was the true test of their Indigeneity.

Thus, as Bronwyn Carlson explains,

A problem emerges for many Aboriginal people when claiming cultural heritage as a basis of identity because of the extent of discontinuities with traditional heritage. ‘Urban’ Aboriginal people are able to be positioned as more like White people than traditionally-oriented Aboriginal people who still fit within the colonial constructs of Aboriginality leading to the identification and selection of elements from ‘the past’ to establish this distinctiveness. Quests to re-construct and express contemporary forms of Aboriginality that emerge in response are part of the discussions. This may include elements of traditional pasts and elements of the recent shared past of colonial experience.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “The Materials for Identity Construction”, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁸ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 92

Casey, like other participants, turned to the past and was fascinated by pre-colonial Indigeneity. He had developed a strong interest in cultural revival. However, in Casey's case, the importance of traditional culture especially lay in its opposition to 'white' culture. It is linked to a time when Indigenous people were not defined by non-Indigenous Australian society. Casey is a participant who managed to overcome the dichotomy between past and present Indigeneity which prevents several participants from feeling Indigenous. Through his involvement in current political issues, Casey links past, present and future in the way he lives his Indigenous identity: his reliance on traditional Indigeneity allows him to define future goals for his people in the present. Casey therefore combines the two definitions of Indigeneity outlined in Carlson's comment: a definition based on traditional representations, and a more recent definition which started developing in the 1960s with the demand for civil rights. This is a pan-Aboriginal definition of Indigeneity which is based on the common colonial and post-colonial history of Indigenous people, on political struggle and often on an opposition to 'white' Australian culture. For people like Casey, it can provide an alternative to the negative representation of present Indigeneity I have described. However, it implies a political commitment not all participants in this study were ready to make. This vision of Indigeneity and how it influences the participants is part of the analysis carried out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

Authenticity and Disadvantage

8.0 Introduction

Disadvantage [suffered by Indigenous people] is associated with a history of racism and colonization in Australia. From the 1960s onwards, Indigenous Australians have asserted a right to 'self-determination' with Indigenous affairs being characterized from this time by varying degrees of effort by Australian governments, and support among the general populace, to redress the disadvantage suffered by Indigenous people through specific funding and programmes as well as the establishment of Indigenous health/legal services and other representative bodies. This period has also witnessed widespread support for the 'reconciliation' movement in Australia. (...) Despite such positive changes in race relations in Australia, contemporary racism against Indigenous Australians continues to be documented in the political domain, health and education systems, the legal and criminal justice systems and civil society as a whole). It is evident that (...) misconceptions of Indigenous people as being welfare dependent, more likely to drink alcohol and as getting special 'government handouts' still abound.¹

As Joan Cunningham and Yin Paradies explain, disadvantage² is a reality experienced by many Indigenous people both in history and in present-day Australia. This reality has

¹ PARADIES, Yin, CUNNINGHAM, Joan, "Experiences of Racism Among Urban Indigenous Australians: Findings from the DRUID Study", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2009, p. 549.

² The notion of disadvantage is a broad one. In the participants' minds, it mostly included having been subjected to racism and having been discriminated against in terms of opportunities (such as education for example). The lack of financial resources was emphasised as a form of disadvantage since the participants were reluctant to take advantage of financial benefits reserved for Indigenous people. More generally, the participants also referred to the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous living conditions (for example, the fact that Indigenous people's life expectancy is lower than that of other Australians was mentioned).

featured prominently in discourses about Indigenous people and, as shown in the previous quote, has come to be a defining feature of Indigenous identity in the same way colour or traditional culture have. After having analysed the discourses of Indigeneity linked to colour, and to time and place, the last discourse I wish to study is that of disadvantage. It differs from the two others in that it departs from the representations of what is called 'traditional' Indigeneity which I studied in the previous chapters.

In chapter 7, Megan explained how she separated Indigenous people into two broad categories: Indigenous people who are perceived as traditional (black and living in a remote location) and the others, relying on the welfare state.

Megan *Until maybe I was a teenager, it would have just been like a cartoon kind of idea of tribal people with paint on their bodies and things like that. The kind of welfare, state version of Aboriginality, I would have probably just started to understand before university.*

Megan's comment shows that on one side, there is an old, simplified but today mainly positive image of Indigenous people – the first Australians, bearers of the oldest living culture in the world – and on the other, a mainly negative vision of disadvantaged Indigenous people who are sustained by the welfare state. I will centre this chapter around the notion of disadvantage and analyse its various implications on the participants' understanding of Indigeneity. The perception of Indigenous people as disadvantaged was a significant one for the participants in this study, one which, like other discourses previously studied, often led to feelings of illegitimacy. For several participants, not having been/not being disadvantaged could imply feeling less authentically Indigenous than

According to *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016*, some of the determining criteria to evaluate disadvantage are life expectancy, young child mortality, access to education (especially post-secondary education), imprisonment and juvenile detention. The report emphasises that experience of disadvantage is variable, depending on "geography, age, sex and other socio-economic factors."

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Factors 2016, produced by the Productivity Commission for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, pp. 3 and 6,

<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2016/report-documents/oid-2016-overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage-key-indicators-2016-overview.pdf>

Also see "Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report, 2016", *Australian government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet*, http://closingthegap.dpmc.gov.au/assets/pdfs/closing_the_gap_report_2016.pdf, accessed on 3 December 2016.

someone who had to face the daily hardships Indigenous people have been and still often are subjected to in mainstream Australia.

The perception of Indigenous people as disadvantaged can be traced back to the early colonial era. 'Lack' was often what characterised Indigenous people in the eyes of the first settlers: Australian Indigenous people were mostly perceived as people in a primitive state of civilisation, lacking the refinements of Western societies. Anderson and Perrin (see 4.1) even argued that disadvantage came to be seen as an essential trait of the natives of Australia who were deemed incapable of evolving.³ From the 1960s onwards, with the gradual recognition of Indigenous people's rights and the governments' changing attitudes towards them, the discourse of disadvantage evolved.

Disadvantage used to be understood as inherent to Indigenous people, as the result of their impossibility to move beyond a low degree of civilisation, and as the cause of their future disappearance, being unable to adapt to what was seen as the superior culture of European settlers. However, in the last three decades of the twentieth century, disadvantage came to be seen as the consequence of the treatment Indigenous people were subjected to from 1788 onwards. This is linked to a more general evolution of the perception and treatment of Indigenous people in Australia both from a governmental and public point of view (see 2.14 and 2.1.5). Therefore, rather than being seen as an essential part of the Indigenous character, the disadvantages faced by Indigenous populations became regarded as brought about by the process of colonisation, by the settlers who destroyed the Indigenous way of life. This new discourse of disadvantage was put forward both by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and has had several consequences on the way Indigenous people have been perceived and treated.

³ "[I]t was in the context of successively failed attempts to 'civilise' them that [the settlers'] initial perplexity turned into an outright crisis; introducing speculation not only about the Aborigines' inclination, but about their very capacity, for improvement."

ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, ANDERSON, Kay, PERRIN, Colin, "'The Miserablest People in the World': Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine", *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

Recognising that Indigenous people had suffered and still did suffer disadvantages was a positive step in the more general recognition of the place of Indigenous populations in Australia. From the non-Indigenous side, it marked the beginning of a process of contrition, reparation and reconciliation. A feeling of guilt and desire to apologise was clearly present at the end of the years 2000 and, although less potent today, the idea of reconciliation still is an important one for many Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.⁴

From the Indigenous side, disadvantage past and present, was used as a common trait to unite all Indigenous people across Australia. With the development of a movement of pan-Aboriginality in the 1970s, dispossession, the experience of racism and subjection to government policies allowed Indigenous people whose experiences varied greatly to regroup, as Martin Nakata explains.

Diversified experiences suggest that there are particularities of Indigenous colonial and social experience that are not commonly shared by all Indigenous Australians. But the Indigenous political struggle against the nation-state did give rise to a collective pan-Indigenous identity claim based on a shared cultural heritage and a shared history of oppression, as a way to transcend the multifarious group, family, or individually specific experiences within the broader history.⁵

As Indigenous academic Nakata writes, common disadvantage became the starting point for rallying and for political struggle, something important considering the diversity of Indigenous people's experiences accentuated by the divisive effects on communities of government policies throughout history.

Using disadvantage as a dominant criterion of Indigenous identity could and can have several different effects. Sharing a history of disadvantage can be a source of pride for Indigenous people – and importantly, for those Indigenous people whose experience and/or physical appearance do not automatically signal Indigeneity, provides a strong basis for claiming this identity.

⁴ According to the 2014 Reconciliation Barometer, 86% of the general population and 96% of the Indigenous population believed that the relationship between both groups was important.

⁵ NAKATA, Martin, "Identity Politics: Who can Count as Indigenous?" in HARRIS, Michelle, NAKATA, Martin, CARLSON, Bronwyn (eds), *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, Sydney: UTS ePress, 2013, p. 133.

But because, as Nakata writes, Indigenous people blame the nation-state for this negative history, it also follows that being an ‘authentic’ Indigenous person necessarily means struggling against the nation-state, and demanding specific rights and recognition for Indigenous identity. More generally, as I will show, the discourse of disadvantage linked to political struggle tends to not only place the blame on official policies – and therefore on the state – but to place it on mainstream ‘white’ society and its values as well. I am not arguing here that opposition to non-Indigenous Australian society is a negative effect of the rise of past disadvantage as a common identity trait of Indigenous people. In the context of this study, however, opposition to non-Indigenous society once again reaffirms a dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, which makes it more difficult for people in-between cultures, like the participants in this study, to embrace both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritages. This dichotomy is reinforced by a stronger pressure to side with one’s Indigenous community and to display loyalty and solidarity to help alleviate disadvantage.⁶

The discourse of disadvantage which was constructed in the last decades of the twentieth century has had positive effects: it has helped non-Indigenous Australians understand the plight of Indigenous people, and triggered political action within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁷ However, the shift in this discourse has also had more ambivalent effects. While successive governments since the 1970s have emphasised a vision of Indigenous people as disadvantaged compared to the rest of Australian society, and have endeavoured to “close the gap”,⁸ disadvantage has become one of the most common words associated with Indigeneity,⁹ turning being disadvantaged into an almost

⁶ As Gillian Cowlishaw explained, “With significant and continuing struggles over wealth, status and power associated with the racial divide, it is important to everyone to know where each person’s loyalty lies.” COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists”, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁷ See chapter 2.

⁸ “Closing the Gap is a strategy that aims at reducing Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes. Endorsed by the Australian Government in March 2008, Closing the Gap is a formal commitment developed in response to the call of the Social Justice Report 2005 to achieve Indigenous health equality within 25 years.” *Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet* website, 12 July 2016, <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap/key-facts/what-is-closing-the-gap>, accessed on 11 August 2016.

⁹ This is visible both within the political sphere and the public sphere. For example, one of the aims of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, beside promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, was to ensure a “national commitment to co-operate to address Aboriginal and

essential aspect of this identity. This is even visible within parts of the Indigenous community who only associate success – opposed to disadvantage – with ‘white’ Australia.

Within the non-Indigenous community, the focus on disadvantage and above all on the state financial help directed at Indigenous people has created an ambivalent perception of Indigenous people seen as lacking (being victims of colonial history) and yet as now having too much.¹⁰

Thus, the effects of the discourse of disadvantage are complex: it is necessary to recognise that Indigenous people have been disadvantaged in the past and still suffer from consequences of colonization and subsequent discriminative policies. However, the insistence on disadvantage as a characteristic common to all Indigenous people regardless of differences of experiences can perpetuate the relation of domination between the state (provider of welfare) and Indigenous people (victims of disadvantage).

I will show the various effects of the discourse of disadvantage on the participants and on their ability or not to claim their Indigenous heritage. I will first analyse how being Indigenous has come to mean that someone has experienced disadvantage. Again, this can be viewed positively – as an experience shared by all Indigenous people, and thus as a legitimising trait – or negatively since most participants cannot claim to have been personally disadvantaged because of their Indigenous heritage. I will then explain how success is not regarded as something Indigenous: while in the first section the focus is on a lived experience of disadvantage, in this second section, I will highlight a form of essentialising of disadvantage which becomes a quality of Indigeneity. Finally, I will look at the expectations regarding solidarity and loyalty to the Indigenous community. These seem

Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.” (“Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act, 1991”, *Australian government* website, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2004A04202>). The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report quoted before has been produced every two years since 2003. A “Closing the Gap” report has been produced every year since 2008. The participants also mentioned that the representations of Indigeneity they formed through the media were focused on disadvantage. For example, Megan described “The stereotypical media version of Aboriginality” as “somebody who’s on welfare, has an alcohol problem. (...) When people talk about Aboriginal people, [it] would mainly be those negative aspects, I believe.”

¹⁰ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p. 16.

exacerbated because of the disadvantages faced by Indigenous people compared to 'mainstream' Australian society.

8.1 The Experience of Disadvantage

In this first section, I will analyse how the participants relate to the concept of disadvantage, both in positive and negative ways.

Based on findings from the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key indicators* reports¹¹ from 2005 to 2011, Pat Dudgeon *et al.* describe the types of disadvantage Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people suffer from:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most disadvantaged group in Australia. [They] experience poorer health outcomes than others; (...) have a shorter life expectancy than others (11.5 years less for males and 10 years less for females). (...) Suicide death rates for Aboriginal people are twice that of other people. (...) Only 50 per cent of Aboriginal students completed year 12 – 30% less than other students. (...) The Aboriginal employment rate remains 20% lower than for other Australians; the average Aboriginal income is lower than others. (...) Aboriginal people were imprisoned at 14 times the rate for other Australians, with imprisonment rate increasing by 59 per cent for Aboriginal women and 35 per cent for Aboriginal men between 2000 and 2010.¹²

These are only some examples in the list provided by the authors. There is no doubting the reality of disadvantages experienced by the Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander

¹¹ "In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments commissioned the Steering Committee to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The Steering Committee is advised by a working group made up of representatives from all Australian governments, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report measures the wellbeing of Australia's Indigenous peoples. The report provides information about outcomes across a range of strategic areas such as early child development, education and training, healthy lives, economic participation, home environment, and safe and supportive communities. The report examines whether policies and programs are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians."

"*Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*", *Australian Government Productivity Commission* website, <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage>, accessed on 11 August 2016.

¹² DUDGEON, Pat, WRIGHT, Michael, PARADIES, Yin, GARVEY, Darren, WALKER, Iain, "Aboriginal Social, Cultural and Historical Contexts" in DUDGEON, Pat, MILROY, Helen, WALKER, Roz (eds), *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, 2014, pp. 13-14.

communities in today's Australia. However, what I am interested in here is to know how the dominant discourse emphasising these disadvantages influences the perception the participants have of them in relation to Indigenous identity.

In the last decades, because of a governmental focus on alleviating the disadvantages faced by Indigenous people, being disadvantaged has gained a significant place in discourses about Indigeneity and has become an expected – and consequently almost necessary – attribute to call oneself Indigenous. In consequence, the participants strongly felt that they needed to have experienced disadvantage in order to identify. As I will show, the great majority of them understood that disadvantage was not inherently Indigenous. However, the tension around the question of benefits (Who gets them? According to which criteria?) within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities exacerbated the issue of disadvantage: it appeared wrong to the majority of the participants to claim benefits without having experienced disadvantage. Moreover, there was a fear that identifying would be equated with trying to appropriate benefits reserved for truly disadvantaged people. From there, it is only a short step to associating an experience of disadvantage with being more authentically Indigenous.

8.1.1 Disadvantage, Struggle and Pride of Survival

In this section, I will analyse the two ways in which the participants could understand the notion of “having experienced disadvantage”. According to the one they adhered to, they could either feel pride in sharing a common characteristic of Indigenous people, or on the contrary feel that they had not experienced enough disadvantage to call themselves Indigenous.

8.1.1.1 Pride in Past Struggles

Casey *That idea that no matter how (...) many paternalistic policies, or whatever, we're still here. That's really something I value.*

“For many Aborigines living where colonial impacts were greatest, elements of identity arose less from ‘traditional’ culture than from a shared history of oppression and experiences of racism.”¹³

Casey’s remark illustrates Tonkinson’s view that the experience of oppression – exercised by the nation-state in Casey’s example – is a significant element of identity. According to Tonkinson, the pan-Aboriginal movement which emerged in the 1970s focused more on this shared negative history than on common cultural characteristics.¹⁴ Considering that the people I interviewed were not raised as part of the Indigenous community and that their ties to it and to Indigenous culture are tenuous, an emphasis on past experiences of the Indigenous community could be a way for them to identify with it and to gain a sense of belonging.

While a few participants found relevance for their Indigenous heritage in their present lives, the majority of them relied on the past to form a connection to Indigeneity. The past, as I explained in chapter 7, was the first and most accessible place in which the participants could anchor their claim to Indigeneity. Knowing that a family member was Indigenous gave them a starting point from where to explore their culture, and some degree of legitimacy. Indeed, being of Indigenous descent is the first of the three criteria in the official definition of Indigeneity. “Descent”, as Philip Morrissey explains in a reflection on Indigenous identity, “implies not genetics as inherited essential characteristics but the historical connection that leads back to land and which claims a particular history, just as the Anzac celebrants do.”¹⁵ Although the participants did not personally face most of the disadvantages listed above – in the same way people who identify with the Anzac

¹³ TONKINSON, Robert, “National Identity: Australia After Mabo” in WASSMAN, Jürg (ed.) *Pacific Answers to Western Hegemony: Cultural Practices of Identity Construction*, op. cit.

¹⁴ TONKINSON, Robert, “National Identity: Australia After Mabo” in WASSMAN, Jürg (ed.) *Pacific Answers to Western Hegemony: Cultural Practices of Identity Construction*, op. cit.

¹⁵ MORRISSEY, Philip, “Aboriginality and Corporatism” in GROSSMAN, Michelle (ed.) *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, op. cit., p. 59.

symbolism did not fight in the war – they can however relate to past disadvantage because one or several members of their families were victims of past policies (see 2.2). The participants' first understanding of disadvantage comes through past disadvantages and struggles which affected the Indigenous community and which later formed the basis for a common Indigenous identity.

Turning the general mistreatment of Indigenous populations in Australia into a criterion of Indigenous identity allows the participants to experience a form of belonging: whereas they may not have been disadvantaged during their lifetime, their ancestors were part of this history of abuse.

For example, Miriam, who identifies as Indigenous and works in an Indigenous position, explained to me that although she felt she lacked lived experience as an Indigenous person – notably because she grew up without experiencing disadvantage – she could turn to the past to find legitimacy in her claim.

Miriam *I'm not trying to justify it because I'm quite happy to apply for [an Indigenous job], but I just think, well, my family were disadvantaged at some point because of white Australian governments' policies, so why shouldn't I take the opportunity now? And I often think... I wonder if I asked my great, great, grandfather or his father, "Should I take this job?", they'd be like, "Of course."*

Miriam's imagined conversations with her ancestor are a way to validate her identity since her 'lived experience' as Indigenous is limited, and to allow her to re-create a link between past, present and future.

In the same way, Adam explained that when he was a teenager, one of the reasons why he felt proud of being Indigenous was because this was an identity people have to fight for.

Adam *I thought it was cool, but I thought it was cool in a good way. Sorry... Not as a bandwagon thing, but as in I was proud of being Aboriginal. Yeah, that's what I would say: I was proud of that.*

Delphine Prouder of that than of being Irish?

Adam *Yes, because of the struggle Aboriginal people had gone through, because of the fact that I had to struggle for that identity, because my family had to struggle for that identity. It was worth more than the others. It had more value because we fought harder for it. You don't have to fight for the other identities.*

Adam explained in previous chapters how being Indigenous, to him, meant that he always had to defend his identity because he was either accused of not being Indigenous enough or denigrated because of this heritage. Like Miriam, Adam links past and present in his description of Indigenous struggle.

As Casey's introductory quote showed, there is an element of pride shared by many Indigenous people in having survived colonisation and successive government policies.

Indigenous people are said to possess the oldest living cultures on earth, and the fact that these go back 40,000 to 60,000 years is now widely acknowledged. So is the resilience of Indigenous people in the face of colonisation.¹⁶ It is this struggle for survival which gives Adam pride in calling himself Indigenous. This is clearly apparent in the way he links the struggle of Indigenous people as a whole to the story of his family and finally to his own experience of fighting against people rejecting his identification.

Adam's quote can be linked to the idea developed in chapter 5 that part of the attraction for Indigenous identity comes from its difference: its minority-culture status can be attractive in the way a 'mainstream' Australian, 'white' Anglo-Celtic identity may not be. Not everyone can be Indigenous: this is an identity which often demands fighting for.

Miriam also felt that disadvantage added legitimacy to her Indigenous identity.

¹⁶ For example, the current Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, in his speech to Parliament in the 2016 Closing the Gap Report said, "For more than 40,000 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have cared for this country. Theirs are the oldest continuing cultures on earth. Our nation is as old as humanity itself. The stories of the Dreamtime, the rock carvings on the Burrup Peninsula, these speak to us from thousands of years, so far away, time out of mind, linked by the imagination, the humanity of our first Australians. Yet we have not always shown you, our First Australians, the respect you deserve. But despite the injustices and trauma, you and your families have shown the greatest tenacity and resilience."

TURNBULL, Malcolm, "Speech to Parliament in the 2016 Closing the Gap Report", *Prime Minister of Australia* website, 10 February 2016, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2016-02-10/closing-gap-statement>, accessed on 11 August 2016.

Miriam *I wouldn't say...I feel proud of being of English descent. And I think part of it is because...of the history of Aboriginal people since colonisation, you know. (...) Because they're so disadvantaged.*

Delphine And so that gives you pride?

Miriam *Yeah. I'm proud to say that that's my background. I'm proud to say I am Aboriginal. But I guess I'm also really opposed to what colonisers did when they came to this country. So I don't want to say I'm English, you know. So I think I would just say I'm Australian, and Aboriginal, or Australian of Aboriginal descent, I guess.*

I see the white cultural part of my identity as Australian, rather than English. And I will say Aboriginal, not particularly because my culture is reflected in that, but because I'm proud of being of Aboriginal descent.

In Miriam's case, it is as much the fact that Indigenous people were ill-treated as the fact that colonisers were responsible for this which makes her favour her Indigenous heritage over her English one. She rejects the colonial aspect of her English heritage and is proud of the resilience of her Indigenous ancestors. I think Miriam's last comment is interesting because although she acknowledges that her culture is not Indigenous – because she was not raised as such – this does not prevent her from feeling Indigenous. On the other hand, apart from the association with colonial violence, another reason she does not call herself English is because she feels culturally Australian rather than English. Thus, in the case of Indigeneity, the lack of cultural ties seems to matter less. Descent is an important criterion which compensates for her lack of cultural knowledge. Thus, I think that, as Morrissey wrote, descent can here be interpreted as a “historical connection” and “particular history” rather than as a simple lineage.

We can note that in Casey's, Miriam's and Adam's quotes, the dichotomy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous identities is already apparent. Although Miriam reconciles her two identities by differentiating English (her colonising ancestors) from Australian (her cultural identity), the fact that 'white' Australians are the source of many of the disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people throughout history makes it difficult to embrace both heritages.

8.1.1.2 Pride in Resistance

For several participants, identifying as Indigenous signified, to a certain extent, continuing the struggle for survival initiated by their ancestors. As Miriam's imaginary conversation with her ancestor showed, several participants linked past disadvantage to the present. One way for the participants of justifying that they were – to a certain extent – disadvantaged themselves was to express the idea that, had their ancestors not been led to hide their identity, they would today still possess their links to culture and community.

Therefore, Indigenous identity was often associated with resistance, albeit on different levels. For example, Adina's is a story of resistance for personal (family) reasons. As I explained earlier, Adina associates her Indigenous identity with other minority groups or causes. She emphasises the importance of tolerance for different cultures, for gay people, as well as her family's choice to be vegetarians. She told me, "We're a protesting family." But on a more personal level, Adina's choice was also a display of resistance: Adina did not grow up with her Indigenous father who, like her mother, abandoned her when she was a baby. She was raised by her grandparents who never talked about her Indigeneity. After her son was born "olive", she contacted her Indigenous father's sister to ask her about the family's heritage.

Adina *"Ah yes, well... We don't like to talk about that. It's not nice to talk about." (...) I said, "Well, you might not like to talk about it, but unfortunately since my son came out the same colour as a coffee bean, people might want to talk about it."*

I'm not, you know, going Aboriginal because suddenly it's the cool thing to do. (...) I mean; this is the one thing I can do to reclaim who I am. And I'm going to do it. [My father] might have tried his hardest to keep me out of his family – and God knows he did. (...) He could have fought for me. But he chose not to. So if my family don't want to acknowledge that – my biological family on my father's side – that's fine. But I'm not going to let them take this one away from me. Or from my son. Because he deserves to know why he's olive. So that's the reason why I did it.

Adina resisted her family's reluctance to talk about their Indigenous heritage and therefore set herself against the imposed silence and the denial of identity which, as several of the participants' experiences confirmed, are common among people with Indigenous

heritage. Adina's pride in her son's skin colour – she said, "He's my little coco boy. I call him my little olive-skin baby" – and heritage is a form of rebellion against the negative associations a darker skin creates. Thus, her personal story of resistance is also linked to a more general fight against prejudiced discourses about Indigenous people and against the history of denial of Indigenous heritage in many families.

The same will to move beyond prejudice surrounding Indigeneity is present in Miriam's discourse.

Miriam *My father was born in 1960, so...there was obviously a mentality back then... You wouldn't want to say that you were Aboriginal. (...) [In my family] there wasn't any shame about it, but there was definitely this attitude, "Yes, we are of Aboriginal descent – your great grandfather was Aboriginal – but we aren't Aboriginal." That was the feeling. And (...) two of my friends at school were twins, and they were my second cousins, (...) and I remember saying to them, joking around, "Oh, you know, we're Aboriginal." And they were like, "No." Like, they know that they are; they know we have the same ancestors but they were like, "No, we're not." (...) And part of me thinks that they think that we're not Aboriginal because we weren't drunks, or...these stereotypes; that's what they knew. And then I guess the point of me identifying was understanding why other members of my family don't identify.*

Although Miriam said that there was no real denial of the family's Indigenous heritage, she also had the feeling that her parents did not take her identification very seriously. According to her, her cousins refuse to acknowledge their heritage because they believe they do not fit in the disadvantaged representations of drunk Indigenous people. Miriam's decision to disregard her family's pre-conceptions and to identify publicly (she has a certificate of Aboriginality and she applied for an Indigenous job) is an act of resistance against her family's – and 'mainstream' Australian society's – association of Indigenous people with negative stereotypes of disadvantage, but also against the barriers inherited from the past which, she believes, prevent other members of her family from claiming their heritage in the present.

For Andrew, identifying as Indigenous also carried an element of resistance, even though it did not feel as if he personally saw it this way.

Andrew *It sounds really egotistic or narcissistic, but I think I liked the idea of – if to an extent it was taken in statistics – my grades were quite good at school, so – putting them out there to push up the Aboriginal stats. Yeah, that’s what I mean: it sounds a bit narcissistic, but I think I had a younger mentality. (...) These would be good marks for that sample group, and so I was kind of proud of it in that sense. But I don’t think I’d put too much thought into it.*

When he was in high school and starting to think about identifying, Andrew began ticking the box asking people to declare if they identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Having grown up hearing the discourse presenting Indigenous people as disadvantaged, he thought that by identifying in such a way, he could help boost Indigenous school results statistics. Andrew believes this to be a narcissistic attitude. I think it can also be analysed as an early – his understanding of what identifying as Indigenous was still quite vague – feeling of pride in his Indigenous heritage leading to a desire to go against the view presenting Indigenous people as necessarily disadvantaged at school.

Years later, when he had already identified, Andrew graduated from university. He explained that on Graduation Day, he was the only student wearing the Indigenous colours:¹⁷ “I felt quite proud wearing my Aboriginal colours, and I think my family was as well.” In his explanation of Aboriginality as resistance in 1988, Kevin Keffe analysed the role of the Aboriginal flag as a symbol of resistance. He witnessed the activities of Indigenous children attending an Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Camp.

[A] great deal of time was spent by the children in painting, silk-screening, and colouring in the Aboriginal flag. This powerful symbol of resistance was designed as recently as 1972, and has rapidly become a significant marker of common identity for Aboriginal Australians. (...) The colours of the flag have become symbolic of Aboriginal resistance in a sense of being more than an abstract and remote item of micro-patriotism. That the association with the flag is of a different order than, for example, most Australians feel towards the national flag is evident from the fact that young Aboriginal students talk of ‘wearing their colours’. This is the same phrase that ‘bikies’ use about their emblems and indicates that the colours are used as a marker of personal

¹⁷ That is to say wearing the black, yellow and red colours of the Australian Aboriginal flag.

commitment to cultural opposition. Wearing the colours of resistance is in itself an act of resistance.¹⁸

Aboriginal colours today are worn not only by Indigenous people, but also by non-Indigenous people supporting the Indigenous 'cause' more or less directly. Arguably, these colours are more widespread now than they were at the time Keffe wrote his article and may have lost part of their subversive nature.¹⁹

Another potential explanation for the meaning of Andrew's action can be found in Mary C. Waters' study of symbolic ethnicity.²⁰ The American sociologist explains how, for example, later generations of Irish immigrants in the United States still wear green on Saint Patrick's Day but otherwise have little connection to the home country of their ancestors. I wondered to what extent Andrew's wearing of the Aboriginal colours on his Graduation Day could be considered a display of symbolic ethnicity or an act of resistance. I believe that in spite of a greater acceptance of Indigenous culture and people in today's Australia, wearing Indigenous colours still carries more meaning than wearing the Irish green. Andrew did not seem personally committed to cultural opposition, as Keffe wrote. However, he seemed aware that his gesture was not completely innocent either.

Andrew *It was a bit of a strange one in the sense that because I was the only one wearing Aboriginal colours, at the beginning of the ceremony, there was the acknowledgement of the land – the traditional acknowledgement of the land holders' speech, and the elder there speaking, because of my non-traditional appearance or characteristics, I felt as if, in some way, I was diluting, diluting their... But the elder actually came and shook my hand (...) and he was very much accepting.*

¹⁸ KEEFFE, Kevin, "Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence", *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Number 1, 1988, p. 71.

¹⁹ On the contrary, interestingly, the increasing display of the Australian flag was linked by Miriam to an exacerbated nationalism and rejection of multiculturalism, especially after the Cronulla riots in 2005: "I hate this walking around with the Australian flag, and I'm sure there'll be people who will hate me for that, but I just associate that with all these themes of colonialism and things like that, and I think we live in such a global community, that nationalism gets on my nerves... (...) Since the Cronulla riots, the Australian flag and the southern cross has this theme of...not violence, but..."

Thus, Keffe's comment about the low level of subversion of the Australian flag could also be subject to qualification today.

²⁰ WATERS, Mary C., *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, p. 123.

Part III

Andrew who felt slightly insecure about his white appearance was aware of the fact that displaying the Indigenous colours would mean acknowledging his Indigenous identity in broad daylight, and his doubts about his legitimacy indicate he is aware that this is not an identity to be embraced lightly. Andrew previously explained how his mother – who has Indigenous heritage – avoided talking about her background. From what Andrew explained in other parts of the interview, his public display of Indigeneity does not indicate an opposition to ‘white’ culture: Andrew is not fiercely anti-‘white’ and enjoys embracing all his different heritages. There is, therefore, an element of symbolic ethnicity in his action since he did not seem to consider displaying the Indigenous colours as a political statement. I believe that Andrew’s gesture can nevertheless be seen as a form of resistance, a public acknowledgement of an identity his mother was denied and often keeps denying as a consequence.

Finally, I want to recall the example of Casey for whom being Indigenous cannot go without actively resisting what he sees as continuing attempts from Australian governments to assimilate Indigenous people and culture into ‘mainstream’ society. As I explained, Casey’s Indigenous identity is just as turned towards the past as towards the future. The story of his dispossessed grandfather forced into silence and denial, and the general disadvantages Indigenous people were subjected to because of past policies are the motivations prompting Casey to now fight for his people’s rights to self-government. Casey believes that the more people have lost, the more they will cling to what they have and fight to preserve it. Therefore, the fact that the language of his people was almost lost is what triggered his desire to bring it back: “I guess I felt that obligation to go and dig that up, find...reignite that tribal identity.” In Casey’s case, past dispossession – the form of disadvantage I have described in this section – is an incentive to fight.

This conclusion also applies to the other participants whose examples I have given, although the meaning of resistance varies according to each person. Together with the advent of a more tolerant environment in which Indigeneity is more accepted and which renders identification easier, a history of disadvantage was, for several participants, a reason for identifying. Within this frame of mind, past disadvantage acted as a positive

trigger. Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs thus explained how “dispossession is not a passive condition by any means; within the frame of dispossession, renewed and even intensified modes of possession are produced.”²¹ The uncanny feature of dispossession is that, in these participants’ cases, it opens the way to re-possession of their Indigenous heritage and identity.

8.1.2 Lived Experience of Disadvantage

After having analysed how the participants could draw legitimacy from the concept of disadvantage, in this section, I will look at two ways in which it can become an obstacle to the participants’ identification.

While knowing that their families had experienced disadvantage in the past could help the participants find legitimacy in claiming their heritage, most of them felt that not having been disadvantaged themselves took away some of the legitimacy of calling themselves Indigenous. More importantly, most of the participants considered the question of benefits when thinking about identifying. Several regarded financial benefits as reserved for Indigenous people more disadvantaged than they are, and they feared being suspected of only identifying for financial reasons.

8.1.2.1 Associating Being Indigenous with Having Experienced Disadvantage

This second way of understanding disadvantage can be introduced through the concept of ‘lived experience’. AIATSIS²² Principal Russel Taylor described it in these words:

This ‘lived experience’ is the essential, perennial, excruciating, exhilarating, burdensome, volatile, dramatic source of prejudice and pride that sets us apart. It refers to that specialness in identity, the experiential existence of Aboriginal people accrued through the living of our daily lives, from ‘womb to tomb’ as it were, in which our individual and shared feelings, fears, desires, initiatives,

²¹ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p. 46.

²² Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

hostilities, learning, actions, reactions, behaviours and relationships exist in a unique and specific attachment to us, individually and collectively, because and only because, we are Aboriginal people(s).²³

‘Lived experience’, in Taylor’s words, is a mixture of experiences and feelings, both positive and negative, which sets Indigenous people apart. In spite of his insistence on “experiential existence”, Taylor’s discourse clearly delineates a specific Indigenous existence from which one cannot escape (“from womb to tomb”) and which leaves no room for other ways of experiencing one’s Indigeneity. For the participants who were not born within this special environment or raised with this worldview, such a discourse precludes identification.

Miriam mentioned her lack of ‘lived experience’ as an Indigenous person and the consequences on her identity.

Delphine You would feel more Aboriginal if you had experienced [discrimination]?

Miriam *Oh, for sure, for sure! Have you heard that term 'lived experience'? Yeah, except for in situations where I've said in the last few years, "I'm Aboriginal", I guess that would be my only lived experience. So that's difficult. (...) It affects how I would see my Aboriginality, but it doesn't affect the fact that I am Aboriginal. Because of the way I was brought up as well, I would never say that I was disadvantaged in any respect because I'm Aboriginal. Because that would be completely ridiculous because I wasn't brought up Aboriginal, and I don't look Aboriginal, so how could I be disadvantaged because of that?*

Interestingly, while Taylor insisted on the blend of positive and negative experiences, in this quote, Miriam associates ‘living experience’ with disadvantage only. In her mind, “lived experience” especially seems to refer to discrimination.

Miriam is confident enough to identify in spite of her lack of lived experience – she believes that being Indigenous does not have to mean that she is or has been disadvantaged. However, her acknowledging that her lack of “lived experience” takes away

²³ TAYLOR, Russell, “About Aboriginality: Questions for the Uninitiated”, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

from her Indigeneity shows the prevalence of the link between Indigeneity and disadvantage in her mind, and in today's discourses about Indigenous people.²⁴

Other participants linked their lack of experience of racism or any kind of disadvantage to feeling less Indigenous.

Delphine Do you feel less Indigenous because you did not experience racism or dispossession?

Andrew *Yes. Yep. (...) I am what could be described as a white male who's grown up in a first-world country. My background is a good education, and... like, everything, I've had good health. There's nothing really concerning there, so I do feel, to an extent, disengaged with some of the issues that the Indigenous population has faced.*

Josh expressed a similar feeling.

Delphine Would you have [tried to get a certificate of Aboriginality] if nobody that you knew had been on the Council?

Josh *I wouldn't have tried to prove it, I don't think, no. (...) Not deserving, I guess. (...) I wasn't raised... (...) You might be able to prove that your family's Indigenous, but I didn't have any of the disadvantages that Indigenous people often suffer – like prejudice and poverty, and remote communities.*

Delphine So you feel less Aboriginal because you weren't disadvantaged?

Josh *Yeah!*

Delphine And not, like, spat on at school and stuff?

Josh *Yeah, I suppose. Yeah, basically. And I'm not saying that to be Aboriginal, you have to be disadvantaged. I suppose I just wasn't raised in a culture of their spirituality, and...with their tools, and their ways of thinking.*

²⁴ In her study of "people learning about their Aboriginality", Fiona Noble's interviewees also expressed the feeling that they were not oppressed enough compared to their idea of what an Aboriginal person is like. Therefore, they felt it was disrespectful to claim that they understood what it is like to be Indigenous. NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, op. cit., p. 67.

Josh's explanation recalls the ambivalence also present in Miriam's quote and in several participants' discourses: he says he feels he is not as Indigenous as people who had to face racism because of their Indigeneity, but quickly corrects himself to affirm that disadvantage is not an essential characteristic of Indigenous people. Instead, he insists on the fact that it is his lack of cultural knowledge which is a hindrance. This ambivalence is yet another proof of the in-between position of the participants: they are both very influenced by discourses delineating Indigenous identity (focusing on colour, traditional culture or disadvantage) but are also knowledgeable enough that they can distance themselves from these discourses. In the end, though, they impact the participants' ability to embrace their heritage. Being able to reason about the issues at stake and to dissociate themselves from stereotypes is not always enough to make the participants choose a risky identification. Moreover, most participants felt that claiming an Indigenous identity would be disrespectful to Indigenous people who had experienced real hardships.

Bronwyn Carlson's study of Indigenous identity confirmed that the participants' reluctance and fear of offending is founded. One of her Indigenous participants explained that, to him, having experienced hardships was an essential element of the Indigenous identity.

Aboriginal people have had it hard and that is what makes us Aboriginal in some way; we all know about our past and what it means to be Aboriginal. So that is why, when people aren't really Aboriginal because they haven't faced these things, it isn't right they can say they are Aboriginal.^{25 26}

Vanessa who identifies as Torres Strait Islander was also reminded of her lack of experience of disadvantage by Indigenous friends.

Vanessa *I've got close friends; (...) they know me quite well, so I'm quite open with them,*

²⁵ Participant quoted in CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

²⁶ The same idea was reported by Yuriko Yamanouchi in her 2012 study of Indigenous identity among south-western Sydney Aboriginal people. She explained that some Indigenous people feel ill-at-ease with newly-identified Indigenous people, on the one hand sympathising with the loss of their relatives and ties with the community, but on the other hand, feeling that they are not like them: "They might have lost something but they have not gone through what I have gone through."

YAMANOUCI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *op. cit.*, p. 70.

and they're just like, "If I didn't know you and I found out that you didn't have to go through the same childhood that we went through...I would judge you. You're like a privileged Indigenous." There's, like, levels, apparently.

Vanessa's interpretation of her friends' comment points to a hierarchy between Indigenous people. Vanessa seems to imply that her friends made her feel as if she was less authentically Indigenous because of what they saw as her more privileged life and lack of experience of disadvantage.

Carlson emphasises the importance for Indigenous people of the shared history of struggle described by the participant in her study (8.2.1 showed this was also the case for the participants). Preserving this specific trait of Indigenous identity is, according to her, the reason why Indigenous people fear newcomers and their different experiences of Indigeneity.

[There] is a subtext of fear that announcements of diversity of Aboriginal experiences will diminish the hardship experienced by many Aboriginal people and erode the collective solidarity built around 'shared' cultural heritage and colonial experience. The idea that all Aboriginal people share a collective experience is common among Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal people, and is accepted as a primary signifier of authenticity.^{27 28}

Gillian Cowlshaw explained that the distrust for newcomers could also translate into open hostility as the following example shows.

[R]esentment is aroused by those who have only recently discovered their Aboriginal heritage. Besides tending to be better educated and skilled in conventional work practices, such people lack the sense of stigmatised difference that is seen as essential to Aboriginality. Few have experienced racist exclusion; they were never 'down there on the mission eating bread and fat', as one woman put it. This expression of cultural identity refers to material deprivation but encompasses a whole world of social experience. When

²⁷ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

²⁸ David Trigger and Cameo Dalley raised the same point when they asked whether white Australians could ever be called 'Indigenous': "Can Indigeneity be emergent over time in populations which begin their presence in a location as settlers, migrants and visitors? (...) Such a conception of being Indigenous is likely to be at odds with political definitions stressing an encapsulated colonised history and the experience of dispossession."

TRIGGER, David, DALLEY, Cameo, "Negotiating Indigeneity: Culture, Identity and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 57.

someone discovers a Darug ancestor and exultantly displays a new-found Indigenous identity as an asset, those whose race has been a heavy social burden are bemused or offended.²⁹

On the other hand, it is worth noting that some Indigenous people also resent having their history and present condition reduced to disadvantage. For example, when her non-Indigenous colleague David Palmer emphasised the importance of sharing stories of colonial violence, Indigenous academic Denise Groves replied,

Yes, but I often find that non-Aboriginal people only want to hear the harrowing stories in relation to Aboriginality. They want to hear about deaths in custody, the stolen generations, about the killing times and so on. I can understand that these are very important issues for Aboriginal people, and issues that many non-Aboriginal people need to hear much more about. On the other hand, it often seems to be implied that if one hasn't experienced all these things personally, or isn't constantly talking about misery, then one's Aboriginality is called into question.³⁰

The problem raised by Groves – the negative effects ensuing from turning disadvantage into a major characteristic of Indigeneity – will be analysed in detail in 8.3.

8.1.2.2 Disadvantage and Benefits

With the recognition of Indigenous people's rights and the change of directions in Indigenous policies operated by governments from the 1970s onwards (starting with that of Gough Whitlam), the reasons for determining who is or is not Indigenous also changed. The creation of a number of benefits reserved for Indigenous people consolidated the association between Indigeneity and disadvantage: 'fixing the Indigenous problem',³¹ 'closing the gap' became permanent features of the following governments' Indigenous

²⁹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Mythologising Culture, Part 2: Disturbing Aboriginality in the Suburbs", *op. cit.*, p. 178.

³⁰ PALMER, David, GROVES, Denise, "A Dialogue on Identity, Intersubjectivity and Ambivalence", *op. cit.*, p. 28.

³¹ The "Indigenous problem" is an expression I often came across in my readings about Indigenous disadvantage. A simple Google search of the expression reveals how widely the word "problem" is used to talk about Indigenous people in Australia today.

See also note No. 49.

policies, and still are today.³² Growing up with discourses presenting Indigenous people as disadvantaged, and more often than not non-Indigenous and especially Anglo-Celtic Australians as the cause of these disadvantages, influenced the participants' vision of Indigeneity.

For example, as I mentioned before, when I asked Josh whether he had grown up with the idea that an Indigenous person was black and living a traditional life, he answered that according to him, poverty was a more important characteristic defining Indigenous people.

Josh *I suppose, for me – I was born in 1987 – you know, we grew up with computers and all that sort of stuff, and a good education, so the main problem for Indigenous people in my lifetime has been poverty, predominantly in the remote communities. (...) And I remember talking to [my Indigenous schoolmate] about it: “What are they going to do? How is it that they’re going to get all these people out of poverty? Is it education? Is it money? Is it time?” He said, “It’s just time.”*

Besides cementing the association between Indigeneity and disadvantage, a second effect of the appearance of benefits was the emergence of concerns, both from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, about who would get what, as well as suspicions that Indigenous people were getting too much, or at least that so-called ‘fake’ and not truly disadvantaged Indigenous people were. I have already mentioned this issue when I analysed Andrew Bolt’s articles in 6.2.4.2.

Consequently, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs once again point out the uncanny feature of the ambivalence with which Indigenous people are perceived today. According to them, the shift from a benevolent perception of Indigenous people as disadvantaged to that of people taking advantage of welfare and living off the taxpayers’ money occurred after the Mabo decision in 1992 (see 2.1.5.3).

It has, of course, been usual to think about Aboriginal people as not having enough, as lacking: for example, lacking their land, self-determination, justice, adequate health and housing – and so on. There is certainly no denying that Aboriginal people are radically disadvantaged. But there is also a modern perception which sees Aboriginal people as in receipt of special privileges, that

³² I will specifically analyse official representations of Indigenous people as disadvantaged in 8.3.1.

they are the unique beneficiaries of what is often called ‘reverse discrimination’. (...) At an earlier point in Australia’s modern history Aboriginal people were imagined as owning nothing. But now, especially after *Mabo*, Aboriginal ownership has the potential of reaching right across Australia. (...) This radical shift from absence to profound significance produces [a] ‘swing to resentment’. (...) To be in a culture which can see Aboriginal people as lacking and yet having too much at the same time is itself an uncanny phenomenon.³³

Some of the participants in this study are caught in-between this ambivalent representation of Indigenous people. On the one hand, the “profound significance” Indigenous people have gained over the years is part of the reasons why their Indigenous heritage has become more attractive. Arguably, the *Mabo* decision also highlighted the importance of land for Indigenous people at a time when Indigenous culture and special links to the continent were already getting better known and valued by mainstream Australia. On the other hand, such late identifications put the participants at risk of being suspected of wanting to “get on the gravy train”.³⁴

The participants had two concerns regarding benefits. First of all, since they did not feel they had experienced disadvantage, they did not want to take benefits reserved for Indigenous people having faced or facing more hardships than them. Secondly, they were concerned about being suspected of only identifying in order to get benefits.

8.1.2.2.1 “I Don’t Think We’re Entitled.”

Most participants – whether they had used Indigenous scholarships or not – felt that benefits should be reserved as a priority to Indigenous people who had experienced more difficulties than them. In order to let these Indigenous people benefit from the financial support the participants believed they deserved, they often felt they should not reveal their heritage by ‘ticking the box’. The participants were often unsure about what ticking the

³³ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p. 16.

³⁴ This expression is similar to “jumping on the bandwagon” but focuses on financial benefits. This phrase is applied to people only claiming their Indigenous heritage in order to receive these benefits. More generally, it refers to a way of making money quickly and easily.

“The Gravy Train”, *The Free Dictionary* website, <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/the+gravy+train>, accessed on 30 November 2016.

'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' box implied and about how the information would be used (Josh and Michelle even feared potential racist discrimination at work). The majority, however, equated it with asking for benefits, which made them reluctant to tick it.

Megan *[Some Indigenous people on the Insight program 'Aboriginal or not?'] were angry. They were like, "I have paid my dues. I was brought up black; I suffered the racism, and I don't think it's fair. (...) Why should you reap all the benefit – financial benefit, whatever – if you haven't actually had this experience your whole life of having racism and things like that?" (...) You know, we were talking about some people who had horrific upbringings, or horrific racism. How could you expect them to say, "Yeah, we're similar."*

I don't think we're entitled to access services that are there to help people (...) who had reduced access to resources. I don't feel we've had any reduced access to anything, and I haven't really experienced racism. So why should my kids... Yeah, that's why we don't tick any box or anything. We haven't been hard done by, so why should we get more...?

I don't think there's a box for me, for us to tick. (...) Because I think I know what those boxes are for. (...) They're not about identity, really. They're about getting something. Again, that's what I think. The doctor doesn't want to know if you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander because they think that they then can have an interesting conversation. (...) I don't feel like it makes you more Aboriginal or not. I just feel like you tick it because you know that you've missed out on something and you're going to get something because you tick it. That's kind of how I feel, rightly or wrongly.

Josh also explained that he did not want to take advantage of benefits reserved for other Indigenous people.

Josh *Sometimes I won't tick [the box] because, say, I work for the Queensland government, and they have certain standards, requirements: they need to employ so many Indigenous people. Well, I don't tick it because I don't think that's fair on other Indigenous people; (...) I don't want to take up one of the Indigenous spots, and if I don't take it, it means that more Indigenous people can get employed in high-level roles. And because it doesn't matter whether or not I'm Indigenous in my job, yeah, I don't tick it at work because I don't think it's fair.*

Both Megan and Josh are participants who feel that Indigeneity is more a part of their heritage than of their identity. Although both of them are interested in their Indigenous

heritage, it does not influence their daily lives much. They do not tick the box because to them, it is mainly associated with disadvantage and benefits. Josh's opinion on this seemed to vary: he did not consider himself disadvantaged in any way but also said he sometimes ticked the box and sometimes did not, depending on the context. This shows that although in Megan's mind, the box is not about identity, Josh hesitated about its meaning. The fact that he sometimes ticks it in spite of his belief that it is about benefits, shows that ticking the box also means expressing his interest in his heritage. Indeed, to some participants, ticking the box was seen as a form of official identification. Because it is anonymous, it is an easy and safe first step in identifying.

Fiona Noble found out that the participants in her study chose not to tick the box for three major reasons: when they did not have enough information about their Indigenous background; when they had no link to the Indigenous community, and were not ready to take on obligations and responsibilities associated with identification.³⁵ Noble's findings reveal that 'ticking the box' can indeed be about other things than benefits. However, the necessary association of Indigeneity with disadvantage, in Megan's mind in particular, prevents her from envisaging it as such. Ticking the box, but also asking for a certificate of Aboriginality are actions she associates with the governmental management of Indigeneity, with the public rather than the private sphere. As I will analyse in chapter 10, governmental recognition can be a gateway to Indigeneity for participants with tenuous links to the Indigenous community, but this is not how Megan sees it here.

The strong link between disadvantage and Indigeneity in official discourses (relayed by the media and therefore also present in public discourses)³⁶ can appear as an obstacle to connecting Indigenous identity to other elements. Megan does not envisage ticking the box as anything other than asking for benefits, something she does not think is fair and therefore rarely – if ever – does. I believe that not feeling entitled to receive benefits should not be equated with not being entitled to identifying as Indigenous. However, the weight of the discourse linking disadvantage and benefits to Indigeneity can have this effect.

³⁵ NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

³⁶ See footnotes 11 and 31.

Linked to this is the question of the distribution of benefits based on a declaration of Indigeneity rather than on an assessment of disadvantage. This is a burning issue in Australia and it is at the core of the questioning of people's identities by non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike (e.g. Andrew Bolt's articles in chapter 6).

Some Indigenous people such as academic Anthony Dillon believe in the dissociation of the question of benefits and disadvantage from that of identity:

There are benefits for identifying as Aboriginal. The benefits typically relate to schemes and incentives to address the disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal people. In theory, specific strategies to address this disadvantage are a good thing, but there are problems. Specifically, should all people who identify as being Aboriginal be entitled to access such benefits? I think a better approach to addressing the disadvantage and despair that characterise some Aboriginal communities and individuals, is to focus on need, rather than race. If this was the approach used, then a lot of the controversy about Aboriginal identity and allocated benefits would cease.³⁷

Indigenous blogger Dallas Scott sided with Dillon's opinion in arguing that identifying as Indigenous does not mean he is necessarily disadvantaged.

Disadvantage is about circumstances, not genetics or racial identity, even if one racial group has statistically poorer outcomes than another. It is not 100 percent of the group suffering, yet we continue with race-based funding rather than needs-based funding in an effort to alleviate this suffering and disadvantage. (...) I'm no poster child for the Aboriginal disadvantage and suffering we are sold as being necessary to ask no questions about where race-based funding is spent, or how it is divided up. If anything, people like me are the reason we should ask hard questions and not shy away from debate on this topic.³⁸

In a reversed situation, Vanessa also used the expression "poster child" as she recalled being asked to pose as an example of Indigenous success with her brother, and recalled rejecting it on the grounds that she never had to overcome obstacles linked to her Indigeneity to succeed.

³⁷ DILLON, Anthony, "Indigenous Identity Distracts from the Real Issues", *ABC News* online, 27 March 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-03-27/dillon-aboriginal-identity-and-need/3915412>, accessed on 21 January 2014.

³⁸ SCOTT, Dallas, "Who is more Aboriginal?", *The Black Steam Train*, *op. cit.*

Vanessa *My brother and I got approached as a brother and sister combo to be marketed to...because we're both government. He is a political advisor for a Premier. (...) So, brother/sister, four years apart, public service, Indigenous poster child. Yeah, I rejected it quite hard. (...) They want to promote you as "Oh these kids grew up, and succeeded. Look where they are now because of their public service degree." Yeah, it's just... It's not realistic: we went to a private white school where we didn't know we were Indigenous. And saying that to Indigenous people as well is insulting.*

Again, the association of disadvantage – and the need to alleviate it and to showcase Indigenous progress – with Indigenous identity appears problematic. I think several participants were hindered by the belief that they would offend Indigenous people if they embraced their heritage, as this would automatically be linked to attempts to derive financial advantages out of it. Yet such accusations also come from the non-Indigenous community.

8.1.2.2.2 Fear of Accusations

Everything costs more for me, but why is it less for them? [They're] having this free ride, and I'm working my ass off.

[They're] classing themselves as Aboriginal to get more welfare.³⁹

We are accused of assuming Aboriginality in order to take advantage of certain perceived benefits, which would otherwise be denied. In my view, in adopting a 'balance sheet' approach to this issue, any imagined or real benefit(s) would be clearly outweighed by a host of disadvantages, disclosed through a simple audit of our life-choices and which clearly show that, under any and all socio-economic indicators, Aboriginal people remain the most disadvantaged in the nation. If any benefits flowing from any falsely assumed Aboriginal identity do exist, they are fleeting and problematic at best. However, such ill-informed, not to say, racist arguments persist, and are based on stereotypical, albeit heavily disputed models, of who is or is not an Aboriginal person.⁴⁰

Russel Taylor refutes the idea that Indigenous people take advantage of benefits to the detriment of other Australians. However, as shown by the comments above made by the

³⁹ Participants in *First Contact*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ TAYLOR, Russell, "About Aboriginality: Questions for the Uninitiated", *op. cit.*, p. 143.

non-Indigenous participants in the reality TV show *First Contact*, such a view is often expressed in ‘mainstream’ Australia. For example, a Google search reveals many forum threads dedicated to this question – “White ‘Aboriginal’ claiming benefits”, “Claiming Aboriginal benefits...What do you think?”⁴¹ – and presenting stories of people making what is seen as dubious claims to benefits. As the previous comments reveal, there is an enduring perception within the non-Indigenous community that Indigenous people receive more help from the government than any other group in Australia.⁴²

Kate explained how, for many years, her mother – and consequently herself as she was a teenager then – believed that identifying as Indigenous would mean asking for a special treatment. Kate admitted that she had not at first understood that culture came into the equation.

Kate *Somewhere along the way, it came up that we did have some Indigenous heritage in our family history. (...) My auntie has three kids with three separate men and has been on welfare since she was, like, 16 when she first had her first child, and I think it came up that she was actually able to get housing based on the fact that we had Indigenous heritage.*

[My mum] contracted polio when she was very young. (...) Even though technically she is legally disabled, she was never allowed to not have to walk to school or not participate in sports, so I think that sort of passed through to my mum and she never wanted to, I guess, make any concessions to who we were and how we grew up. (...) I was going through our testing in high school, so our school certificate, which is like the year 10, (...) and it got to the point where we could actually select if we are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; it's literally just ticking a box. So I

⁴¹ <http://forums.whirlpool.net.au/archive/2309212>, 2014, accessed on 14 August 2016, <http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/forums/index.php?/topic/421578-claiming-aboriginal-benefits/>, 2007, accessed on 14 August 2016.

⁴² “Generally, Indigenous people receive the same level of public benefits as non-Indigenous people. Individuals do not get extra funding because they are Indigenous. However, specific government programs, not additional income, have been introduced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because they are the most economically and socially disadvantaged group in Australia. (...) These programs supplement those available to the mainstream population. They are necessary because Indigenous people do not generally use mainstream services at the same rate as non-Indigenous people and because the level of Indigenous disadvantage is much more severe. Medical and legal services for low income and migrant communities are also available in Australia.”

“Questions and Answers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”, *Australian Human Rights Commission* website, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/questions-and-answers-about-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-peoples#q5>, accessed on 15 August 2016.

discussed it with my mum and she was of the opinion that she doesn't know anything about our history and didn't want to pursue it. She didn't want us to just tick the box and get a leg-up basically, just for the sake of it. She wanted to learn more and find out more, and she felt that she had moved us to the city and, you know, we went to good schools and all that sort of things, so we didn't really need to do it. At the time, I guess, it was sort of saying – and in particular with the experience with her sister – it was just seen as getting extra benefits and that sort of things rather than actually being involved in the culture. (...) I had no concepts of, I guess, what it actually means to be Aboriginal (...) until I got to university and actually started working in the area. I actually realised that the face of being Aboriginal is not just how you look, it's if you identify, and if you are involved in the culture and have that heritage.

Delphine Do you think it's easier to identify as Indigenous than it was before? (...)

Kate *No. I think it's a lot more difficult. I think because it is so well-known, I guess the benefits that being Indigenous has for people, that it's definitely seen as – in particular in my personal experience with my auntie – it just seems like some people would stand up and say, "Yes. I'm Indigenous", just to get a house, or get extra benefits, or whatever. So I think, no. That makes it harder for people, and I think it's something that holds people back, because I know it's definitely one thing that I'm concerned about; I don't want to be seen as identifying just to get extra benefits.*

The stories circulating in Kate's family entrenched in her mind the idea that identifying as Indigenous can become synonymous with asking for undeserved benefits. Both her mother's story and the negative counter-example set by her aunt bring back the idea that Indigenous people are not only disadvantaged but lazy (see 4.2). For a long time, this association prevented Kate from viewing her heritage in a different, more positive light. Kate feared being categorised as a person only looking for an easy source of financial help.

Miriam experienced just this as she asked for her certificate of Aboriginality.

Miriam *When I was in the process of getting [my certificate], my mum approached the Land Council and a leader within it, and asked for them to organise my confirmation, and the lady said to my mum, "Oh, why? Does she want to get a scholarship to go to university?", and things like that, and my mum said, "No..."*

Yuriko Yamanouchi confirms that non-Indigenous people are not the only ones doubting claims of Indigeneity, but that the Indigenous community can also suspect newcomers of being after financial benefits.

More recently, Aboriginality is considered by some to provide some advantage such as being able to apply for Aboriginal housing and welfare programs. Many Aboriginal people from Aboriginal family backgrounds feel that some non-Aboriginal people are trying to be 'Aboriginal' due to the perceived privileges afforded to those who are seen to be Aboriginal. An Aboriginal friend of mine spoke bitterly about his Maori friend, who tried to make him sign a support document so that she could get an Aboriginal certificate.⁴³

Feeling that they should not benefit from advantages reserved for truly disadvantaged Indigenous people, and fearing being criticised for only identifying for financial reasons added other obstacles on the way to identification for the participants. It reveals the prevalence of the association of Indigeneity with disadvantage which borders on becoming an essential characteristic of Indigenous people. Few participants managed to separate the two. Miriam and Casey did. They both expressed the idea that benefits are meant to compensate for past mistreatments of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous governments. Considering that their families were victims of past discriminatory policies, they felt that they are entitled to get benefits today.

Casey *[The students at school]'d be like, "You're just 1/8th or whatever. Why do you get that?" I'd be like "Well, my grandfather never got any compensation. He denied his identity till the end, so who gets that?" But I don't want to get a scholarship that's black-specific, just personally. I guess I feel I haven't grown up in certain conditions... I can do it on my own two feet.*

As Casey's comment shows, however, understanding benefits as compensation for the past does not necessarily make the participants more comfortable accepting them.

⁴³ YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *op. cit.*, p. 70.

8.2 Impossible Success?

In the previous section, I looked at the association created between Indigeneity and disadvantage and analysed its positive and negative effects on the participants' ability to identify as Indigenous.

This association not only makes several participants feel like they are less Indigenous because of their 'privileged' lives, it has also tended to create another association between success and a Western (even 'white') way of living only. Therefore, not only is the absence of past disadvantages a hindrance to qualify as Indigenous, future success also seems excluded.⁴⁴ This is a vision sometimes adopted by parts of the Indigenous community who reject successful Indigenous people on the grounds that they are not authentic enough. The opposition between Indigeneity and success in various forms is the topic of this section.

8.2.1 Success Is Not Indigenous: Official Representations of Indigenous Disadvantage and Their Effects

Megan *I think when I see a really dark Aboriginal person who's really educated, or they're in a position of authority and they're on TV, I feel really, really happy, but I also feel – still – surprised inherently. And I start wondering, "How did they...? Were they adopted or something?" I actually do think those things. Still. "Wow. I wonder how that person managed to become an academic!" (...) I don't watch channel 10, or channel 9 or 7. I only watch SBS or ABC,⁴⁵ so I'm finding that these positive images are coming out more and more... And as they come out more and more, I think that surprise will stop.⁴⁶*

⁴⁴ The notion of success, like that of disadvantage, is subject to variations. Casey later explains that the way Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people understand the notion of success is different. What he calls "white success" is what is sometimes opposed to Indigeneity in the discourse of disadvantage: academic success, material success, especially if those are individual.

⁴⁵ Jon Stratton analysed the representation of multiculturalism on television and explained how SBS (Special Broadcasting Service, a public television network created in 1980 and offering programs in various languages) concentrated most of the representations of ethnic minorities (as well as of Indigenous people): "The split between SBS and the other channels has reinforced an image of an Australian culture split between a core culture that is Anglo-Celtic, (...) and a proliferation of peripheral cultures that are all hyphenated Australians and distinct from Australian culture which is read as more and more fractured." STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴⁶ In chapter 4, I quoted journalist Tim Dick who mentioned "the rut in which many of us find ourselves, unable to think of Aborigines in any terms other than disadvantaged or talented exceptions."

Megan's comment reveals that the association of Indigenous people – especially those visibly Indigenous – with a narrative of disadvantage still prevails in many non-Indigenous people's minds. As I explained before, contrary to white people whose individualities are better recognised, in public discourses and representations, Indigenous people are perceived as a homogeneous group.

Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata explained that he found the discrepancy between generalised representations of his people and his own personal experience disturbing.

I began to feel uneasy whenever I read about people 'in the margins' – a strange sensation you get when you read about what is supposed to be a representation of yourself in a text. It can give you a sick feeling when you're thinking, 'But this isn't me' or, 'This isn't how I perceive my position' or, 'This wasn't my experience'. And then comes the related anxiety, of course: 'Is this how others see me?' 'How do others see me?' 'And all Torres Strait Islanders?' Well, from my reading of the literature the others see lots of things. But overwhelmingly, I think, they see a group of people who 'lack'. Along with Aboriginal people, I think Islanders have probably at some stage or other been represented as having lacked everything there is to have. (...) Let me simply ask: from whose point of view are these 'lacks' inscribed on us?⁴⁷

The Australian Human Rights Commission provides a possible answer to Nakata's question: "It is an unfortunate reality that governments of all persuasions continue to have a tendency to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage from a deficit-based approach, addressing the 'Indigenous problem'."⁴⁸ According to this Social Justice Report, governments are partially responsible for presenting Indigenous people as lacking, and for treating them as a "problem" to be solved.⁴⁹

DICK, Tim, "Talkabout: Time for Aboriginal languages to go mainstream", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2009

⁴⁷ NAKATA, Martin, "Better: A Torres Strait Islander's Story of the Struggle for a Better Education" in GROSSMAN, Michele (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, op. cit., p. 139.

⁴⁸ "Lateral Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities" in *Social Justice Report 2011*, Australian Human Rights Commission website, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/chapter-2-lateral-violence-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities-social>, accessed on 8 July 2016.

⁴⁹ This is something Belinda McKay, in her study of the status of whiteness in Australia, also notices. With an anecdote, she shows that Indigeneity is not only treated as problematic, but that this also allows whiteness to remain invisible.

As the previous quote explains, the strong link created between Indigeneity and disadvantage was maintained in part by official discourses and policies.⁵⁰ This link often made the participants reluctant to embrace their heritage, as they did not recognise their experience in this representation of Indigenous people as disadvantaged.

Paradoxically, the insistence of successive governments on the need to 'close the gap', and their efforts to allow more Indigenous people to reach top positions have reinforced the idea that disadvantage is a necessary feature of *all* Indigenous people and masked the possibility that there now could be Indigenous people who identify without having experienced disadvantage.

Gillian Cowlshaw called Indigenous people in today's Australia "the nation's favourite wounded subjects"⁵¹ to evoke the (over)-protective attitude of the government and parts of 'mainstream' Australian society towards them.

Vanessa who, at the time of the interview, worked with Indigenous students at university had been reflecting for a long time on the ambivalent effects of this help provided to Indigenous students. She highlighted the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the deeply entrenched vision that Indigenous students entering university necessarily come from disadvantaged backgrounds and will have difficulties in their tertiary studies, and on the other hand, the reality of younger generations of Indigenous people who do not all share this history of disadvantage and struggle. She also pointed out the difference between cities and remote communities.⁵²

"Government policy (...) enshrines the invisibility of whiteness. [A]fter the election of Pauline Hanson as Member for Oxley (...) [f]ormal complaints of racial discrimination to [the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission] increased by 90 per cent in the 1996–97 financial year. The federal government's response was to cut funding to the Commission (...) and to move the position of Race Commissioner to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The effect of this latter decision is to locate race and the 'race problem' firmly with Indigenous Australians, rather than identifying whiteness as being at the centre of the 'race problem'."

MCKAY, Belinda, "Making Whiteness Visible, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ See footnote No. 16.

⁵¹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Mythologising Culture, Part 1: Desiring Aboriginality in the Suburbs", *op. cit.*, p212

⁵² However, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Strategy and Services at the University of Sydney Shane Houston as well as academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson warn against the division between remote and disadvantaged Indigenous people on one side, and urban Indigenous people not needing benefits on the

Vanessa *I think [there's] a generational difference between people who have risen to the top and make the decisions, and the people coming through at the bottom. So the kind of issues and problems that we have, coming into university, when they were at university forty years ago, are un-applicable to the students coming in currently, because (...) technology has helped with access to information. More and more students are urbanised, have gone to good schools, are getting grades, getting in there on merit, not through any pathways.*

I don't see a problem with using tools that are available to you: the scholarships are around. But I'm actually seeing at the moment that you've got students that have grown up in urban Australia – because most people see everyone as rural and you know, for students who come from a rural background, getting into university is a feat, and they should be offered anything and everything because they weren't... You know, one teacher for three subjects. They're not going to achieve the same ATAR, and that's just a problem with the system. But (...) you have a second or third generation at the moment whose parents did the hard yards. They've succeeded. Kids go to private schools in Sydney. [They] are expected to succeed. They're going to university. (...) But you find that they're not doing so well because they're being taught that they need help because they've ticked the box. (...) They've identified in the university context in their first year. They did really well in high school, but you come to university, you're Indigenous, and you probably won't do that well. (...) It's the way in which you're told. It's like, "Have you gone to your classes?" Like they're not adults. There's a huge wrap around them. It's not really challenging them to succeed. It's more being very cautious. (...) Teachers are doing it. The university's strategy is doing it. The support is doing it. (...) Students with support will succeed if they're given high expectations. But I'm finding everyone tends to give students low expectations – I've had it myself. People will give you low expectations because you're Indigenous. (...)

Delphine So people are still seeing [students] as disadvantaged? [As needing] extra help?

Vanessa *Extremely. I don't know where the vision comes from, but I'm assuming it's a generational problem. (...) That's been drummed into me since I got here, and I'm just saying, "Talk to the students." And they're like, "Oh, yeah, Indigenous students*

other. They disagree with Anthony Dillon for saying that urban Indigenous people have a better access to health service than those in remote communities:

"[Moreton-Robinson] points out that the majority of Aborigines don't live in remote areas but in outer suburbs of metropolitan areas and their socio-economic indicators are "fairly consistent with those of their brothers and sisters who live in remote areas, and therefore why would you seek to exclude them from any opportunities to improve their life chances?"

DILLON, Anthony, "Defining Aboriginality", *Digital Global Mail Limited*, 3 August 2012, <https://vimeo.com/46864147>, accessed on 16 August 2016.

MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen quoted in FANNING, Ellen, "No, Andrew Bolt did not have a point", *op. cit.*

are the ones that do the worst in classes”, and I’m like, “Are you sure about that? Not all students identify. You could have ten great Indigenous students in a class, and they just haven’t told you about it, because they didn’t go through a pathway programme. And the university doesn’t know about them.” And they’re like, “That’s really highly unlikely.” That’s the kind of attitude. Yeah... I don’t know how to fix it.

Vanessa points out several issues related to the way Indigenous students are treated. First of all, she believes that the notion that all Indigenous students are disadvantaged is outdated and not representative of the totality of Indigenous experiences today. Indeed, as shown before, more and more people are identifying as Indigenous, and if among them are people like the participants in this study – who, as they say, grew up in privileged conditions – then being Indigenous no longer necessarily equates with being disadvantaged.

However, as the reaction from her colleagues shows (“That’s highly unlikely”), there is an entrenched belief that Indigenous students will be worse-off than others. The lack of distinction between different experiences of Indigeneity – although well-intentioned as Vanessa later adds – is not far from perceiving disadvantage as an essential characteristic of all Indigenous people.

Vanessa’s comments also point to another effect of the discourse associating Indigenous people with disadvantage. In her description of the university’s treatment of Indigenous students, Vanessa signals a form of paternalism I have already mentioned in 4.2.1. She explains how Indigenous students are treated like children with “a huge wrap around them”. In this sense, the necessary association of disadvantage with Indigenous people perpetuates the historically-recurring relationship of domination in which the benevolent welfare State takes care of Indigenous people – even though the aim of new policies is to empower them.

This is a negative effect former Chief Executive Officer of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health Mick Gooda criticised:

Mick Gooda recently noted that while the unarguably high level of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people has been effectively used in the past to gain

just entitlements and facilitate recognition of rights, there are inherent dangers in continuing to use this narrative today. To do so bolsters notions of failure and, Gooda notes, in doing so ‘we are constantly playing to and highlighting what are perceived to be our weaknesses – we are always playing catch-up. I would prefer to play to our strengths as Aboriginal people.’⁵³

Beyond the perpetuation of a paternalist relationship to Indigenous people, Gooda points out that the discourse of disadvantage can also have negative effects on Indigenous people’s confidence in their abilities. Indeed, Vanessa further argued that Indigenous students who may have succeeded without help were taught to expect less of themselves because of their Indigeneity.

Vanessa *I’ve read a lot of research, and also personal experiences: if you have someone constantly check on you because you’re Indigenous and you’re possibly going to do really bad, I don’t think that’s... So giving [the university] free access to contact these students without any monitoring...They’re super excited – don’t get me wrong – super good intentions. But it also builds out into students’ head: “Why do I need extra help? Why am I not like everyone else?” (...) I did quite well at school. But I wonder if I had identified during school, whether the extra impact may have taught me that I couldn’t succeed.*

There’s a certain percentage of Indigenous students at the moment that are doing so well, compared to, like, ten years ago. It’s whether you tick the box and identify and get spammed with all these extra services, or you just have your personal achievement, and not have anyone question you on it.

Similarly, Gillian Cowlishaw rejects the idea that all Indigenous people, regardless of their experiences, should be labelled disadvantaged: “Attributing a common history of pain and suffering to Aboriginal people positions them as inherently needy and damaged in some abstract and disembodied way that is, I believe, dehumanising.”⁵⁴

As some participants pointed out, it is also dis-individualising, since their individual differences are erased, hidden by their Indigenous status. In order not to “get spammed” with help, Vanessa argues that some Indigenous students would rather not identify to the

⁵³ GORRINGE, Scott, ROSS, Joe, FFORDE, Cressida, “‘Will the Real Aborigine Please Stand Up?’: Strategies for Breaking the Stereotypes and Changing the Conversation”, *AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper*, No. 28, Canberra, 2011, p. 10.

⁵⁴ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Mythologising Culture, Part 1: Desiring Aboriginality in the Suburbs”, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

university. There are several reasons leading to this decision: first, some people like the participants may feel that they are Indigenous but not disadvantaged and therefore, they refuse to take away opportunities from others who may need them more.⁵⁵ This is something Kate mentioned. In the following quote, she explains how a consequence of regarding Indigenous people as disadvantaged is a desire to push as many of them as possible to the top. Kate explains that there is a lot of pressure for Indigenous people who are constantly in the “spotlight”, as the federal government tries to increase the numbers of Indigenous people in universities and elsewhere.

Kate *I think it's also hard [to identify nowadays] because there's such a spotlight on it now. You know, it's a federal government initiative to have more Indigenous people going through school, and bringing everything up, and even to do with healthcare, employment. Everyone is so focused on spotlighting the fact that you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. So I think that that's another reason why it would be harder for me to... (...) Particularly at this university – well at all universities, it is a priority to get more Indigenous students into university and have them educated at the same level as non-Indigenous, basically. But also within our university itself, there's a whole bunch of strategies going on to increase Indigenous staff numbers and I just feel like because I work so heavily with the [Indigenous] staff, I don't think there's any way I could declare [I am Indigenous] while I work here without anyone making a big deal about it. Immediately, I'd be escalated to all these jobs just because I'm Indigenous. And I think that's not right, you know... I'd rather get things on my own merits rather than be fed up the chain just because I'm Indigenous and they need more Indigenous people in high levels.*

With this comment, Kate highlights how the undifferentiated way in which Indigenous people are treated becomes an obstacle to her identification. Here it is not the reluctance to be perceived as inherently disadvantaged which stops Kate from claiming her heritage, but a reluctance to ‘steal’ another Indigenous person’s opportunity. Not feeling entitled to claim benefits is an idea already expressed by Megan or Josh in 8.2.2.2.1. However, to Kate, another restricting effect of ‘spotlighting’ Indigenous people is the fact that individuals’ merit is no longer recognised.

⁵⁵ I am not only talking about financial benefits. For example, both Megan and Vanessa rejected academic help. Vanessa said, “I wouldn’t touch the Indigenous tutoring, because (...) I did really well, so maybe I shouldn’t take it because there’s probably other students that really need it.”

This is the second reason explaining why the students Vanessa mentioned may not want to identify publicly: they may refuse to be labelled as Indigenous and disadvantaged, and thus be suspected from only being at university or having a job because of their identification as Indigenous, rather than thanks to their abilities.

This is something Vanessa personally experienced.

Vanessa *I got into a grad program for the Prime Minister's Department, and then halfway through the year, people found out that I was Indigenous, and then they're like, "Oh, she only got into the program because she's Indigenous." Yeah. That's your boss saying that. To other people. So it's kind of like: when is it going to hinder me? When is it ok for me to... That sucks...but that goes through my head. (...) If I tick that, then will I be approached? Will the tutor talk to my lecturer, or would the tutor talk to my coordinator? And then everyone in the university will know, and then they'll think I just got in...*

Beyond other people's opinion of themselves, some Indigenous people may also want to prove to themselves that they can achieve results without help. Vanessa, Adina and Adam are three examples of this.

Adina *I didn't want to apply for an Aboriginal thing because I was an Aboriginal. I didn't want that to be an advantage. I wanted to get in under my own terms. So I did. And then I registered my Aboriginal status once I got there.*

Adam first tried studying medicine and obtained Aboriginal entry. Like Vanessa who only identified to the Indigenous centre of her university but refused that this information be released, Adam later studied Sociology without declaring his Indigeneity. He explained why he decided to stop identifying officially at university.

Adam *I stopped taking [help] for a reason: I hit a point where I started feeling like the only reason I was getting things was because I was Aboriginal, and not because I had earned it. And to be honest, it started bringing me down. It started making me feel like I wasn't worth anything. And this is where I come back to this whole idea of empowerment in the Aboriginal community. If I can feel that, imagine how many people are feeling that same thing. We're talking about thousands of Aboriginal people who are undertaking education, who have been let in based on these ideas, and who never know if they're actually good enough. (...) I had to stop it. I had to stop. I needed to do it on my own. I 100 percent had to get it on my own.*

Part III

So when I went for my last degree, I didn't put any Aboriginal stuff. I didn't tick the boxes. I wanted to just totally do it without anybody knowing I was Aboriginal. I ended up doing extremely well and all that sort of stuff. So, finally I proved to myself that it was me, and that it wasn't the Aboriginal stuff. As silly as it sounds, that is probably the biggest turning point in my life. As in, finally, I felt like I'd earned something for myself which had nothing to do with my Aboriginality.

As Vanessa and Mick Gooda explained, before he stopped ticking the box, Andrew had reached a point where the difference between who he was as an individual and his Indigeneity was blurred. The discourse linking Indigeneity and disadvantage and the help provided to remedy it – which Adam benefitted from – made it impossible for him to test his abilities and to appreciate personal achievements. Separating his Indigenous identity from his academic achievements allowed him to regain confidence in himself as well as pride in an Indigenous identity which had become synonymous with disadvantage.

Adam explained earlier that he was prouder of his Indigenous identity than of other parts of his heritage because one has to fight for the right to be Indigenous. We saw in 8.2.1.1 and 8.2.1.2 how disadvantage could be about struggling against 'white' domination, and ultimately about empowering Indigenous people. A perverse effect of wanting to empower Indigenous people through federal actions applied to all Indigenous people without distinction can be to reinforce the idea that Indigenous people have an essential need to rely on such outside help.

Finding the right balance between helping people whose discrimination in the past has brought about very real disadvantage without building an essential link between disadvantage and Indigeneity appears difficult.

Once again, the issue of control surfaces here. The participants who wished to declare their Indigeneity but did not think of themselves as disadvantaged were vulnerable to suspicion or special treatment, and lost control of the image they projected. The lack of recognition of the diversity of Indigenous people and of their experiences in contemporary Australia can force them into narrow definitions. Declaring their Indigeneity limited the participants' potential for self-definition as individuals because of deep-seated representations.

This is something Megan expressed.

Megan *I don't want to be put into [the Indigenous] category. That's it. And I'm not ashamed of my Aboriginal heritage. It's just, I don't want to be treated differently either one way or the other. (...) I'd like to know about it, but I don't want to be either disadvantaged because of it, or advantaged because of it.*

Megan refuses to be categorised, whether positively or negatively, as she wants to keep control over the way she identifies herself.

8.2.2 Success is White: Indigenous Rejection of White Values

While the goal of successive government policies has been to 'close the gap' and empower Indigenous people, the tendency to still regard them as inherently disadvantaged can prevent this. In the same way as fair-skinned Indigenous people continue to be considered less Indigenous, being successful can bring questions about someone's authenticity as Indigenous.

During the assimilation era, Indigenous people were expected to take their place in 'mainstream' Australian society but were often rejected by non-Indigenous Australians when they tried (see Henry Reynold's comment in section 6.2.1). Similarly, today, Indigenous people who are asked to succeed can be regarded as fake when they manage to do so.

Discussing Andrew Bolt's articles – in which he criticised several fair-skinned, successful Indigenous people who had received grants for identifying for financial reasons only – Aileen Moreton-Robinson explained the irony of the situation.

What I find really ironic in all this is that people like Larissa Behrendt [the Indigenous woman, barrister and professor of law at the University of Technology Sydney who was one of those vilified in Bolt's articles] are supposedly what the government wants from all of us [Indigenous people]. They

want us to get off welfare. They want us to achieve and to excel. And yet when people do that, it becomes a problem.⁵⁶

Moreton-Robinson points out the impossible situation Indigenous people are in, condemned to remain forever disadvantaged in order not to be seen as losing their Indigenous identity. If Indigenous people cease to be authentically Indigenous when they succeed in 'mainstream' Australia, and are seen as becoming 'white', not only is success not perceived as Indigenous, it becomes a 'white' attribute. This idea is present in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and is the object of this section.

As I explained, non-Indigenous Australians sometimes consider that successful Indigenous people – especially those whose physical characteristics do not match the traditional idea of an Indigenous person – are inauthentic. This vision comes from the enduring idea that urban Indigenous people have lost their culture and assimilated into white society. Taking a 'white' job, living a 'white' life, are made synonymous with losing one's Indigeneity. This idea was present in Megan's surprise at seeing a successful dark-skinned person on TV: she could not help disassociating blackness of skin – a symbol of authentic Indigeneity – from success often presented as un-Indigenous.

Alan McKee explained there is a lack of 'banal' Indigeneity in today's Australia.

Education is a 'white' achievement which renders Aborigines inauthentic. The possession of wealth in itself appears to be a white attribute. (...) These identities which may be described as banal Aboriginality have been consistently devalued in Australia, by means of ideas of authenticity, mobilised in order to render Aboriginality and banality incommensurable. (...) There seems to be little possibility of an Aboriginal identity which is urban; which is middle-class; which exhibits some features of white culture – and yet remains recognisably Aboriginal. (...) Certain aspects of white culture are so incommensurable with a perceived Aboriginal identity that to gain the one is to automatically negate the other. (...) Representations of blatantly middle-class Aboriginality are still rare enough to present a useful complement to the culture of poverty and traditional cultures that still present the most recognisable Australian representations of the Aboriginal. The image of the middle-class Aborigine – or of the urban

⁵⁶ MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen quoted by FANNING, Ellen, "No, Andrew Bolt did not Have a Point", *op. cit.*

Aborigine, or of the educated Aborigine – is not one which has yet become familiar enough to be un-problematically regarded as Aboriginal.⁵⁷

Whereas in the previous section, I focused on academic success, McKee's analysis also brings in the idea of material success. McKee highlights the perceived "incommensurable" divide between 'white' and Indigenous ways of life.

The entrenched representation of Indigenous people as disadvantaged and the idea that education, wealth and success are not compatible with authentic Indigeneity are not only present in the non-Indigenous community. As Bronwyn Carlson's study shows, within the Indigenous community, material success can also be perceived as a 'white' attribute, which means that Indigenous people who do not experience material disadvantage in their daily lives are sometimes criticised and regarded as disloyal to their community, and thus as inauthentic.

Carlson describes her participants' feelings about this.

Some participants (...) spoke of feeling guilty or worried about living in a nice street, about bringing other Aboriginal people home to see how well they lived, about sending their children to private school, about being 'uptown' blacks because they liked cafes and coffee or because they travelled, of being careful not to draw attention to personal success in order to stay on the same level as others to be accepted by the community. This is evidence of the tacit acceptance of socio-economic disadvantage as not simply a measure of Aboriginality but as a sign of cultural authenticity. (...) Without overstating it, there is a suggestion here that community discourses on Aboriginal identity position personal and material success as evidence of turning White and a contra-indicator of Aboriginality. Those who are successful have to be careful to demonstrate in other ways that they are 'still' Aboriginal.⁵⁸

Like McKee, Carlson also describes banal Indigenous lives which are considered inauthentic because they resemble 'white' lives. This representation forbids Indigenous people from enjoying comforts of modern society, thus reaffirming the idea developed in chapter 7 that in the public's imagination, authentic Indigenous people are those whose

⁵⁷ MCKEE, Alan, "The Aboriginal version of Ken Done... Banal Aboriginalities in Australia", *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 12 and 17.

⁵⁸ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 308.

lifestyle most resembles that of the pre-colonial era. As Vanessa pointed out in the interview, this representation once again turns disadvantage into an Indigenous attribute only, thus hiding the fact that non-Indigenous Australians also experience disadvantage and receive financial help. Vanessa explained that at university, benefits are not only reserved for Indigenous people but also for non-Indigenous students coming from a low socio-economic background.⁵⁹ However, she noticed that criticisms about excessive financial help seemed focused on Indigenous people, with the belief that this group receives more government money than any other in Australian society.⁶⁰

With the following story, Adam further highlights the adoption by parts of the Indigenous community of the discourse turning disadvantage into an Indigenous characteristic and success into a white one. While Carlson analysed the rejection of material success, Adam's story reveals that parts of the Indigenous community can also reject people identifying as Indigenous while being part of the non-Indigenous system.

Adam strongly identified as Indigenous when he was younger but one incident between his sister and the Indigenous community where she worked dampened his enthusiasm.

⁵⁹ For example, at the University of Sydney where I studied, along with the Cadigal Alternative Entry reserved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are other pathways to university, including the Broadway scheme which "targets domestic students who have experienced long-term disadvantage that has affected educational performance in Year 11 and/or Year 12 including from disrupted schooling, financial hardship, home or school environment, English language difficulty, personal illness or disability, or refugee status." "Alternative Entry", *The University of Sydney* website, <http://sydney.edu.au/study/admissions/pathways-to-study/alternative-entry.html>, accessed on 3 December 2016.

⁶⁰ See footnote No. 42.

Adam *When my sister went to work in Redfern, she had done all the right things: contacted family, contacted communities; she wanted to work as an Aboriginal social worker and did the whole thing. But when she got there, she spent a few months working there and that was all fine, but then in about a month, her own family members – extended family members – started calling her an uptown nigger, basically telling her that she was not a part of their community and how dare she tell them what to do. (...) She [ended up] le[aving]. She stayed for a bit, but she couldn't handle it. It was just... Her identity was being destroyed, and by the people who were supposed to accept it the most. So, yeah... I think she struggled with it. So the guilt thing is partly that: having been given these extra privileges in life, do I deserve to be called Aboriginal to some degree?*

Delphine So, in a way, you have to be unsuccessful, unprivileged, and disadvantaged to feel Aboriginal?

Adam *Yes. I'm not entirely sure that's the case right now because it was a few years ago, but I can say it definitely was the case then. And it wasn't just my sister. There was a whole bunch of that going on at the time. I thought there was stuff in the media as well about Aboriginal people talking about these up-and-coming Aboriginal people (...). I know that Andrew Bolt's arguments were coming out at about the same time – you know his stuff about white Aborigines – which again would reinforce that whole dichotomy.*

It seems here that Adam's sister was rejected because she was perceived as not truly Indigenous and yet as trying to bring help to the community ("How dare she tell them what to do"). The expression "uptown nigger" could point to several things, one of which, in this case, may be resentment towards a person having received a 'white' education and whose help is perceived as condescending.

In her analysis of oppositional culture, Gillian Cowlishaw explained that, indeed, it could be difficult for parts of the Indigenous community to trust those Indigenous people who work in positions of power in 'white' society, because they are not seen as representative of other Indigenous people's stances.

Those [Indigenous] individuals perceived as most likely to succeed are usually the least representative of the oppositional culture. This does not mean they do not want to 'help their people'. But that help is often seen in terms of occurring at the same time that many are being enticed with the opportunity to cease

being Aboriginal in the ways of the past, to desert the kinship networks as well as depressed circumstances and, of course, to desist from opposition.⁶¹

Cowlshaw's comment emphasises opposition to 'white' society as a significant part of being Indigenous. For those Indigenous people for whom it is, to integrate 'white' society – and to leave behind “depressed circumstances” – is to betray one's community and to become less Indigenous, which explains why people like Adam's sister are not always welcomed as true members of the community.

The dichotomy between the two groups is perpetuated and, as McKee stated, there is no 'banal' Indigeneity in Australia, something that can also be interpreted as an absence of middle-ground. Therefore, not only is success not yet Indigenous, it cannot ever be. Indeed, for those Indigenous people using such terms as 'uptown nigger' or 'coconuts',⁶² success is considered a 'white' value and consequently something to be opposed.

I have mentioned Cowlshaw's concept of “oppositional culture”. It consists in a form of resistance to 'white' society she studied in rural New South Wales.⁶³ Cowlshaw interprets displays of violence, public drinking or swearing, for example, as forms of rebellion against 'white' society which considers these inappropriate. Similarly, the rejection of education or of material success by some Indigenous people can be understood as a form of negative resistance to the imposition of what are seen as 'white' values and lifestyles on Indigenous communities. Refusing to comply with these can be perceived as a rebellion against assimilation into 'white' society.

Casey who believes that assimilation is indeed ongoing explained the difference between 'black' and 'white' success and how his priorities evolved as he embraced his Indigenous identity.

Casey *There's a difference between white success and black success. White success might involve – maybe this is a hasty generalisation, but – white success is about money,*

⁶¹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “The Materials for Identity Construction”, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁶² A 'coconut' is someone who is black outside but white inside; an Indigenous person acting like a 'white' person.

⁶³ COWLISHAW, Gillian, *Black, White or Brindle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

fancy cars, a nice house, a good paying job, a degree, a nice wife, that sort of stuff; whereas black success is more communal, that collective sort of idea that everything you do should revolve around benefitting other black people. That communal idea that what you do affects everyone else, so make sure you're doing the right thing. (...) And that's how tribal society works, and to a higher degree, that's how a lot of Aboriginal people still work today. Like that idea of... "Oh, I forgot my ATM card, do you want to shout⁶⁴ me?" Yeah sure; (...) It's money, whatever, yeah? And I guess it's another thing that's happened: my old value system has changed within the past year. I no longer... There is very little importance placed on money at all. My uni degree – even though I know it's still important for me to finish it – I'm no longer like, "Oh, this is the primary thing I've got to do", because I know that what I'm doing, whether it's working at the radio station or...

By emphasising how money and formal education are no longer his priorities, Casey points out that there is not one way of understanding success, something Lynette Rodriguez, among others,⁶⁵ expressed.

Aboriginal people have often been seen by many non-Aboriginal people as being on the bottom rung of the ladder, not quite there yet. What 'there' means is not quite clear. Does it mean economic comparability, cultural similarities, physical replication, or exhibiting 'Aussieness' (whatever that means)? Equally, who is making the judgement of attainment? It is certainly not Aboriginal people.⁶⁶

It is important to see that the discourse of disadvantage is indeed inherited from a representation of Indigenous people as 'lacking'. But Casey and Rodriguez emphasise that disadvantage is measured according to Western standards of success. However, to my mind, what Casey's description of 'white' and 'black' success perpetuates is the generalisation – as he points out himself – of characteristics which supposedly apply to all members of the non-Indigenous or Indigenous groups. Although differences in worldviews should be respected and taken into account before passing judgements on people's

⁶⁴ "To shout someone" in Australian English usually means to pay for a round of drinks. Casey's use of the word points to the more general idea of lending money.

⁶⁵ For example, Jill Byrnes explains about kinship rules and responsibilities in the Indigenous community, and compares them to non-Indigenous values: "There is no obligation in non-Aboriginal society to share with your relatives, although you may choose to do so. Individuals are expected to accumulate wealth, as it is the basis of a capitalist economy. There are no specific rules which imbue certain people with responsibilities for others in adulthood, except for a general value that you should look after your 'mates', but, this is vague." BYRNES, Jill, "A Comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Values", *Dissent*, No. 3, 2000, p. 10.

⁶⁶ RODRIGUEZ, Lynette, "But who are you really?", *op. cit.*, p. 67.

identities, I nevertheless find Casey's description problematic in that it discards individuals' right to self-definition. Thus, if we follow his description, an Indigenous person who wishes to own "a nice house" or to get a degree at university may be considered less Indigenous than someone who places less value on material possessions or on education. Casey insists on the importance of benefitting the community (something I will return to in 8.4). What is unclear is why receiving a good education or enjoying the benefits of a well-paid job should be incompatible with it, both for Indigenous but also for non-Indigenous people.

Pat Dudgeon, Marion Kickett and Darlene Oxenham, all Indigenous academics, emphasised the difficult position they were in because of the narrow representations of Indigeneity described by Casey.

Pat Being part of the community is a double-edged sword (...) It's actually quite stressful if you happen to be a bit different. So it's all about what constitutes an Aboriginal person: that you have to live in a certain lifestyle; that you're not materialistic; that you are strongly linked into family and community; and a whole range of other things, which some of us don't subscribe to. But that doesn't make us any less Aboriginal.

Marion 'Look at where you work; you just better remember where you came from.' (...) When they [her family] come to your house, they say, 'You live like a Wadjella,'⁶⁷ and I look at them and say, 'Well, how are Aboriginal people meant to live? Tell me!'

Darlene People always talk about grassroots people and somehow academics like us are always removed from grassroots people because we don't live in the same way as they do, and I certainly don't want to live in a fringe-dweller situation.^{68 69}

All three women refuse the essential characteristics attributed to Indigenous people and which are incompatible with the lifestyles they have chosen. Their comments are

⁶⁷ 'Wadjella' (from white fellow) is an Aboriginal word for non-Indigenous people.

⁶⁸ OXENHAM, Darlene et al, *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts'n'all*, op. cit., pp. 65, 92, 97.

⁶⁹ Quoting Cowlishaw, Yin Paradies expresses the same idea: "Being educated, well-remunerated or simply enjoying material assets 'can expose one to suspicion of wanting to be white'. (...) Although many Indigenous people rightly desire the privileges that, until recently, have been synonymous with Whiteness, such desire is associated with being less Indigenous."

PARADIES, Yin, "Beyond Black and White: Essentialism", *Hybridity and Indigeneity*, op. cit., p. 358.

evidence that there is a variety of ways of understanding what being Indigenous is about in today's Australia. While placing less importance on money may be associated with being Indigenous for Casey, it is not necessarily the case for every Indigenous person. However, these different visions of Indigeneity are not always recognised as legitimate.

Therefore, the problem seems once again to be the lack of recognition of the diversity of the Indigenous population today, and the tendency to essentialise both Indigenous and 'white' Australians' characteristics.

As Carlson explained,

The subtext is also a denial of Aboriginal people to freely choose the manner in which they live and interact in the wider society, itself a principle of political self-determination. And yet, this is a widespread, common and popular discourse across Aboriginal Australia.⁷⁰

Describing such things as education as a 'white' attribute only, and therefore as incompatible with being Indigenous can have obvious detrimental effects which were already outlined by Vanessa in her analysis of the treatment of Indigenous students at university.

Emphasising the communal aspect of Indigenous societies as opposed to a more individual mindset within Western ones may look like a more harmless form of essentialism (as I explained in chapter 5, a longing for community can be part of the attraction for Indigenous culture). However, in the following quote, Yin Paradies explains how the communal spirit Casey praised earlier can also have perverse effects in that it perpetuates a discourse of victimhood and a dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

There is no doubt that Indigenous people have suffered a deplorable history of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion that continues to this day, and that such a history has led to a 'solidarity grounded in a common experience of subordination'. However, it is also evident, from international contexts, that

⁷⁰ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., p. 309.

when group cohesion is premised on the impossibility of transcending such subordination, the achievement of individual success endangers this cohesion. As a result, social norms are formed that seek 'to keep members of a downtrodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it'. (...) The idea that Indigeneity is synonymous with suffering and marginality, together with the misconception that such 'victimhood' bestows privileged access to social truths, leads to uncritical acceptance of the views, opinions and scholarship of Indigenous people about Indigenous issues. This phenomenon is sometimes also accompanied by a corresponding rejection of non-Indigenous views, which are portrayed as 'tainted with racism'. Such moralistic positioning is untenable given the various and contradictory views that Indigenous people hold.⁷¹

Paradies and others⁷² warn against a possibly endless cycle of disadvantage caused by a refusal to let individuals choose how to define their Indigenous identity free from community discourses. Paradies also criticises the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views which gives the impression that Indigenous people speak in one voice only.

Following the incident with his sister, Adam, who now teaches at university, insisted on the importance of breaking stereotypes and of opening so-called 'white' values such as education to Indigenous people.

Adam *It's ok to be white and Aboriginal, and not only is it ok to be white and Aboriginal; it's ok to be an educated Aboriginal. You don't have to be an uptown nigger. You can be educated and that's ok. You can work hard and that's ok. (...) We need to get rid of this attitude that there's a problem with being successful – because there shouldn't be a problem with being successful and in fact we need Aboriginal people to be successful!*

In the same way, when I explained why some participants were reluctant to identify because they had not been disadvantaged, Damita McGuinness from UTS Indigenous centre replied that,

⁷¹ PARADIES, Yin, "Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity", *op. cit.*, pp. 358-360.

⁷² For example, see also PEARSON, Noel, "Individualism vs Communalism", *The Australian*, 6 August 2011, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/individualism-versus-communalism/story-e6frgd0x-1226109346928>, accessed on 16 August 2016:

"Paul Keating once told me, the problem with your mob is you're like crabs in a bucket. If one of you starts climbing out and gets his claws on the rim, about to pull himself over the top to freedom, the other mob will be pulling him back down into the bucket. You all end up cooked."

Damita *Just because you're Aboriginal doesn't mean you're disadvantaged. That's two words that governments have put together. We don't say that, you know! (laughs) I guess that's not an Aboriginal attitude. And what we're seeing our students achieving now is a lot different than what we were seeing twenty years ago. The opportunities are there now. So, as I said, all our students get on, get through on their own. But we're just here for those difficult times.*

It is interesting to see that Damita also generalises about Indigenous people as she claims that disadvantage is not “an Aboriginal attitude”. Considering the counter-examples we analysed before, this is further evidence of the diversity of opinions pointed out by Paradies.

Moreover, the rejection of disadvantage as inevitable can also be seen as a form of resistance, a “struggle against the odds”⁷³ to prove people associating Indigeneity with disadvantage wrong. Indigenous academic Larissa Behrendt also defends this same idea, and the right for Indigenous people to remember their history of disadvantage while not turning it into an essential characteristic of Indigeneity today. She believes Indigenous people should be willing and able to succeed in contemporary Australia.

A person's cultural identity is not defined by their poverty; you are not more Aboriginal if you grew up struggling. At the same time, the history of our own community – and the marginalisation that is the reality for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – will always be relevant to those who have become the new Indigenous middle class. Protest and fighting for inclusion into mainstream society should be at the forefront of a contemporary Indigenous worldview.⁷⁴

8.3 Giving Back: Loyalty and Solidarity to the Indigenous Community

Kate *About a year ago, I went with my mum to her cousin's funeral, and she ran into a lot of family she hasn't seen since she was really little and who live in the country*

⁷³ MORTON, John, “Essentially Black, Essentially Australian, Essentially Opposed: Australian Anthropology and its Uses of Aboriginal Identity” in WASSMANN, Jürg (ed.), *Pacific Answers to Western Hegemony: Cultural Practices of Identity Construction*, op. cit., p. 361.

⁷⁴ BEHRENDT, Larissa, “Who's afraid of the Indigenous middle class?”, *The Guardian*, 9 June 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/09/whos-afraid-of-the-indigenous-middle-class>, accessed on 17 August 2016.

(...) and she started talking to one of her cousins in particular who's really prominent in his Indigenous community and he spoke about his son, and how his son went through university and has this great job and feeds everything back into the community.

Kate's story about "feeding everything back into the community" is part of a common discourse according to which Indigenous people who succeed should give back to their community. Within this discourse, success is therefore accepted, but only if it serves a communal purpose.

As Casey explained, a communal way of living is often described as an essential characteristic of Indigenous culture. For example, in the guide *Working Together*, Pat Dudgeon et al. write that,

For Aboriginal people there are various obligations and commitments that one has as a member in the community. Being part of the community may have various responsibilities and obligations that confirm and reinforce membership. These include obligations to (extended) family, responsibilities to be seen to be involved and active in various community functions and initiatives, and representation in various political issues.⁷⁵

Most participants were aware that being involved in the community is a very important part of being Indigenous. But by mentioning obligations and involvement, Pat Dudgeon et al. go beyond simple connections to extended family and community.

In this section, I will analyse the participants' relation to the notion of 'giving back'. In their discourses, two understandings of this concept stood out: it could be perceived as a need to alleviate disadvantage experienced by the Indigenous community, and/or as a struggle for the recognition of Indigenous rights, often in opposition to Western values and 'mainstream' society.

Michelle, who lives in France and has not maintained a connection with her family's community, felt that her lack of involvement made it difficult for her to say she had Indigenous heritage. She tried to get around this by helping the Indigenous community in

⁷⁵ DUDGEON, Pat, WRIGHT, Michael, PARADIES, Yin, GARVEY, Darren, WALKER, Iain, "Aboriginal Social, Cultural and Historical Contexts", *op. cit.*, p. 6.

indirect ways. Her former job in a company working with Indigenous people was one of those.

Michelle *That was a job I was really proud to do because you feel like you're actually doing something for the Aboriginal community. I feel apart from it. Like I don't feel like I'm part of the Aboriginal community, but I'm doing something to...help them in a way. (...)*

Delphine You felt like you had to do something good. Is it related to the fact that you were just very militant about [Indigenous issues], or because you were Indigenous and felt you had to give something back?

Michelle *Both actually. But the second part, yes, because, as I was saying earlier, I don't feel I have complete legitimacy in saying that I'm Aborigine. And perhaps doing this film,⁷⁶ and highlighting where there had been problems with the treatment of Aborigines maybe gave me more legitimacy to say to people that I had this culture within my heritage. Does that make sense? Because you have actually participated in the community in a kind of side way.*

What is interesting is the connection Michelle makes between involvement in the Indigenous community and Indigenous disadvantage: Michelle was proud of her work because this particular company helped create more jobs for Indigenous people. She also wished to highlight how Indigenous people were mistreated in the past. Participating in the community is here associated with teaching people about Indigenous disadvantage, and helping alleviate it.

Through her interviews with light-skinned Indigenous people, Bindi Bennett found that the participants in her study who had not faced much disadvantage also wished to “repay” the community.

Some participants did not come from a life of complete or abject poverty or disadvantage. They spoke about repaying the community and helping Aboriginal people who were disadvantaged. Participants who had received an Aboriginal cadetship into university or a designated Aboriginal job stated they thought that this provided them with the opportunity to finish something, to go beyond poverty and to achieve success. Some of these participants were already doing

⁷⁶ Michelle: “I did do a project with a friend, and actually presented it here at a film festival in France. We went and interviewed Aborigines about what it was like to live as an Aborigine in Australia at that time.”

various volunteer roles in the Aboriginal community with this goal in mind. These participants had moved from a place of being someone without a clear, formed identity to being strong role models for others. They surrounded themselves with a community that supported them and this made it easier for them to identify as Aboriginal with pride.⁷⁷

Bindi Bennett confirms the existence of a link between, on the one hand, working towards lessening disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people, and on the other, finding one's place within the Indigenous community. Like Michelle, the participants thought that the latter was conditional upon the first.

The perception comes from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities. As Vanessa told me, a subtext of the official discourse about 'closing the gap' is the idea that Indigenous people who receive help and are pushed to the top will then go back to their communities and therefore have a general positive impact beyond simple individual success. Vanessa confirmed that there are expectations regarding this, and that she must have been influenced by this widespread idea that giving back is almost required.

Delphine When I read about Indigenous students going to university to then come back to their community and help, I'm always wondering: what if they don't want to do that? What if they just want to...

Vanessa *Yeah, I know lots of friends that don't want to...*

Delphine There are some expectations from them. If you go to university and succeed, then you have to give back.

Vanessa *There is. There is. Like, if you look at the Indigenous strategy,⁷⁸ it talks about making Indigenous leaders to go help and have a flowing effect. Any government policy has, you know... "Let's start here and let's build Indigenous leaders". In Australian business currently there is a careers tracker program, and they build Indigenous leaders in every kind of field. So yeah, I guess I have had that engrained.*

⁷⁷ BENNETT, Bindi, "How do Light-skinned Aboriginal Australians Experience Racism?", *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁷⁸ "Wingara Mura - Bunga Barrabugu: The University of Sydney Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Integrated Strategy", <http://sydney.edu.au/dam/corporate/documents/about-us/values-and-visions/wingara-mura-bunga-barrabugu.pdf>, accessed on 15 December 2016.

For Casey, there is no doubt that being Indigenous not only means choosing a more community-centred way of life but also working actively in favour of the Indigenous community. As he explained earlier, “everything you do should revolve around benefitting other black people”.⁷⁹ He further explained his reasoning in a discussion about benefits.

Casey *I don't have any problem with any black person using a certificate of Aboriginality to get a scholarship or whatever, I guess, as long as it's to return to the community.⁸⁰ (...) To me, if you know that you have black heritage, and you don't do anything about it, you're just sort of like, "Yeah, a bit more money. That's a good thing, even though I have nothing to do with black people or anything like that, just using it when I need it." Then you're not really black because you don't get involved; you don't identify; you don't make any efforts whatsoever.*

Casey's idea that to be Indigenous requires efforts follows the discourse about the need to actively work in favour of the Indigenous community. Not all identities require such efforts. Bronwyn Carlson analysed this as the need to “do” identity work in order to be accepted as Indigenous, rather than to simply “be” Indigenous.

[I]t is difficult just to 'be' Aboriginal. It is not sufficient to just 'know' that you are Aboriginal and 'identify' as Aboriginal on the basis of having proof of Aboriginal descent. An individual must 'do' Aboriginal to be recognised and be accepted as Aboriginal in the community in which they live if they want official confirmation and/or if they do not want to be the subject of accusatory questions and distressful challenges. Those not prepared to do the hard work of growing a publicly visible community presence ran the risk of being refused recognition and acceptance in the community, even if they were without question of Aboriginal descent. But, as well, even official recognition and acceptance in the Aboriginal community was not always sufficient and some participants talked of the need to continue to 'do' identity work. Tacit criteria to secure continued acceptance and recognition implied the need to 'live and

⁷⁹ Casey's involvement was welcomed by the Indigenous community in Brisbane. As the example of Adam's sister shows, however, the Indigenous community does not always welcome help coming from people who can be perceived as “uptown niggers”.

⁸⁰ Several participants on the SBS *Insight* program “Aboriginal or not?” agreed with Casey's view. Mark McMillan mentioned “the concept of cultural responsibility”. Matilda Pascoe clearly stated, “If you're putting it back into the community, yes, that's accepted but not if you are just there to get higher and higher and use your Aboriginality and your people.”

MCMILLAN, Mark, PASCOE, Matilda, *Insight* “Aboriginal or not?”, *op. cit.*

breathe' the Aboriginal community, as if there was no legitimate life space beyond it for a *bona fide* Aboriginal person.⁸¹

As far as Casey is concerned, "the need to 'live and breathe' the Aboriginal community" implies political activism in favour of self-determination, which is somewhat different from thinking in terms of disadvantage. I believe Casey would not talk about his work in terms of helping alleviate disadvantage because, as he previously explained, Indigenous success is different from 'white' success.

Casey's identity changed completely after he attended a meeting of the Tent Embassy in Brisbane and decided to become involved in the life of the community on a regular basis, by writing a newsletter about the movement: "Ever since then, I think that was the turning point of where, like I went from being...knowing I've got black heritage to...beginning to live black." Beginning to work for the Indigenous community equated to beginning to truly be Indigenous. For Casey, identifying as Indigenous means activating this identity and therefore "doing" Indigeneity. From this first moment on, Casey became increasingly committed to his political work for the Indigenous community.

Casey *I work on a project called Smashing the Myths which is about getting rid of the common misconceptions in the white community about Aboriginal people like, "They're all drunks". (...) And also, I just finished a thirty-minute radio documentary on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy from 1972 that went on air this morning. (...) And then within the past year, I've been heavily involved in organising conferences, talks, marches, protests, a whole host of things.*

Avril Bell seconded Carlson's opinion on the need to "do" identity and mentioned the importance of the commitment to "contribute to tribal survival",⁸² something Casey – who wrote a dictionary of his Indigenous people's language – also considers fundamental.

Despite the prevalence of the 'giving back' discourse, most of the participants who identified as Indigenous declared that they did not feel pressured to become involved in the community but that working with Indigenous people seemed like a natural thing to do and that it was a consequence of their interest in their heritage and in Indigenous issues.

⁸¹ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 305.

⁸² BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Although Vanesa earlier agreed that there are expectations regarding successful Indigenous people, she explained that working for the Indigenous community was a personal choice.

Delphine Did you feel a pressure to, basically, use your knowledge to help the community? Is that...what is expected of you?

Vanessa *I think...it's something I wanted to do. I don't even think it's an expectation; it just makes sense. (...) Because in everything I've done in government, there's always an Indigenous element. And even if I don't identify, I'm quite passionate about it. (...) I think there hasn't been a question that I wouldn't go back and try. It just seems like the right thing to do. I don't know!*

Miriam also explained that she was passionate about working in Criminal Law for an Indigenous community. Casey said that his two passions are black media and cultural revival.

It is difficult to determine why these participants did not think twice about becoming involved in the Indigenous community although they had not grown up immersed in it. However, I believe that having discovered their Indigeneity later in life could actually have made a difference for several reasons. First of all, as Vanessa, Miriam and Casey explained, they were already interested in their heritage and Indigenous questions in general. Working in an Indigenous environment was a choice – just like identifying was – since this identity was not a given for any of them. Secondly, in Vanessa's, Miriam's, but also Kate's cases, working with Indigenous people was, I believe, an accessible way of becoming involved in the Indigenous community.

This, when I asked her if she wanted to become involved in the community, Kate explained that she already was.

Kate *I guess I already am involved in the community here at the university. (...) I think that I'm already very aware of, you know, culturally, how things need to be consulted that affect Indigenous people. So for example, in my work, I may be throwing a Welcome to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land. It recently came to my attention that in certain occasions, we actually need to organise an elder from this community to perform a 'Welcome to Country' instead. So that's*

good, and it's because I guess I had the knowledge of how it works; I consulted the right people and got the right answer rather than getting the white answer. So I feel like I'm already across that.

Finally, I believe that the fact that the participants had grown up with discourses linking Indigenous people with disadvantage and often emphasising 'white' Australians' role in bringing it about, could have played a part in their view that giving back was necessary.

For example, Adam explained he sometimes felt guilty about calling himself Indigenous without having experienced disadvantage. I believe that guilt could indeed be one of the motivations for people who have one foot on the 'white' side and the other on the Indigenous side presented as disadvantaged. Giving back can thus allow someone to identify with less scruples and also provides a justification for accepting financial benefits.

Moreover, the idea that newly-identified Indigenous people have to work harder than others to gain the right to be Indigenous is also voiced by some Indigenous people. For example, the following quote from Indigenous activist Jackie Huggins emphasises guilt and contrition in the form of active work in favour of the Indigenous community as the path all newly-identified Indigenous people must follow to gain acceptance.

Aboriginality cannot be acquired overnight. It takes years of hard work, sensitivity and effort to 'come back in'. (...) The debt has to be repaid in various ways. (...) Genetic inheritance does not only determine identity in an Aboriginal society, as there are other inescapable and compounding factors which influence 'being' Aboriginal. For instance, acceptance by the community in which one lives and being actively involved in alleviating the disadvantaged positions of Aboriginal people per se. Solely swallowing the genetical cocktail mixture does not constitute 'being' Aboriginal, as so many Johnny-come-latelies would have whites believe.⁸³

Bronwyn Carlson further explains what the term 'Johnny-come-lately' means.

The 'Johnny come lately' tag applies to Aboriginal people who have just 'found out' about their Aboriginality. This term is also used for those who are accepted

⁸³ HUGGINS, Jackie, "Always was always will be", *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

as Aboriginal but have never actively participated in community activities, utilised community organisations, or been vocal or active in regards to issues which concern the community.⁸⁴

Casey recalled being called a “Johnny-come-lately” and he “took it at heart”. Although he does not say so, I wondered whether Casey’s complete commitment to working for his community did not also partly stem from his need to prove his Indigeneity to others but also to himself, especially at the time when he still had doubts about his legitimacy as Indigenous.

Andrew expressed this idea of an insecure identity, although his perception of help goes beyond the Indigenous community.

Andrew *The fact that I probably haven’t – and these are more so insecurities – (...) I’m not part of the Indigenous community locally or outreach programmes. (...) As I’ve said, I’ve had quite a privileged life so to speak, so I’d rather do something to help at a community level, but it wouldn’t be specifically Indigenous, it would be more so at the PCYC20⁸⁵ where there would be a high level of Indigenous people as well. (...) It’s more so an insecurity in the sense that I haven’t reached out, but it’s not a hindrance and it hasn’t stopped me.*

The expectations that successful Indigenous people will give back to the Indigenous community are present in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, official as well as general discourses. While some participants were willing and happy to become involved, at times, Adam felt pressured into choosing a path that did not reflect his personal aspirations.

Adam *Part of the deal with getting into the [medical] course [with Aboriginal entry] was that I would go into rural communities... In the medical course, it’s literally part of the deal, as in you sign on and you have to do two years in a... It was at the time anyway. So basically, I was being forced to; there was no choice... Medicine was one of the [courses] where they said, “If you get into this course, you have to do it.” (...) I [later] went to Sydney uni to do sociology. There was more pressure. Rather than you have to do this, it was more, “You know, you’re an Aboriginal person, you should really be looking at Aboriginal subjects. Because we need Aboriginal people doing this!” And that’s fine. I agree. We do need Aboriginal people doing that... But*

⁸⁴ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., p. 200.

⁸⁵ Police Citizens Youth Club, a youth organisation created to help prevent crime by and against young people and promote citizenship.

why does it have to be...me?

I had started working in a hospital while I was in my first year. I enjoyed it, but I realised that I didn't want to be a doctor. That's pretty much what it came down to. And the idea of doing Medical Science and then become an Aboriginal doctor, and work in Aboriginal communities – these are the expectations when taking one of those places. And I decided I didn't want to do that. As much as I identified with being Aboriginal and all that sort of stuff, I had other interests that weren't about becoming an Aboriginal doctor in an Aboriginal community.

While Adam accepted the give-and-take contract which came with Aboriginal entry in his first university, he later felt more pressured by the assumptions about his desire to work on Indigenous questions in Sociology. Adam highlights the problematic association of Indigenous identity with a necessary interest in Indigenous matters, and more generally the fact that identifying as Indigenous means that someone's life should only revolve around Indigenous questions.⁸⁶ Like other associations I have analysed – Indigeneity and blackness; Indigeneity and traditional culture and way of life; Indigeneity and disadvantage – that of Indigenous identity and necessary involvement (and often need to 'help') in the Indigenous community narrows down the definition of Indigeneity. There is no question that building role models for a community generally facing more disadvantages than most Australians is a worthy goal, one several participants were more than willing to embrace. However, when being Indigenous becomes synonymous with being committed to work for the Indigenous community, the diversity of Indigenous people's goals is not recognised, as Adam's story reveals.

In the same way, Josh explained that he did not feel like working towards "bettering" Indigenous people's lives.

Josh *Maybe if I'd been raised... Maybe I'd focus more on contributing to society in a different way. Somebody else will take care of Indigenous policy and relationships and bettering the Indigenous people, whereas, you know, I will do something else.*

⁸⁶ The full commitment being Indigenous implies – and which other identities do not – is a question I will further explore in chapter 9.

Josh's comment reveals that in his mind, being Indigenous is necessarily linked to wanting to work for the Indigenous community. According to him, it is because he was not raised Indigenous – and therefore does not feel that this is his identity – that he does not naturally feel it his responsibility to help. Thus, his comment ventures the idea that someone raised within the Indigenous community will automatically want to become involved in working for this community. There is little recognition of the possibility that different Indigenous people may want to follow different paths. As I wrote, Josh's assumption is not surprising considering how dominant the 'giving back' discourse is within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The words he uses ("bettering", "take care") also show how involvement in the Indigenous community is perceived as alleviating disadvantage. Once again, the idea that the 'Indigenous problem' needs to be fixed surfaces. In Josh's comment, being Indigenous is reduced to helping the Indigenous community.

What this comment also hints at, and which appeared clearly in Casey's description of the differences between 'white' and 'black' success, is a tendency to essentialise Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions and ways of living. As I explained, the division between a community-centred Indigenous way of life and an individual-centred Western one on the other side is common. I mentioned it myself to Adam, following the discussion about his studies.

Adam *I think it comes down to this contradiction in the Aboriginal community about what is you, and what's the Aboriginal community itself. How could I separate myself from it, and become what I was happy with, while still be happy to be a part of that community?*

Delphine The problem is that Aboriginal people are often very community-centred, whereas you live in a country which is Western, so individual-centred. It's probably difficult to balance the two.

Adam *Very, very hard. All the things we talked about earlier, about the pressure to join, to be an Aboriginal studies person, the pressure to be a part of the community if you do get educated, those types of things are clearly part of the communal mode. (...) This communal idea of living is very different to the white ideal. That's one of*

the things that I struggle with quite a bit.

I had an Aboriginal student in my class a couple years ago. I said I was Aboriginal. (...) Straight away after class, he came up to me and he said, "Oh, you know, you've worked really hard!" because he was saying, "You know, my brother sits on the dole and does all this, and my dad's on a pension", and I'm like, "Look man, you know, that's my family too. You got to do what you do. It's got nothing to do with the people around you to some degree. If you want to be successful, you can be successful for you." And he said, "Yeah, but it's more than that, you know. I need to be successful for my community." And I agree.

The traditional Indigenous system is often described as revolving around an extended community more than the Western one.⁸⁷ As Adam explains, it can be difficult to live in both worlds as there is little recognition that being Indigenous today could also involve making individual choices. This explains why Indigenous people whose lives are associated with Western values are sometimes described as inauthentic. Being Indigenous and living in the 'mainstream' 'white' Australian society means juggling with different ways of being: feeling that one belongs to a community but wanting to succeed individually. Adam refuses to choose between his Indigenous identity and his desire to make personal choices outside of the community. The story of his Indigenous student reveals the pressure placed on Indigenous people getting a university education to give back, and the limited scope for individual choices. Once again, declaring one's Indigeneity can mean giving up a part of one's freedom as this is an identity requiring that one fit inside well-delineated categories.

Moreover, as Casey's comments showed, being Indigenous is often directly opposed to being 'white', and general tendencies can become essential characteristics leaving no place to in-between-ness. For example, Larissa Behrendt described 'white' and Indigenous people's values as antithetical. On the one hand, she mentioned her "traditional values of community, collectivism, strong sense of family, respect for elders, co-operation, reciprocity and cultural pride", and on the other "white values of individuality, competition,

⁸⁷ In her analysis of the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous values, Jill Byrnes writes that "[a] fundamental difference is that traditional Aboriginal society was (and is) collectivist (value: we all look after one another) whereas mainstream Australian culture is individualist (value: look after yourself)." Although such a description seems a little caricatural, it is a common description of non-Indigenous and Indigenous societies, and this difference is valued and claimed by many Indigenous people. BYRNES, Jill, "A Comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Values", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

ambition and materialism.”⁸⁸ Kevin Keffe also pointed out that often-cited Indigenous traits were “determined, in part, as oppositional to what are perceived as the essential and enduring elements of ‘white’ culture. ‘Sharing and caring’ is emphasised in contrast to the stereotype of white possessiveness, spiritual relationships with land are contrasted with white rapaciousness.”⁸⁹

Consequently, as was explained, being ambitious or enjoying material comfort can lead to being criticised as inauthentic but also as inherently ‘bad’. While Indigenous values are praised, ‘white’ values are condemned. This is reminiscent of a noble savage view of Indigenous people whose inherent goodness contrasts with ‘white’ people’s corrupted society.

Yin Paradies criticised this binary representation.

The view that being Indigenous requires one to resist White hegemony or strive to alleviate the disadvantage of Indigenous people (...) inappropriately portrays Indigenous people as intrinsically virtuous. These moral qualifications, that some would have us espouse as prerequisites of Indigeneity, evince a profound failure to recognize that ‘wisdom and virtue are as unevenly distributed among Indigenous people as elsewhere’.⁹⁰

Following this, people like Adam who wish to identify as Indigenous while pursuing personal goals are made to feel guilty and un-Aboriginal. Adam explained that he struggled with this issue and used to feel selfish before he managed to make the two sides of his identity cohabit.

Adam *I think that sounds selfish, but...is it really...? Why do I have to study Aboriginality? Why can't I go and study Sociology of religions, which is actually what I'm really interested in? I don't have a desire to study Aboriginal culture! (...) I have no desire to be involved in Aboriginal affairs or politics. I don't want to study Aboriginality. I feel comfortable in who I am and why I am that, and I've just hit the point where it doesn't matter to me that much.*

⁸⁸ BEHRENDT, Larissa, “Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings”, *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1995, p. 60.

⁸⁹ KEEFFE, Kevin, “Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence”, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

⁹⁰ PARADIES, Yin, “Beyond Black and White: Essentialism”, *Hybridity and Indigeneity*, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

8.4 Conclusion

Although the participants could identify with past disadvantages experienced by their ancestors and take pride in this, the discourse linking Indigeneity and disadvantage in the present was a strong obstacle preventing most of them from identifying. Because the view that Indigenous people are disadvantaged is still dominant in today's Australia, and because this discourse is officially sanctioned (as opposed to prevalent but nevertheless dated and stereotyped views presenting Indigenous people as black or traditional only), it seemed to me that it had a stronger impact on the participants' feelings of legitimacy as Indigenous than other discourses studied in chapter 6 and chapter 7. Not having experienced racism or dispossession themselves, and living what many see as a 'white' life, made the participants vulnerable to being criticised for their lack of Indigenous authenticity. The participants were also well-aware of the debates around benefits in Australia. Today, they are one of the reasons why the question "Who is Indigenous?" still matters so much. The strong link established between Indigenous people and disadvantage makes it difficult for a lot of Australians to dissociate Indigenous identity from benefits. The majority of the participants felt it was difficult to call themselves Indigenous without being accused of wanting a share of Indigenous benefits. Another expectation was that if they decided to identify despite not being disadvantaged, they would have to dedicate their time to alleviating disadvantages within the Indigenous community. Once again, discourses linking Indigenous people to characteristics such as disadvantage or loyalty to the Indigenous community ignore the diverse reality of today's Indigenous community and the various experiences and aspirations of Indigenous people. The discourse of disadvantage – like other discourses previously analysed – forces the participants into categories in which they often do not feel they fit. The consequence is at best a feeling of inadequacy and illegitimacy, and at worst an impossibility to identify.

Conclusion to PART III

The last three chapters presented discourses about Indigeneity imposing 'authentic' ways of being Indigenous. What appears striking in the representations I studied is their lack of evolution.

Avril Bell quotes Margaret Jolly who explains the difference between the way Indigenous and Western identities are presented.

If [Indigenous people] are no longer doing "it" they are no longer themselves, whereas if colonisers are no longer doing what they were doing two decades ago, this is a comforting instance of Western progress. Diversity and change in one case connote inauthenticity, in the other the hallmark of true Western civilization.¹

Indeed, while diversity is now recognised and valued in Australian society when it comes to non-Indigenous Australians,² comparatively, representations of Indigeneity have lacked in variety. As **chapter 6** and **chapter 7** reveal, it often seems as if mainstream discourses still present 'authentic' Indigenous people as almost identical to the ones encountered by the first settlers: they should be black and living a traditional life in a remote location. Today's discourse of Indigenous disadvantage³ analysed in **chapter 8** also

¹ JOLLY, Margaret quoted by BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, pp. 52-53.

² Even though the 'white' Anglo-Celtic culture remains at the heart of Australian identity, the advent of multiculturalism is an official recognition that Australia is an ethnically diverse country.

³ Arguably, this discourse can also be traced back to colonisation. However, while Indigenous people were then regarded as disadvantaged because of their perceived inherent inferiority to 'white' settlers,

presents another essential vision of Indigeneity. Whether viewed positively or negatively, these core elements in the representations of Indigenous people have had an enduring significance. As the studies of discourses about colour, time and space, and disadvantage showed, failure to conform to these specific representations of Indigeneity can lead to accusations of inauthenticity. Thus, while all other Australians are permitted to evolve and to diversify, Indigenous people often seem forever stuck in a past and remote place, banned from modernity and individuality. In their struggle for recognition, Indigenous people have had to come to terms with such widespread images and have appropriated them in different ways, as means to assert the uniqueness of their identity. Mitchell Rolls denounces the negative effects this process produces.

Cultural portraits mobilised because of their political efficacy, and because of their value in helping to restore dignity and promote social and economic opportunities that have been otherwise denied or not realised, harden into essences of what it is to be an Aboriginal. These portraits – which include such things as the idea that Aboriginal enjoy a ‘unique’ relationship with the land; live at one with ‘mother nature’, are communitarian, spiritually instead of materially focussed, and so on; and that Aboriginality is determined by some mystical essence – become markers of identity that serve to repress cultural dynamism.⁴

As this third part revealed, the participants often struggle with the essential representations described by Rolls, and with the dichotomy between ‘white’ and ‘black’ identities they imply. Their personal understanding of Indigeneity and the judgements of other people, both derived from such representations, meant that all participants, at some point in their identity journeys, experienced doubts about their legitimacy as Indigenous people. The complexity of the in-between space they inhabit is the object of the fourth part.

disadvantage is now understood as a consequence of the process of colonisation Indigenous people were subjected to.

⁴ ROLLS, Mitchell, “The Meaningless of Aboriginal Cultures”, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

PART IV

Part Identities

Aboriginal Australians are living increasingly intercultural lives and identify in postethnic ways. Their realities are of increasing economic, social, cultural and political interaction with settler-Australians, and they are increasingly integrated in mainstream life, internally heterogeneous and ambiguously different from other Australians. They constantly negotiate their intersecting, and occasionally competing, subject positions that extend beyond the bounds of a stereotypical Aboriginality. (...) [T]he attempt to control the messy realities of increasing interculturality and postethnicity through the device of a knowable Aboriginal subject (...) imagines into being a pan-Aboriginal culture, community and self, thought of in terms of fixed culture, neat difference and disadvantage. The attempt to sustain that fiction in the face of its growing discrepancy with the everyday (...) contributes to the perpetuation of marginality.¹

While Terry Moore's analysis is focused on government policies, his remarks can also be applied to questions of personal identity. Moore notes the discrepancy between fixed and homogeneous representations of Indigeneity, and the growing diversity of the Indigenous Australian population. Moore uses the term "interculturality" to describe the way Indigenous people interact with 'mainstream' Australian society. He later compares it to "cross-culturality": "As a result of integration, Aborigines' everyday realities are less cross-

¹ MOORE, Terry, "Interculturality, postethnicity and the Aboriginal Australian policy future", *Ethnicities*, Vol. 16, Number 5, 2016, p. 713.

cultural, insofar as that implies that they straddle distinct realms, than intercultural.”² Thus, intercultural relationships imply the integration of different cultural elements which together form a whole that is someone’s reality. Therefore, according to Moore, Indigenous people – although still maintaining their difference – are not condemned to a dichotomous relationship with non-Indigenous Australians. Instead of “straddl[ing]” across cultures, Indigenous people are described as blending them, thus creating not one but a variety of Indigeneities. Several authors whose works I will analyse in the following chapters believe, like Moore, that today, it is necessary that Indigenous people be free to define their identities individually and outside of fixed representations of Indigeneity.

In the third part of this thesis, I analysed enduring and dominant discourses about Indigeneity. Representations of Indigenous people as black only, as living traditionally in remote locations, or as necessarily disadvantaged, have shaped the participants’ understanding of Indigeneity. Detaching themselves from such stereotypical images was not always easy. Finding ways to personally relate to these images and finding enough legitimacy to claim their heritage in spite of them was even more difficult.

In this final part, I wish to analyse in further detail a consequence of the discrepancy between the participants’ realities and their understandings of Indigeneity. This consequence was already mentioned on several occasions: it is a feeling of in-between-ness experienced by most – if not all– participants.

While the reality of many Indigenous people may indeed be interculturality, it seemed more difficult for the participants who had not grown up embedded in the Indigenous community to set aside representations of so-called ‘authentic’ Indigeneity, or to move beyond the opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities, which often seems incommensurable. As a result, the in-between position (expressed on many levels) of the participants often looked untenable. In this way, their identities could be described as ‘partial’, never whole, when they wished to embrace both their ‘white’ upbringing and

² MOORE, Terry, “Interculturality, Postethnicity and the Aboriginal Australian Policy Future”, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 16, Number 5, 2016, p. 713.

Indigenous heritage. This feeling of having “a foot in both worlds, but a space in none”, as Adam said, is the subject of **chapter 9**.

However, there were also ways for some participants to move beyond this state of in-between-ness and to make sense of their intercultural identities. In so doing, they embraced a postmodern and hybrid vision of identity, composed of various elements, and always in movement. The study of these identity choices will be the object of **chapter 10**. In my analysis, I will look at different understandings of the concept of identity and analyse how competing discourses – notably that of essentialism, opposed to a more constructed, fragmented and fluid vision of identity – impact on the participants’ ability to build coherent identities.

CHAPTER 9

In-between-ness

9.0 Introduction

As the first two parts of this thesis have shown, a central theme of this study is that of in-between-ness. It was already present in my analysis of the ambivalent constructions of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous Australians throughout history and in today's Australia. A feeling of in-between-ness is also evident in the way the participants deal with knowing that they have Indigenous heritage while not fitting the most common descriptions of Indigenous people.

This feeling of in-between-ness is intrinsically linked to the persisting dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians without which it could not exist.

It is the tension between on the one hand an opposition often presented as essential, and on the other hand the persistence of in-between positions that I wish to study in this chapter.

I will analyse the different ways in which the participants feel in-between, and how this state can eventually be perceived as an impossible one: within the binary framework of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, a choice between a 'white' or an Indigenous identity must often be made. The participants were both 'white' – of Anglo-Celtic and/or European descent but above all culturally so, and Indigenous – of Indigenous descent and sometimes culturally so. As a consequence, they found themselves in an in-between

position which was, at worst, a source of anxiety, severely limiting possibilities to relate to their Indigenous heritage, and at best the cause of doubts about their legitimacy to claim Indigeneity as their identity. It can be noted that all participants without exception – even those who formally identified as Indigenous – experienced these feelings of in-between-ness and issues of legitimacy at one time or another during their journey towards identification and even still after having identified.

I will first analyse the different ways in which the participants appeared caught in-between. I will then go on to explain how and why the in-between state did not appear to be a viable space in which to construct stable and satisfying identities.

9.1 Caught In-between

I noted early in my research how the participants could be characterised by their state of in-between-ness resulting from attempts to make sense of their Indigenous heritage while having received what most called a ‘white’ education.

A common feature of most participants was a seemingly constant state of hesitation. At different times, in different places, with different people, the participants seemed caught in-between different understandings of Indigeneity, which in turn often made their relationship to their heritage conflictual, and their statements about Indigeneity and about themselves ambiguous. The diversity of representations the participants are confronted with is a direct consequence of the combination of a ‘white’ upbringing with Indigenous heritage. Indeed, while they were raised in the Anglo-Celtic Australian culture, the participants in this study later took an interest in their Indigenous heritage. Therefore, they have access to and are influenced by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous representations of Indigeneity, and these can be discordant.

In this section, I wish to study in-between-ness in relation to identity: I will first analyse the difficulty the participants could have in positioning themselves vis-à-vis different perceptions of Indigenous identity, and how they sometimes became caught in-

between their personal understanding of their heritage and the representations imposed by others – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This caused a loss of control over the definition of their own identities. I will then consider how the different perceptions of Indigeneity I mentioned reveal two different perceptions of identity in general: an inherent one and a constructed one. The participants referred to both visions of Indigenous identity. Both could at times help them relate to their heritage or on the contrary hinder them in their understanding of it. Because they rely on these two perceptions of identity, several participants appeared caught in-between heritage and identity. The last part of this section will deal with this hesitation.

9.1.1 Individual and General Perceptions of Indigeneity

“Aboriginal people are often overwhelmed or enraged by the fact that they are already known to others, not as they experience themselves, but in the plethora of images, stereotypes and discourses which have made them known in the public domain.”¹

Gillian Cowlshaw’s remark points to two elements which can be related to the participants’ experiences of Indigeneity. The first is the existence of a plethora of representations of Indigenous identity – something which could be confusing for participants trying to form their own understanding of Indigeneity. The second point raised by Cowlshaw is that this seemingly vast array of representations– the result, notably, of the non-Indigenous obsession with defining Indigeneity (see chapter 4) – does not, in fact, provide greater possibilities of self-identification for Indigenous people, but paradoxically limits them. Cowlshaw emphasises the lack of control Indigenous people feel they have over these images.

¹ COWLISHAW, Gillian, “Racial Positioning, Privilege and Public Debate (Whiteness and Knowing)”, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

9.1.1.1 Building a Personal Definition of Indigeneity

As I explained early in this thesis, the participants in this project were not raised in a consistent Indigenous cultural environment. Adam was the only participant who was brought up not only knowing about his heritage but also learning about Indigenous culture. He said, “I never had to actually become Aboriginal myself to some degree. My parents were making me into an Aboriginal person.” While this did not prevent Adam from being influenced by dominant discourses about Indigeneity (thus creating doubts about his legitimacy as Indigenous), it allowed him to integrate his Indigenous heritage into his identity from an early age. The rest of the participants had to build a personal relationship to their Indigenous heritage later in their lives, and most of them were more subject to the influence of dominant discourses from the public domain about Indigenous people and culture – the “plethora of images, stereotypes and discourses” described by Cowlshaw.

As I explained in chapter 4 and chapter 5, considering the ambivalent perception of Indigenous people in today’s Australia, the participants had to juggle with different representations of Indigenous people coming from the government, the media, school or university, their families, friends and colleagues, Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

As Bronwyn Carlson writes, the fact that someone knows they have Indigenous heritage does not necessarily mean that what being Indigenous entails is understood by them.

Those participants who had always known they were Aboriginal or had Aboriginal heritage nevertheless had diverse backgrounds and stories that shaped how they approached identity issues. These participants reveal how knowing one is Aboriginal does not necessarily carry with it clarity about what this means. The meaningfulness of Aboriginality is closely entwined with life circumstances and parental histories as well. A range of factors impact including where a person grew up, proximity to the extended Aboriginal family, whether the custodial parent was Aboriginal, which historical era they grew up in, and so on.^{2 3}

² CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

³ In her study of symbolic ethnicity in the United States, Mary C. Waters also explained that knowing about their heritages did not always mean her participants could define what it consisted in: “Identification with a

In the previous chapters, I analysed some of the factors influencing the participants' shifting understandings of what it is to be Indigenous. One of them was the difficulty several had of reconciling the idea of having Indigenous heritage with negative representations of Indigeneity.

Delphine So [your father] kind of separated..."We're Aboriginal, but not these Aboriginals?"

Casey *I guess that was the case. I guess that's how my dad sort of saw it. Well that's my interpretation of how, I think perhaps, he saw it. And I guess some of that rubbed off on me. Like those interpretations of... I don't know; it's hard to explain...that sort of image of the black man, or woman drinking, and all those sorts of negative things, because that's all I'd been conditioned to think about.*

What Casey experienced was an example of in-between-ness recurring in the participants' stories: although they knew they had Indigenous heritage, most participants had trouble, at some time or another, relating this knowledge to the dominant representations of Indigeneity they had acquired, especially when these were negative as in the examples Casey gives. The participants could thus feel Indigenous, and yet not really Indigenous.

The following story also reveals this ambivalence. While Adam points out that the perception of Indigeneity was more negative at the time when his father grew up, he also emphasises the part his mother's education played in helping him see his Indigenous heritage in a positive light. As Carlson explained, "parental histories" as well as attitudes towards Indigenous people and culture were determinant in the participants' vision of them.

particular ethnic group, even when it is quite vocal, does not necessarily mean that the individual has a strong idea of what that ethnicity entails. One can have a strong sense of identity without a specific idea of that identity meaning anything. And one's conception of the ethnic group does not necessarily come from personal experience anymore."

WATERS, Mary C., *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

Although the context of Waters' study is quite different from the Australian one, the concept of symbolic ethnicity can be a useful one here as the participants in this study also often grew up with representations rather than in direct contact with the Indigenous community. I will further explore this concept in chapter 10.

Adam *My mum was just so accepting: she wanted us to be Aboriginal. She thought it was a great thing – so I grew up with that idea. But my cousins grew up with the other idea of, “No, we’re something else, but not that.” So they’ve found it much more trouble to accept it, similar to the way that my father has. I speak to my cousin Jason about it and (...) he wants to be Aboriginal. You can hear it in some of the ways he speaks, that he likes the idea of being Aboriginal, but then you can also hear the problems that he has with it. There’s just this ambivalence. (...) So as much as my dad wants to accept that, he still struggles. My auntie is the same: she wants to accept it, but she struggles.*

Delphine Are you the first generation in your family who totally accepts it?

Adam *Yes. I think we are. (...) Me and my sister are totally accepting all this. I’m not trying to rewrite my history.*

As the example of Adam’s cousin shows, for the participants, claiming an Indigenous identity can be perceived as both attractive and unattractive depending on which representations they base their understanding on. For example, while Indigenous people’s special relationship to the land appealed to many participants, several mentioned representations of drunkenness as making them feel it is a problematic identity. In the same way, and as the second part of this thesis revealed, depending on the type of definitions of Indigeneity they used, the participants could either feel legitimate or not claiming their Indigenous heritage and identity. The variety and contradictions within representations of Indigeneity could leave the participants unable to decide whether or not they could consider themselves Indigenous. As I will show in 9.2.3, it was not always possible for the participants to move beyond this ambivalent ‘I am yet I am not’ feeling.

Another factor determining the participants’ understanding of Indigeneity is, as I explained in chapter 4, education – such as that provided by Adam’s mother, but also and mostly formal education. This was perceived by many to be a key to better understanding Indigeneity and to move beyond dominant stereotypical discourses which often proved too limiting.

Several participants mentioned their university experience (Indigenous studies, Indigenous centres, Indigenous programs) as fundamental in broadening their views about

what it means to be Indigenous in today's Australia. This is something Bronwyn Carlson also personally experienced.

University opened up a new world for me. I now understand what being 'touched by the tar brush' means. I now know that 'being' Aboriginal is more than just the colour of one's skin. I was fortunate enough to learn about Australia's history in a time and in a way that was inclusive of many voices, including Aboriginal voices. I met other Aboriginal people like me who had spent most of their lives outside both worlds – not quite White, not quite Black.⁴

The participants all displayed a rather subtle understanding of Indigeneity that they had acquired in the course of their university education, by personally learning about Indigenous culture, or by working with Indigenous people. In the previous chapters, I gave examples of how the participants took critical distance from stereotypical images and discourses about Indigeneity.

For example, Andrew recounted an incident while he was at boarding school. He explains that the incident was discussed in an unbiased way, which helped him understand both sides of the problem and reflect upon the reasons behind it.

Andrew *There was a large burning at the park next to our school, with gasoline, as a sign of resentment for the fact that one of the parks was named and glorified after someone who had gone through and created a mass killing [of Indigenous people]. (...) It was quite openly talked about and it was talked about quite well in the sense of looking at it from both sides so it wasn't kind of, "Oh [Aboriginal people] are setting a park on fire", but it was more like, "Why would they name a park after a guy that had committed these atrocities in an area that had a high Indigenous population?" It's kind of inflammatory in itself.*

In the same way, as an adult, Megan started questioning the binary representations of Indigenous people she had grown up with.

Megan *Well, is this real or not, the noble savage type, painted Aboriginal person you've got, and the one which is on the news which is like drunk or living in a run-down...or in Redfern or something?*

⁴ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal today?* Op. cit., pp. 10-11.

These qualified knowledges the participants acquired were added to the “plethora” of images available to them to construct their understanding of Indigeneity.

But it often seemed as if, rather than creating a more diverse picture of Indigeneity, learning about different ways of being Indigenous could also accentuate some of the participants’ state of hesitation.

As I showed in the second part of this thesis, because representations of Indigeneity are judged based on their authenticity or lack of it, rather than simply accepted as various expressions of identity, the participants were sometimes led to weighing which of the representations they used was that of ‘authentic’ Indigeneity. Are dark-skinned Indigenous people more authentic than fairer-skinned ones? Do urban and successful Indigenous people retain the same degree of Indigeneity as more traditional Indigenous people? As the previous chapters showed, the adoption by some Indigenous people themselves of such criteria added to the confusion about the definition of authentic Indigeneity. Therefore, the multiplicity of images and discourses Cowlishaw mentioned often produced hesitation rather than possibilities of defining Indigeneity more freely.

The fact that, at the end of the day, several participants did not feel legitimate enough to claim or even simply explore their Indigenous heritage reveals that, despite acquiring positive and varied accounts of Indigeneity, the participants could not always be completely free of the weight of dominant discourses presenting Indigenous people and culture in limited and old-fashioned ways.

This final example from Josh illustrates many participants’ hesitation about how to define Indigenous people. While the vast majority of the participants were able to distance themselves from dominant stereotypes such as the ones studied in the second part of this thesis, they also kept coming back to these images as if they could not help using them as references pointing to what is seen as authentic Indigeneity.

Josh *[If I hadn’t known someone on the Council who could help me get a certificate of Aboriginality], I wouldn’t have tried to prove it, I don’t think, no. (...) I don’t have the disadvantages that Indigenous people have. (...) And I’m not saying that to be*

Aboriginal, you have to be disadvantaged.

Here Josh positions himself as not Indigenous enough because he is not disadvantaged, yet he immediately corrects himself, as he knows that the representation of Indigenous people as necessarily disadvantaged is erroneous.

9.1.1.2 The Weight of Others' Definitions

9.1.1.2.1 Being Categorised

The second point raised by Cowlshaw's remark is that Indigenous people feel they have little control over the definition of their identities: "they are already known to others". This feeling was very often echoed by the participants. The first two parts of this thesis have outlined the weight of dominant discourses delineating Indigenous identity throughout history and in today's Australia. Consequently, the participants' claim to Indigeneity was never easily accepted by others, but constantly measured up against the host of images produced about Indigenous people.

Even in Western societies where a focus is placed on the individual; even from a postmodern point of view on identity which emphasises personal choice,⁵ identities do not only ever belong to the individual. As Richard Jenkins explains,

What people think about us is no less important than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough to assert an identity. That identity must also be validated (or not) by those with whom we have dealings. (...) Not only do we identify ourselves, but we also identify others and are identified by them in turn, in the internal-external dialectic between self-image and public image.⁶

Jenkins' remark about identity takes particular significance in the case of Indigenous identities. The previous chapters have revealed how scrutinised these are in Australian

⁵ See Stuart Hall's definition of postmodern identity in chapter 10.

⁶ JENKINS, Richard, *Social Identity*, London, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 21-22.

society. The participants were well-aware of this, and several felt that by claiming their Indigenous heritage, other aspects of their identities may be eclipsed. Some feared that the way people saw them would change and that they would only focus on their Indigeneity.

This is what Ben expressed.

Ben *I'm somewhat a modest person and I feel if I categorised myself as an Indigenous person, people would treat me differently to how I'm treated now.*

To Ben, claiming his Indigenous heritage would be synonymous with labelling himself as Indigenous only, in too visible a way. Probably because of the host of representations attached to Indigeneity, Ben cannot envisage being Indigenous as a 'neutral' identity, and feels that claiming his heritage would bring him too much unwanted spotlight.

Adam also pointed out that claiming an Indigenous identity implied that people would always form an opinion about him. He added that this absence of control over his identity was felt even more acutely because his physical appearance did not match people's expectations about Indigenous people.

Adam *It's a liminal identity and you have no control over yourself. It's completely set by the outside world. And I don't actually have any grasp of it. In the end, all I can do is tell myself that that's how I feel, that that's who I am. (...) The word liminality is perfect for it. I think that is the space where white Aborigines sit in – a liminal space that is never accepted by the other side.*

The fear Ben had of being categorised is here echoed by Adam who feels claiming Indigeneity when not fitting the definition of the 'authentic' Indigenous person means being relegated to an in-between space, as the emphasis on "liminality" shows. He goes on to explain that the rejection from society he mentioned can come from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities.

This is the thing that makes it so bloody hard, because [racism] never [comes from] one side; it's always both sides. When I say I have a foot in both worlds, it's literal. A foot in both worlds, but a space in none. Both sides consider that identity to be a problem.

Claiming an Indigenous identity in Australian society places someone in a vulnerable position, since both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities feel they have to monitor this identity. Adam points out that people who do not seem to fit the deep-seated criteria of Indigeneity are even more clearly placed in an in-between position since they can be considered unfit both as 'white' and Indigenous.

9.1.1.2.2 The Right to Know and Judge

As I mentioned, it seems very hard for the claiming of an Indigenous identity to be seen as a neutral⁷ act in Australian society. As examples from the participants' discourses show, this is due to the right many people seem to give themselves to judge someone claiming to be Indigenous. Diverse examples from the previous chapters made clear that this happened in all spheres and levels of society. In chapter 3, I explained Ghassan Hage's theory that 'white' Australians act as "governors of the nation",⁸ judging who has the right or not to belong to it. Although Hage's theory is applied to "Anglo-Ethnic" relationships rather than to "White-Aboriginal"⁹ ones, I found it particularly useful to make sense of some of the participants' experiences.

Adam here comes back to the lack of control he has over his identity and compares the level of interest his Indigenous heritage attracts compared to his other backgrounds.

Adam *I don't get to decide my identity. I tell someone, and straight away, all these images in their minds of who I am and what I am. (...) No one questions that I'm an Irish Australian. No one questions that I'm a Scottish Australian. No one questions that I'm French. Any of those things. I can be all of them: not a single problem. But if I say that I'm Aboriginal Australian: problems straight away. And it's just so much*

⁷ I am not sure that any identity could be described as completely 'neutral'. What I mean by this is that some identities are considered un-problematic in given societies. This is the case of the Anglo-Celtic identity in Australia, but not that of the Indigenous identity. Casey was one participant who pointed this out and tried to challenge it, as the following example shows:

"I had an interesting conversation with a couple of police a few months back, and I was trying to tell them that I was Aboriginal, and they were, "Right, right, yeah, ok." And I asked them, "Well, what are you?" because I could tell they had the thickest English accent possible. "What are you?" "Well, we're Australians." I was like, "Are you sure? You don't sound like it." That flipping thing where you question my identity, I'll question yours too."

⁸ HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

explanations, just so much effort.

"Oh, so did you grow up in an Aboriginal family? Oh, you don't know anything about Aboriginal..." It's all these probing questions which are meant to establish whether I'm truly an Aboriginal person. And to me, that's not their place. How dare you? (...) I wouldn't ask you questions about your English heritage, or try to make you prove that you know enough about cricket to be an English person! I don't understand how that's valid, but that is how it works.

I don't have to convince you that I'm Aboriginal, I just am. It's not your place to decide whether I am, but – as we've just discussed – it really is, and this is the actual problem with this identity, that it actually is their place to decide.

As I wrote, identities are composed of an individual's perception of who they are and of the validation or rejection of this perception by others. However, as Adam's example shows, some identities are less subject to examination than others. While Anglo-Celtic and European heritages and identities are easily accepted in Australian society, Indigenous identities must meet a set of defined criteria to be validated by others. However, this set of criteria is less than clear and often subject to contradictions.

An example of this is provided by Vanessa.

Vanessa *I've had a few [negative reactions from Indigenous people] where they're just like, "Ah... Is she an Indigenous? Can she prove it?" That kind of thing which is just quite...in your face. And you're like, "Oh, I have to prove who I am? Ok. Here's the paperwork." And they're like, "Oh, I guess that doesn't make you Indigenous."*

While a certificate of Aboriginality will be valid evidence for some Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – especially in official spheres – it may not be considered proof of authentic Indigeneity by others. Here, it is implied that a piece of paper proving Indigenous descent is no evidence that Vanessa has 'lived experience' as an Indigenous person.

Thus, the participants could be caught in-between different definitions of Indigeneity, and in-between their personal understanding of their heritage and identity, and others' understanding of it. Not having their identity validated by others could prevent it from being perceived as stable, and force the participants to inhabit a marginal space.

For a few participants, the disclosure of their Indigenous heritage went beyond mere questioning. Vanessa told me that she and her brother had lost several non-Indigenous friends over the decision to embrace their Indigenous heritage and identify as Indigenous.

Vanessa *We lost two thirds of our friends [in Adelaide]. My brother got death threats. (...) It would have been... He was 18, and I was 17, so...(...) 2003-2004? (...) I told [my friends] before I left, because I was having a farewell, because I was leaving for America. (...) And then I think my brother told all of his friends first, and because it's such a small school, it got down to my friends before I even had an opportunity, and yeah, I think I had a third of people come to my farewell.*

Delphine What did your friends tell you?

Vanessa *They said, "Oh, you tried to hide it from us because, you know, you're worse than us." They just didn't really have...a real reason...They just knew they didn't like it. (...) I would talk to friends who had been my friends since grade 2 and they were just like, "No, I don't want to be your friend anymore." A lot of them were like, "Oh, you lied. You lied to us."*

Again, Vanessa's friends' reaction exemplifies the idea that non-Indigenous Australians feel they have a right to know about someone's heritage. Vanessa's comment shows that her friends believed that having Indigenous heritage is something you are obliged to disclose. It seems they believed Vanessa's Torres Strait Islander heritage should have been public knowledge. Her friends' comment is almost reminiscent of a time when Indigenous heritage was considered a taint on someone's blood and therefore something Indigenous people should own up to so that non-Indigenous people could choose not to socialise with them if they wished. It is quite obvious from the participants' experiences that the persistence of the right some non-Indigenous Australians – but also Indigenous people – give themselves to welcome or reject Indigenous people, strongly impacts the participants' control over their heritage, and therefore their ability to identify.

As a result of this state of things, the participants' personal understanding of their identity is jeopardised. As Adam's example shows, the participants feel caught in-between their personal understanding of their identity – in his case, a positive one transmitted by

his mother – and the understanding and judgement of their identity made by others – sometimes positive, sometimes negative, but rarely neutral or indifferent.

Adam thus concluded:

Adam *It just becomes harder and harder to bother with [my Indigenous identity], I guess. (...) All you can do is things like what my mum did, which is to try and take back that power.*

9.1.1.2.3 'Black' or 'White'

Because of the judgements often passed on people claiming an Indigenous identity, the participants, as Ben expressed earlier, feared being categorised. Beside losing some control over their self-identification, the participants also had to learn to navigate the different groups they mixed with. I have already mentioned this particular in-between position, in chapter 6 for example, with the example of Andrew wondering whether he should let jokes about Indigenous people “slide” or declare he is Indigenous himself. The following stories illustrate the participants’ constant need to evaluate the consequences of disclosing their heritage.

Kate, like Ben, feared that declaring her Indigenous heritage at work would change her status.

Kate *I'm just worried that people would start treating me differently. (...) You know, feeling like they couldn't talk to me because I'm Indigenous, or they have to start, I guess changing the way that they talk to me or what we do with each other... like, watching more what they would say, or thinking that maybe, you know, I would feed different things back to my Indigenous co-workers and that sort of thing.*

In the same way, Michelle explained that depending on the group of people she is with, she can feel confident talking about her Indigenous heritage or not.

Michelle *If I was in a group of people I knew were university friends that were empathetic towards the Aboriginal cause and reconciliation, I had no problems telling them. If I was amongst a group of people at a town barbecue, or at the pub with those sorts*

of people, I wouldn't. Because they would look down upon you differently; they'd treat you differently or they'd make jokes about it.

While Kate seems to fear that political correctness would prevent her non-Indigenous co-workers from talking to her as freely as they normally do, Michelle fears outright discrimination from her hometown inhabitants whom she described as rather racist. However, what both stories reveal is what Michelle called “a line in the sand between Aborigines and ‘white’ Australians”, but also a separation between groups of people for whom being Indigenous is regarded as unproblematic, and others who see Indigenous people in a negative way. Thus, the dichotomy between black – and black-friendly – and ‘white’ Australia makes it difficult for people in-between to ever find a stable place in society.

Casey's following story, like Vanessa's before, shows that an in-between stance seems difficult to maintain.

Casey *I guess the few white mates I had when I started uni...they don't want to sort of know me, I guess because they don't understand why someone with my colour of skin would want to identify as being Aboriginal. So it's sort of like...they don't agree with any of the politics I believe in, or any of that sort of stuff.*

The impossibility of in-between-ness is something I will further explore in 9.3.

9.1.2 Innate or Constructed

As I explained in the previous section, it is difficult in today's Australia to avoid considering Indigenous identity outside of the authentic/inauthentic framework. Within this framework, not only does the multitude of definitions make it difficult for the participants to decide which of these represent ‘authentic’ Indigeneity, it is also the fact that these definitions are based on two different – and often contradictory – ways of understanding identity.

On the one hand, as I have already mentioned in the previous chapters, it is common to see Indigenous identity presented in essential terms. For example, in 5.2.1, I showed how

the relationship Indigenous people have with the land is described as an essential part of the Indigenous experience which distinguishes Indigenous people from non-Indigenous Australians. Aileen Moreton-Robinson thus described this relationship: “Our ontological relationship to land, the ways that country is constitutive of us, and therefore the inalienable nature of our relation to land, marks a radical, indeed incommensurable, difference between us and the non-Indigenous.”¹⁰ In Chapter 5, Michelle herself described her relationship with the Murray river as “an essential part” of herself. Thus, some elements constitutive of the Indigenous identity are presented as innate: an Indigenous person will be born with a special relationship to the Australian land while a non-Indigenous person will not.

On the other hand, ‘lived experience’ and being involved in the community are also presented as important elements of the Indigenous identity. This is something set out in chapter 8. Therefore, an Indigenous identity is both presented as innate in several ways, but also as necessarily constructed. In this section, I will study how the participants relate to both perceptions of identity and how this combination often increases the feeling of in-between-ness they experience.

9.1.2.1 Identity As an Essence

The importance of essentialism in the presentation of Indigenous culture has been an important topic of discussion in academia. In a post-colonial society which, for many years, used ideas of race, of biologically-determined essences in order to discriminate against particular groups – such as Indigenous people – the use, today, of essential criteria to describe an identity is seen by several commentators as problematic.¹¹ Others, however, also point out that a certain degree of essentialising is unavoidable when putting identities

¹⁰ MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, quoted in DUDGEON, Pat, WRIGHT, Michael, PARADIES, Yin, GARVEY, Darren, WALKER, Iain, “The Social, Cultural and Historical Context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians” in DUDGEON, Pat, MILROY, Helen, WALKER, Roz (eds) *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practices*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹¹ I will come back to this debate in detail in 9.3.2.1.

into words. For example, as he debates the use of references to the past in forming coherent Indigenous identities, Indigenous academic Ian Anderson writes,

Tasmanian Aboriginal identities are (...) similar to those of all other people. It is a set of meanings through which we negotiate both coherence and change. In fact, it is not essentialism per se which is the problem. The very act of naming is an essentialising process. (...) So we might expect that in forming identities Aboriginal people may 'essentialise'.¹²

Other theorists of identity such as Alberto Melucci do not consider essentialism to be outdated but on the contrary something necessary to create stable identities in a world where postmodern, fragmented visions of identity prevail.

Th[e] reawakening of primary identities, this need to anchor oneself to something essential which is permanent and has visible confines, lies at the basis of many contemporary collective phenomena. Ethnic or geographical identification, the attachment to traditional culture, express the attempt to resist the dissolution of identity as an essence.¹³

It was not uncommon for the participants themselves to refer to their identities in essential terms. When asked if and why they felt Australian, several of them cited a list of qualities which, according to them, were quintessentially Australian. The participants described themselves and Australians as people “lik[ing] sport”, making “racist jokes”, “laid back and down-to-earth”, and “accepting”. In the same way, as was demonstrated in previous chapters, the participants also attributed common characteristics to Indigenous people. For example, Michelle said she enjoyed the fact that Indigenous people were not focused on material possessions.

However, considering that most participants had trouble feeling completely legitimate as Indigenous, they only rarely associated themselves with essential characteristics perceived as belonging to Indigenous people. When this happened, the remarks were less

¹² ANDERSON, Ian, “I, the ‘Hybrid’ Aborigine: Film and Representation”, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹³ MELUCCI, Alberto, “Identity and Difference in a Globalized World” in WERBNER, Pnina, MODOOD, Tariq (eds), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 198.

the result of a reflection on their identity than passing comments, as the following extracts reveal.

Josh *I knew (...) a young bloke running the Indigenous cadetship program (...), and it wasn't until I really started to get to know him that I realised, in some ways, I am quite Indigenous in that (...) ...he never once gave you a piece of advice, but he'd always tell you a story that is somehow related to it, and I know that I do that a lot. I'll never give you a straight answer, but I will tell you some, perhaps, completely unrelated story to get my point across, and I do that a lot.*

Overall, Josh positioned himself more on the 'white' side than on the Indigenous one. He said he was not sure whether or not he was truly interested in his heritage or if he wanted to know more about it at this stage in his life. Moreover, he seemed to think that not having been raised Indigenous made it difficult for him to now claim this heritage. For example, he said,

Josh *So another bloke working at the Department of Environment was Indigenous, and he was from the same mob as me, and he went through initiation. So I suppose I was like, "Oh, well, I never grew up out there. I'll never be part of that."*

However, in the first extract, he casually associates his propensity to tell long stories to his Indigenous heritage. Since Josh clearly states elsewhere that he was not raised Indigenous, it can be deduced that in his eyes, this trait is not constructed but originates in biology. It is part of an inheritance from his Indigenous ancestors. This may not be the only way Josh would perceive it: again, I believe most people would, at one point or another, talk about their identities in essential ways. As Anderson and Melucci explained, essentialism is used to bring coherence and stability to how we see ourselves and communicate it to others. However, the fact that Josh was not raised Indigenous yet feels Indigenous in some ways points to a belief that Indigenous identity is not only learnt but also genetically inherited.

I asked Josh about the contradiction in his feelings about his heritage.

Delphine So...You're kind of saying that you do feel Indigenous in some ways.

Josh *In some ways, yeah!*

Delphine It's really confused, right? It seems like you...

Josh *Like I'm confused. Yeah, I guess so.*

The confusion, in this case, lies not only in Josh's interest in or indifference to his Indigenous heritage, but also in what the Indigenous identity consists in, and how it comes to be.

The same confusion is apparent in Adam's stories.

Adam *So [I worked in this job in] 2001, I think. And while I was doing that, I decided I needed to do something else. I'm a bit of a...such an Aboriginal person, going walkabout!*

My parents always said that I was definitely Aboriginal because I couldn't help myself; I would give stuff away; I would just share... I don't think about it. I would do things like give a kid at school my jumper because he was cold. But that was just how we were brought up to do that.

Both Josh and Adam seem influenced by so-called typical Indigenous characteristics: storytelling, going walkabout or the idea of "caring and sharing".¹⁴ Adam's parents describe the fact that their son did not care much for material possession as an essential characteristic inherited from his Indigenous ancestors rather than as something they taught him. Adam, however, seems to give this a second thought and adds that this tendency may indeed come from his parents' education rather than from his Indigenous genes. As in Josh's case, however, there seems to be a certain degree of confusion as to what in Indigenous identity is inherited and what is constructed. However, this may not be confusion so much as the use of two different discourses circulating in Australian society,

¹⁴ I mentioned this characteristic in 8.4. Kevin Keffe includes it in a list of inherited Indigenous cultural traits: "The elements that make up this inherited culture can be listed and defined. (...) A belief in a spiritual connection with the land (...) the belief in the value of "caring and sharing", consensus decision making, the belief in the persistence of kin oriented networks that underpin racial behaviour in all parts of Australia and a certain quality of essence identified with Aboriginal blood. (...) These elements are used to define the commonality of Aboriginal culture as it has been inherited by every person of Aboriginal descent." KEEFFE, Kevin, "Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence", *op. cit.*, p. 69.

those of nature and culture, on which the participants draw at different times to explain different aspects of their identities.

9.1.2.1.1 Empowering Essentialism?

The previous examples illustrated the impact of essential discourses about Indigenous identity, which are still dominant in Australian society, both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. As Mitchell Rolls writes,

There remains popular support for the idea that the 'essence' of Aboriginality is to be found within this heritage. (...) Aborigines claim that a certain uniqueness arises from this biological heritage and demand this 'uniqueness' be recognised in several ways.¹⁵

It was noted that such essential representations exist within popular discourses. Yet it is also not uncommon to find descriptions of inherent characteristics of Indigenous identity in academic papers predominantly written by Indigenous people, or in official publications (such as the government-funded document I quoted in 9.2.2 to evoke Indigenous people and their link to the Australian land). Consequently, it can be said that an essential understanding of Indigenous identity is, to a certain extent at least, officially and academically sanctioned.

For example, Indigenous academics Pat Dudgeon and Darlene Oxenham wrote about the concept of "kindredness".

We believe that kindredness is an implicit depth of feeling/spirituality which transcends our cultural diversity and contributes to the continuing unification of aboriginal people. It is a feeling that is specific to Aborigines. It is a shared feeling in the course of interaction, and a form of recognition of other Aborigines. (...) Whenever aborigines see other unfamiliar aboriginal people they always notice them and focus upon them. Usually contact is made; a brief meeting of the eyes and an acknowledgement is given. Upon acknowledgement

¹⁵ ROLLS, Mitchell, "The Meaninglessness of Aboriginal Cultures", *Balay: Culture, Law and Colonialism*, Vol.2, No. 1, 2001, p. 8.

a feeling is shared (kindredness). (...) Kindredness is our unity. It cuts across and ties together Aboriginal diversity.¹⁶

Dudgeon and Oxenham describe Indigenous identity in essential terms since they mention a feeling shared by all Indigenous people, regardless of their differences, and exclude non-Indigenous people from it. From the constructionist point of view adopted in this thesis, such a statement seems difficult to accept: across this thesis, I have attempted to establish that Indigeneity is a construct and that there is not one, but many Indigeneities. However, in this section, I am interested in the effects that such essentialist discourses can have on the participants.

As we saw, Josh and Adam were two participants who, although at times doubted their right to call themselves Indigenous, could relate to essential qualities attributed to Indigenous people. The feeling of “kindredness” described by Dudgeon and Oxenham is a quality which can be linked to one of Josh’s experiences.

As a boy, Josh went on a trip with his family to visit the Indigenous community where they came from, after his father had carried out genealogical research about their Indigenous heritage.

Josh *The only reason we know about my grandmother’s heritage is because her father was a famous Aboriginal shearer. So everybody knew about him. And when we were children, we went out to the missions where the traditional country was, and where the fish traps and things were –so basically where the tribe came from – and, well, I was told that I was like him, in personality and looks.*

Josh recounted this story to me twice, suggesting that it left its mark on him. At the time, Josh explained, he was too young to realise what was happening. However, the way he narrated the event indicated that in hindsight, he saw this as marking a form of recognition of him from the Indigenous community which later gave him some degree of legitimacy in claiming his heritage at other times in his life. This recognition may have been interpreted by Josh as meaning that in spite of having a fair skin, red hair, and an Irish last name, his

¹⁶ DUDGEON, Pat, OXENHAM, Darlene, *The Complexity of Aboriginal Diversity: Identity and Kindredness*, St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, 1990, p. 37.

Indigenous family could accept him within their midst. Their acceptance was not only based on looks, however, as Josh said he was told he resembled his ancestor “in personality”. This may be linked to the feeling of “kindredness” described above.

Therefore, essential descriptions of Indigenous characteristics could sometimes be taken up by the participants and help them feel more legitimate as Indigenous. Both Josh’s and Adam’s stories have shown how they could relate to essential discourses about Indigenous identity.

In an article studying Indigenous identity in an urban environment (south-western Sydney), Yuriko Yamanouchi explains the difference between the genealogical and relational components of Indigenous identity.¹⁷ These two terms correspond to what I have been outlining in this section: on the one hand, Indigeneity is presented as innate, and on the other as constructed. In her article, Yamanouchi focuses on the construction of relationships with kin and community.

The genealogical component Yamanouchi describes could be an empowering one for the participants in this project. Indeed, as explained in chapter 7, the participants’ first and sometimes only link with their Indigeneity was the past. Having Indigenous ancestors was an undeniable link to Indigeneity, and a starting point towards identification. The participants could find legitimacy in the essentialist discourse about blood commonly used by some Indigenous people and here explained by Kevin Keffe.

Even if you’ve got one drop of Aboriginal blood, you’re Aboriginal all the way through: in statements about Aboriginality, a claim for an inherent, genetic element of persistence constantly recurs. It stems from a belief in the continuity of a distinct racial identity that has persisted despite enormous change in the face of colonisation, domination and extensive intermarriage.¹⁸

Both Adam and Casey were confronted with people questioning the percentage of Indigenous blood they had. As Adam says, blood and ideas of percentage through which

¹⁷ YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, “Managing ‘Aboriginal Selves’ in South-Western Sydney”, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ KEEFFE, Kevin, “Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence”, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Indigenous people used to be defined (see 9.3.1) are tools that are still used by non-Indigenous Australians to evaluate whether a person is Indigenous or not.

Adam and Casey explain how they managed to overcome doubts about their right to call themselves Indigenous with the help of the 'one-drop' or 'you're either black or you're not' discourses.

Adam *People would always ask me – and it's something that I don't want to go into anymore – "What percentage is your grandmother?" And the reason I don't want to answer the question is because it's an irrelevant question. But I want to say it for the tape because it is something that we get asked so often, and it's quite an offensive question. It's basically saying, "You're too white to be Aboriginal." That's it. That's essentially what the question says. (...) And my mum, again, gave me an argument to help. Her thing was, "No, that's not how it works in the Aboriginal community. You're an Aboriginal or you're not. That's how it is."*

Casey *I remember ask[ing] my dad one time, "How can I be Aboriginal? Look at my skin." He was like, "Doesn't matter what percentage you are. If you're black, you're black."*

So if an Anaiwan man went and married a woman from the Gamilaroi tribe, the child would still be 100 percent Gamilaroi, and 100 percent Anaiwan. He'd still be 100 percent of that blood. Like, in this country, pre-colonisation, we were already multicultural. There were 500, 600 different nations with individual languages, individual cultures, individual legal systems, individual government structures, so it makes no difference whether we marry – or have a child with – a white person, or an Asian person, or German, or whatever it is, or a person from another tribe, so you're still 100 percent Anaiwan.

Casey's second extract reveals his belief that Indigenous blood and identity cannot be diluted and that, therefore, mixed Indigenous identities do not exist.

The genealogical understanding of Indigeneity could help the participants find the legitimacy they lacked to claim their heritage. According to essentialist discourses, in spite of their European appearance and lack of Indigenous upbringing, the Indigenous blood flowing in mixed-heritage Indigenous people's veins makes them Indigenous all the way through.

However, there were several instances in which the description of Indigenous characteristics as innate made the participants doubt they could identify as Indigenous. This was due to several reasons.

First, as was argued in the second part of this thesis, the participants relied heavily on non-Indigenous dominant discourses about Indigeneity (sometimes taken up by Indigenous people) also based on essential definitions of Indigenous people. When they did not fit these essential descriptions, the participants felt less legitimate claiming their heritage.

The following quote from Andrew reveals that he is at times caught in-between his personal vision of his identity, and the “quintessential” one ‘white’ Australia has of Indigenous people.

Andrew *I’m proud of it, but at the same time...I don’t fit into the...the quintessential norm, so to speak, like the idea of, or the white Australian idea of [Indigenous people].*

A second limit was the participants’ reluctance to ‘benefit’ from positive essential Indigenous characteristics while having lived ‘white’ all their lives. For example, Michelle was particularly hesitant in embracing cultural traditions – even feeling that it was slightly ridiculous to dream about her totem animal. She felt as if she was “ripping [Indigenous people] off”. The participants’ position in-between ‘white’ and non-Indigenous cultures often affected their confidence in their right to identify or even to embrace their heritage.

A third and final limit to the power of the essentialist vision of Indigenous identity lay in how the participants distanced themselves from it. Earlier, Adam wondered whether he had inherited his tendency to give away his possession from his Indigenous ancestors, or if it was the result of his upbringing. In the same way, Josh questioned how genuine his feeling of being linked to the land could be (also see 5.2.1.2).

Delphine You feel very Australian, and you like living here. Have you ever thought that your attachment to the land is connected to you being Aboriginal?

Josh *Yeah definitely. My mother has told me the same thing. However, why do I feel like that but not my siblings? Other white Australians probably feel the same way. (...) I guess I feel like that because I've always been here.*

The question raised by Josh stems from two competing understandings of identity and of belonging analysed in this section.

While several participants liked the idea that they could have inherited the positive essential characteristics described as being the preserve of Indigenous people, most of them still considered that being Indigenous meant having received an Indigenous upbringing and having 'lived experience' as an Indigenous person.

9.1.2.2 Identity As a Construction

Cultures and identities are not an "accomplished fact". It's not because you claim you're Aboriginal that you'll find within yourself an "accomplished 'true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'". Nevertheless, it is commonplace for this mystic 'true' Aboriginal self to be invoked as *a*, if not *the* bulwark of authenticity.¹⁹

As I stated, the participants in this study distanced themselves from essentialist discourses about Indigeneity. Overall then, despite an admitted attraction for such aspects of Indigeneity as the millennial and spiritual relationship to the land or the absence of the Western focus on material goods, the participants' actions fitted with Rolls' remark about the way cultures and identities are formed. Most participants considered that the fact that they had not received an Indigenous education and were not involved in their Indigenous community did not give them the right to fully embrace their heritage and identify as Indigenous. In emphasising culture as something that is learnt, and relationships as something built across the years, the participants adhered to a more relational vision of Indigeneity.

¹⁹ ROLLS, Mitchell, "The Meaninglessness of Aboriginal Cultures", *op. cit.*, p. 12.

For example, I asked Megan whether she would consider asking for a certificate of Indigeneity.

Megan *No, well, if through the process of getting it, you reconnected with people, the connection would give you the legitimacy, but not the certificate, if that makes sense. And then once you've got this connection, you may feel like, "I don't even want the certificate. I just wanted to meet those people."*

Megan clearly states here that the relational aspect of the Indigenous identity is what matters most. Being able to prove she has Indigenous ancestors would not make her feel Indigenous; knowing her extended family would.

The relational aspect of Indigeneity was what the participants considered most fundamental. It was also something which, in most cases, was much more difficult to relate to than the genealogical component since the participants, for the most part, had not grown up knowing their communities.

For example, Adina expressed her uneasiness at the thought of going to meet her extended family.

Adina *Being in that actual group [the community where her family comes from] where they go generations back, and it's been passed on from one person to another, I can imagine how it would be... Well it's kind of like a sister-in-law: you don't like pretending she's part of your family, just because she married your brother or something. Well, not really. You haven't been here and experienced everything that we've had to offer, or grown up, or know the in-jokes.*

Although Adina mentions the idea of "passing on" knowledge, it is not in a biological way. Indeed, the comparison with a new member entering a family clarifies her meaning: Adina believes she would feel as if she belonged to her community if she had been able to grow up among her extended family, to experience life with them.

Understanding culture and identity as constructed rather than inherent was the main reason stopping the participants from calling themselves Indigenous. In spite of discourses presenting blood – one drop of it – as enough to be Indigenous, the participants were also

well aware of the ‘obligations’ (see 8.4) expected from anyone officially identifying as Indigenous. Therefore, they often chose to identify based not on their racial but on their cultural background.

This is something Peter Aspinall and Miri Song noticed in their study of mixed-heritage people in Britain. They noticed that several of their participants identified as ‘white’ in spite of the common assumption that having ‘black’ heritage means you will identify as such.²⁰

Why do a substantial proportion of non-Black mixed respondents choose ‘White’ or a European national identity? (...) The answers reveal very strongly that the context of a person’s upbringing was very important to those selecting White or a commensurate national identity.²¹ (...) Parental influence and upbringing, (...) the ethnic composition of one’s neighbourhood, and social networks were also fundamental in shaping the choice of ‘White’ or a term implying a European nationality. Lara, who had a Black African father and White English mother, and who grew up in a predominantly White town in the North, explained in her interview, “I would say predominantly White background. Yeah, cos (...) it’s been predominantly a White upbringing, White city culture, the way I dress, the people I hang around with, things I eat, the places I go to, predominantly White I suppose.”

Aspinall and Song’s findings are consistent with the answers given by most of the participants in this study. Those who identified as ‘white’ or as ‘Australian’ did so because they had lived all their lives in Australia and identified with values they saw as Australian – and we saw in chapter 3 that it is the ‘white’ Anglo-Celtic culture which dominates in Australia. As Miriam said, “Aboriginal is not necessarily Australia. It is, but it’s separate. It’s something different”.

²⁰ As they write, “Lara’s choice of White is rather exceptional, since, as discussed below, there are strong societal norms which tend to prohibit Black/White people from claiming a White identification or allegiance.” ASPINALL, Peter, SONG, Miri, *Mixed Race Identities*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²¹ In the case of Aspinall and Song’s study, these could be “British”, “English”, “Italian” etc.

9.1.2.3 Innate and/or Constructed: Paradox and Confusion

Those people might have descent but they may not have been brought up – whatever this means – in an Aboriginal way. Does that mean that they are not actually Aboriginal? (...) What constitutes Aboriginality? (...) What is the link between identity and culture?²²

The participants' confusion over the meaning of identity was a result of a more general confusion within the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities about which elements of Indigenous identity should prevail in its definition. This is the issue Darlene Oxenham mentions in the quote above.

The participants' reliance on two different understandings of Indigeneity – both genealogical and relational, innate and constructed – was confusing at times. The choice of the vision they adhered to could affect their ability to identify or not.

Keeffe writes about this ambivalent vision of Indigeneity in Australia.

Despite a common inheritance, there is still a perceived need to realise this element in practice. Racial origin gives a right of access to a culture that still must be learned in order to make it a reality for an individual. (...) The contradiction between the notion of an inherited culture and the need to master its contents is one of the essential dilemmas of the construction of Aboriginality.²³

Both components – inheritance and construction – are present in the official definition of Aboriginality used by the Australian government and recognised by most Indigenous people: "An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he [or she] lives."²⁴ While the first element of the definition focuses on a genealogical understanding of Indigeneity, the second criterion

²² OXENHAM, Darlene in OXENHAM, Darlene *et al.*, *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts'n'All*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²³ KEEFFE, Kevin, "Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence", *op. cit.*, p. 69.

²⁴ "Kinship and Identity: Legal definitions of Aboriginality", *Australian Government-Australian Law Reform Commission* website, <http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/36-kinship-and-identity/legal-definitions-aboriginality>, accessed on 12 November 2016.

emphasises self-identification, and the third the relational dimension of Indigeneity. Without any links with one's community, it can be difficult to have one's heritage recognised and therefore to get a certificate of Aboriginality. However, the first component of the definition here refers to ancestry, something the participants could all find evidence of. But in Keeffe's analysis, "common inheritance" goes beyond the presence of Indigenous ancestry. Keeffe points to the discourse presenting Indigenous culture as innate, transmitted directly through blood.

Rolls explains that confusion can stem from the understanding of culture as innate described by Keeffe, and which Rolls finds unorthodox.

The orthodox understanding that culture is learned (...) comes under challenge. Culture, like phenotype is treated as if it too is innate. Under the one-drop rule, indigenous (and/or black) descent is held to imbue one with, or however one access to, a range of inherent values and qualities.²⁵

Despite this assertion, culture was something the vast majority of the participants did not feel they had inherited. If, as this discourse presents it, culture is innate, then the participants should possess it. Feeling that they did not, they returned to an understanding of culture as constructed, and of identity as based on culture.

The following extracts from Michelle's interview show how the participants have to navigate these two ways of conceptualising Indigenous identity:

Michelle *You've got a lot of people in Australia that kind of criticise, "Oh, every second person in Australia is Aborigine cause they'll all say, "Oh, I'm Aborigine". It's actually probably true: a lot of them do have Aboriginal heritage, but who's the justified Aboriginal, and who's not? There's no way of measuring it as such.*

I would never feel confident enough to actually integrate the community, because you feel like (...) ...you don't have the right to be Aborigine. (...) Because you can't actually prove that you're Aborigine. You can't... you don't actually have any knowledge of the language. You don't participate in what they do culturally. (...) I'd be scared. It's almost like going into a closed group. (...) I don't know, it's hard to explain, but I just would feel uncomfortable going to approach a group, scared

²⁵ ROLLS, Mitchell, "The Changing Politics of Miscegenation", *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 5, 2009, p. 68.

of rejection a little bit as well – like I was saying earlier about not having any solid proof as such – that someone might actually say, "No, you're not welcome."

In the first extract, Michelle explains people criticising newcomers as a rejection of a genealogical understanding of identity only. According to her, it is not enough to have Indigenous descent, the first criterion of the official definition. She further explains her point of view on Indigenous identity in the second extract: "the right to be Aborigine" has to be proven. In the case of Michelle, this actually refers both to descent and culture. Michelle's mother does not want to confirm her late husband's Indigenous heritage and Michelle feels it is now very difficult to undertake research and get a certificate of Aboriginality. On the other hand, as she explains, such proof can only be granted to someone who can also prove their Indigeneity culturally, by speaking a traditional language or by being involved in the community. The cultural dimension seems more important than the genealogical one.

Thus, in the end, the relational aspect of Indigenous identity matters more to the participants than the genealogical one. Above all, most of the participants believe that to be Indigenous is to be culturally so, and that culture is less inherent than learnt. This vision of identity extends to the participants' understanding of Australian-ness: as Josh and Andrew explain, it is because they grew up in Australia that they feel Australian.

However, as Keeffe's comment pointed out, while the participants may see culture as a construct, it is not always treated as such in Australian society. Indigenous commentators who mentioned kindredness or the incommensurable difference in ways of relating to the Australian land write as if such characteristics were inherent to anyone born Indigenous, or at least raised as such.

This idea that Indigenous culture is a construct, but that it is not possible to learn it as an adult was present in some of the participants' discourses. Therefore, in some of their reflections, they adopted a position in the middle, between essentialism and constructionism.

Adina is someone who strongly defended her right to become Indigenous as an adult since she was not told about her origins as a child. She is very enthusiastic about learning. At the same time, she kept comparing her position to that of her Indigenous friend, and to that of her son who were both allowed to grow up knowing that they are Indigenous.

Adina *[My Aboriginal friend is] like, "Yes! I'm going to teach you!" and I said, "Well I don't feel like...I can, because, you know, I didn't know. You always knew. But I didn't know. So I don't want to come into your world and be like "Hey, this is what I think we should do about the Aboriginal problem."*

I'm the one finding things out, and [my son] is the one finding things out, but he finds it in a much more natural way. I feel like an alien occasionally when I approach it, because I've got to get my permission to be there: "No, it's ok, I'm one of you little brown people." Whereas he just sees it naturally. That's who he is, and so he has a right to figure it out for himself.

It is clear that Adina feels that being born with the knowledge of one's Indigeneity makes this identity not only more "natural" but also more justified: her son has a birthright to Indigeneity she does not feel she possesses. It does not seem to matter that she is learning the same things that he learns, and at the same time as him. His claim is considered more legitimate than hers. Adina therefore seems condemned to occupy an in-between position: Indigenous, yet not as authentically so as people who always knew this was their heritage and grew up Indigenous.

Adina's impression of what it is to be Indigenous is not singular. Casey, who completely identifies as Indigenous, expressed the same idea. In the following extract, he explains that his initial doubts about his right to embrace his heritage were eased when an Indigenous mentor told him he was still young enough to claim it.

Casey *Another thing the guy with the dreadlocks said is, "People question your identity if you're forty or fifty and you're starting to identify; it's completely different." I'm eighteen. The first time I sat around that fire I was seventeen, so... It's like the first chance I really had to do it, because I'd only got out of high school. So I guess, things like that that people tell you really help to reaffirm...yeah.*

Casey who was once called a Johnny-come-lately could find enough confidence in his young age to brush this comment aside. However, his comment implies that people who are “forty or fifty” and who decide to identify could be hypocritical and suspect – or at least perceived this way. What follows is the idea that to be truly Indigenous, this identity has to be a part of someone as soon as possible. The best option seems to be born and to grow up Indigenous. Casey did not and, at times, felt insecure about it, but he feels legitimate enough as an Indigenous person in part because he took the first opportunity he had to identify. This comment is reminiscent of Adina’s in that Casey seems to say that his youth made him quite innocent still, which both precludes him from being accused of adopting this identity for dubious reasons, and allowed this identity to come to him naturally, in the same way as Adina’s son. Therefore, to a certain extent, Casey supports an essentialist vision of Indigenous identity. In fact, although he chose to embrace this heritage and to renounce his ‘white’ life, he never presents this decision as a choice, but as an evidence.

Adina and Casey’s remarks seem justified by the following comment made by Indigenous writers.

Even if people fit in, there’s still a difference there, so I don’t relate to them *absolutely* in the same way as I relate to other Aboriginal people, irrespective of whether they know all the nuances and the joking and teasing and everything like that.²⁶

You can’t change your worldview like you change your underwear. People who’ve been conditioned by Western logic will probably use that logic to understand other cultures. I believe there are exceptions to the rule but they’re not the ones who have visited the country of their ancestors once or twice to establish credentials and then gone back to their white middle-class lives.²⁷

Both Indigenous academic Darlene Oxenham and the online anonymous writer express the idea that it is very difficult – if not impossible – to learn how to become Indigenous as an adult. Both rely on a constructed definition of Indigeneity. However, learning the “nuances and the joking and the teasing” does not seem to be enough to get rid of the

²⁶ OXENHAM, Darlene in OXENHAM, Darlene *et al.*, *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts’n’All*, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

²⁷ Anonymous, “A Reaction to Sally Morgan’s *My Place*”, comment online accessed on 9 June 2010 (no longer accessible).

“Western logic”. Therefore, despite culture being understood as learnt, it seems that an essential component remains in these definitions of Indigeneity. It is possible to learn how to be Indigenous. However, such an Indigenous identity will never be perceived as equally authentic as that of someone who was born and raised within the Indigenous culture and community.

9.1.2.4 Heritage or Identity

As a result of the several definitions and ways of understanding identity they had at their disposal, the participants often seemed caught in-between heritage and identity. For some of them, knowing that they had Indigenous heritage was considered a phase in their discovery of Indigeneity. They hoped to be able to follow a process of learning about their history, before meeting their extended families, and later formally identifying. Others did not feel either interested or legitimate enough to move beyond the knowledge that they had Indigenous heritage, and make it part of their identity.

Megan *I met a girl at play group, and she was – I don’t know – a quarter, or an eighth or something Aboriginal, and she looked like me – we both don’t look really like we have any Indigenous links – and she said, “My eldest son, his dad is Aboriginal. Oh, and I’ve got Aboriginal blood in me too” and I went, “Oh, that’s interesting. I think we’ve got that in our family as well!” You know. And that was it.*

We don’t have a family tree and everything like that. It’s more just like...we know that it’s there. (...) I think if I can find out more about [my Indigenous heritage], I’d really like to encourage [my kids] to enjoy that, but I think the way we are now – this level of understanding, or the level that my dad has – he hasn’t really documented anything. (...) I also don’t feel like I’ve lived an Aboriginal upbringing. (...) The only thing I can take from it is just a historical, kind of theoretical association, which is real because my dad’s always known it and shared it with us, but it’s kind of two-dimensional. (...) I think when dad said he knew where it happened, that was really important to me, but until I actually know, or go there, or meet someone, I’ll still feel like it’s all very vague, shady and... – not, that it’s not real – but that it’s not real enough to me to really feel like this is...real. But it’s, like, real in theory, in an interesting coffee table conversation kind of way. Because I know the place is really important, where you’re from, your connectedness to the place.

Like Michelle before, Megan feels the lack of detailed knowledge about her family puts a stop to her right to move forward. Megan's reflection about what is "real" is her way of distinguishing between her heritage – a historical connection, a knowledge that "it's there" – and a potential identity, something which, to come into being, would require her to at least meet living relatives. The feeling of in-between-ness Megan attempts to convey was echoed by several participants who explained they knew they had Indigenous ancestors but hinted at the fact that this was only part of their heritage, rather than of their identity – either because they did not feel legitimate enough identifying as Indigenous, or because they did not feel that Indigenous culture was a part of who they are. Megan sometimes regretted not knowing more about her heritage. Yet she also said she enjoyed saying she had this heritage – as the first extract shows – and she seemed to enjoy the comfortable space in which she found herself, being able to claim this heritage and talk about it in casual conversations, without carrying the weight identification as Indigenous implies. Megan's interest often seemed rekindled by such things as our meeting, or by watching a television program about Indigenous identity. However, she felt that her heritage was not part of her everyday reality and identity.

While Megan's position reflects uncertainty as to what she should do about her heritage, Michelle earlier explained that she was more pessimistic about her ability to ever become truly Indigenous. Having Indigenous heritage can allow someone to tick the genealogical criterion of the definition of Indigeneity. However, as explained, the vast majority of the participants believe that the relational aspect of this identity is more important than the mere presence of Indigenous blood.

The difference between heritage and identity is something Lynette Russel analyses in her autobiographical novel *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*. She explains that although bits and pieces of Indigenous culture were present in her upbringing – in the same way they were in Michelle's or Vanessa's – she cannot call herself a Koori.²⁸

²⁸ Kooris are the Indigenous people of New South Wales and Victoria.

How can I know what I never experienced? Attempting to decipher and decode my family's history and heritage cannot make me something that I never knew I was. I do not have the shared experiences so integral to identity. I simply cannot be someone I was not raised to be. My social identity, however undefinable and slippery, is by default affiliated with society's dominant stream. While I am careful not to describe myself as an Aboriginal person (...), I proudly embrace having Aboriginal heritage. (...) Although Emily [her ancestor] and her parents may have experienced this struggle, none of their descendants have suffered in the same way. Their descendants can never know the depth of the culture. Yet I know Koori heritage is our heritage too. My father, brothers, sons have a right to explore and attempt to understand our past.²⁹

Russel's analysis summarises what was explained in this section: Indigenous identity is understood as constructed, but in a limited way. Russel believes she cannot learn to be Indigenous as an adult – she will always lack a “depth” of understanding. To Russel, you can only be Indigenous if you are made to become so. Yet you cannot become Indigenous if you are not already Indigenous. Thus, as was demonstrated in earlier examples, while Russel and most participants consider identity as a construction, they also believe some identities are difficult to acquire later in life. These types of identities are called “primary identities” by theoretician Richard Jenkins.

Individual identity formation has its roots in our earliest processes of socialisation. (...) Identities which are established this early in life – selfhood, human-ness, gender, and under some circumstances, kinship and ethnicity – are primary identities, more robust and resilient to change in later life than other identities.³⁰

According to this understanding of identity, it is difficult – if not impossible – to build, as adults, identities which are primary ones and should have been forged growing up. People like Lynette Russel must be satisfied with having Indigenous heritage but no Indigenous identity.³¹

²⁹ RUSSEL, Lynette, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2002, pp. 141-142.

³⁰ JENKINS, Richard, *Social Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³¹ Peter Read, whose family was part of the Stolen Generations, also expresses the dissatisfaction of finding himself in this in-between position, feeling that his interest in his heritage and sense of belonging are not enough to allow him to cross over to the other side: “No matter how much we choose to study anthropology or Aboriginal history, our efforts will still provide us only with understanding and appreciation of things from the outside. Empathy is not the same as identification. And yet (...) we have an enhanced sense of belonging to

Jenkins' explanation of identity does not account for all of the participants' experiences of their sense of Indigeneity. Several participants who were not raised Indigenous did manage to embrace their heritage and turn it into their identity. For those participants, heritage was regarded as a phase in a process.

This is how Casey explained it:

Casey *I told my friends at school, "Yeah, my grandfather was Aboriginal" – I knew that was there, but never really took too much notice of it. (...) And at that time, I felt like it was a part of my identity. It was just a part of me, just there. It wasn't like it is now. So I guess that was just a stage in the development of my own identity.*

What Casey experienced is indeed the in-between stage several other participants describe: Indigenous culture is still looked at from the outside, yet with the knowledge that there is Indigenous heritage in the family, and therefore with the idea that it could be legitimate to integrate this culture into one's own identity. A form of belonging appears with this knowledge. Casey expresses this knowledge as just being 'there'. This expression actually summarises this stage of identification well: it is a feeling of belonging which is only individual as it is not yet tested outside of the personal sphere.

Early in this research project, it appeared that it was impossible to place the participants in clearly-defined categories such as Indigenous or not. Across this thesis, and in this chapter in particular, it seems obvious that although patterns can be discerned, each participant had formed a personal way of relating to their heritage and/or identity as Indigenous. Recent studies in Australia, such as that of Bronwyn Carlson³² or Fiona Noble³³ have attempted to explore how people in-between manage their Indigeneity in their daily lives.

Fiona Noble uses the expression "half-steps" to talk about people who are both interested in their heritage but unsure about how it fits as part of their identity.

this place – we feel enriched by being able to trace our inheritance back both to the old world and to ancient Australia."

READ, Peter, *Nowhere People*, op. cit., e-book.

³² CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today*, op. cit.

³³ NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, op. cit.

Next to those who have embraced their Aboriginality, and those who have opted out, there was also an in-between identity, 'half-steps', who see themselves as 'being of Aboriginal descent' without being 'Aboriginal', a position that harbours intensely personal uncertainties, because it is not sanctioned by any socially valid categories. (...) The in-between status felt by such 'half-steps' is one that has entirely disappeared from the official nomenclature in Australia, where a bifurcated view of being Aboriginal now reigns: are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent? Tick one. The boundaries have been drawn tight.³⁴

The 'half-steps' that interviewees make are indicative that they are reconsidering their identity. There is a lack of certainty as to how to identify but to deny an Indigenous background on the form leaves the respondent with a feeling of dissatisfaction.³⁵

Noble's concept of the 'half-step' can help understand the in-between position of several participants, both interested in their heritage but unsure about how to move forward towards more inclusion of Indigeneity in their lives.

In this research project, only one participant – Ben – said he was at present not interested in learning more about his heritage, let alone about identifying as Indigenous. The rest of the participants had different, individual trajectories – sometimes following a rather linear series of stages from learning about their heritage to identifying, sometimes identifying then letting go of their Indigenous identity, then coming back to it; sometimes interested but unable to move forward; sometimes enjoying remaining in the heritage phase. The participants had different perceptions of what could make their Indigenous heritage feel "real", as Megan said. There were as many stories as participants and even the concept of "half-steps" cannot fully comprehend them.

However, one of the benefits of the concept of the "half-step" is that it highlights the enduring binary separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities. At a time when boundaries between these two groups might be blurred with the new identifications of people with both Indigenous heritage and interest in their culture, and a non-Indigenous experience, it actually seems difficult to inhabit an in-between space – at least one in which a satisfying identity may be constructed.

³⁴ GANTER, Regina, paraphrasing Fiona NOBLE, "Turning Aboriginal-Historical Bents", *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁵ NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

9.2 Impossible In-between-ness

That's the thing, isn't it? (...) The lines are drawn sometimes. (...) You are asked, "Are you Aboriginal or not?", Not, "Do you fit somewhere along this continuum?"³⁶

A binary system of racial classification operates everywhere in Australia according to which an individual is either Aboriginal or white. This is as true where all Aborigines have a biological inheritance from Europeans as it is in the areas where most Aborigines are 'full-bloods'. In all areas there are individuals whose position is ambiguous. For a substantial minority of people, identity within this system is a consequence of their personal history, not of their biology and cultural characteristics. Such characteristics may not correspond to the dominant ideas about what the categories are made up of. (...) There are not simply two categories of people in a racially divided community.³⁷

The persistent "binary system of racial classification" described by Cowlshaw was inherited from the process of colonisation. I described in the first part of this thesis the oppositional relationship that is set up between settler Australians and their descendants on one side, and Indigenous people – seen as Others – on the other. This often seemingly necessary dichotomy influenced the participants' identity trajectories in many ways.

Most participants emphasised their 'white' upbringing or identified as 'white'. For example, Michelle said, "I always considered myself a white kid. (...) I identify myself as being white." Megan, for her part, talked about watching a television debate about Indigenous identity and feeling she was definitely "on the white side of the experience".³⁸ It is interesting to see that, although, in many ways, the participants' discourses highlighted the in-between position several of them inhabit, few of them clearly defined themselves as both 'white' and Indigenous, or as neither one nor the other. Instead, whether positioning themselves on the 'white' or Indigenous side of the experience, the participants often naturally reaffirmed the opposition described by Cowlshaw between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australia. For example, Andrew said that looking white but having Indigenous heritage made it "difficult to just naturally belong to either white Australia or Indigenous

³⁶ Cheryl, participant in NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

³⁷ COWLISHAW, Gillian, "Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists", *op. cit.*, p. 232.

³⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the participants' links to whiteness, see chapter 3.

heritage.” It is not uncommon to hear this opposition described as ‘incommensurable’ – in the same way as Andrew talks about a “natural” belonging – whether by Indigenous people wanting to establish an essential difference between their culture and that of other Australians (see Moreton-Robinson in 5.1.1), or by non-Indigenous Australians criticising such an essential divide (see McKee in 8.2.2). As Avril Bell summarises, “to claim incommensurability is to claim unassailability.”³⁹ Indeed, by delineating an essential difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions, people saying they grew up ‘white’ are denied the process of learning about Indigenous culture and worldviews. Most participants were clearly influenced by such a representation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships.

Therefore, it was not only the confusion resulting from trying to accommodate all representations and understandings of Indigeneity which often left the participants unable to create for themselves a satisfying space in-between both identities. It was also the fact that they were not given the right to do so.

In this section, I will first come back to the old system of classification set up in Australia to define Indigeneity, and to the vision of the ‘hybrid’ within it. I will then explain how an essentialist vision of identity was later adopted by the Indigenous community as a way to re-empower itself, thus strengthening the existing dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at a time when mixed-heritage people are more and more numerous. I will finally explain how the participants, finding themselves in-between both groups, coped with this ‘either/or’ rhetoric.

9.2.1 “Repulsive Hybridity”⁴⁰

On several occasions, I mentioned the difficult position of the in-between Indigenous people – the ‘half-castes’ – in Australian history (see chapter 2, 4, 6 and 7). This denomination now considered offensive to Indigenous people – in the same way as ‘full-

³⁹ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴⁰ WOLFE, Patrick, “Nation and Miscegenation”, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

blood' or any other reference to degrees of Indigeneity – was based on a system of classification employed to define who was or was not Indigenous in Australia until the 1970s. According to John Gardiner-Garden,

Although in the first decades of settlement Aboriginal people were grouped by reference to their place of habitation, in subsequent years, as settlement resulted in more dispossession and intermixing, a raft of other definitions came into use. The most common involved reference to 'Blood-quotum'. 'Blood-quotum' classifications entered the legislation of New South Wales in 1839, South Australia in 1844, Victoria in 1864, Queensland in 1865, Western Australia in 1874 and Tasmania in 1912. Thereafter till the late 1950s States regularly legislated all forms of inclusion and exclusion (to and from benefits, rights, places etc.) by reference to degrees of Aboriginal blood. Such legislation produced capricious and inconsistent results based, in practice, on nothing more than an observation of skin colour. (...) When policy entered a more progressive period in the late 1960s and 1970s the blood-quantum definitions, which had never been accepted as meaningful by Aboriginal communities themselves, were relatively easy to abandon.⁴¹

As previously explained (see 2.1.3, 4.2.1, 6.1), while it was believed until the middle of the twentieth century that 'full-blood' Indigenous people would progressively die out, it was soon evident that 'mixed-race' children would not. These children whose blood, it was believed, was both 'white' and 'black' were the object of a great deal of attention, and of policies the effects of which are still felt today.⁴²

It was unclear whether, due to their 'white' blood, 'half-castes' children should be considered superior to their 'dying' 'full-blood' relatives,⁴³ or if, as Henry Reynolds wrote, "half-castes [should be] assumed to be morally and physically defective, unpredictable, unstable and degenerate."⁴⁴ However, there seemed to be an agreement about the idea that the fate of the 'half-caste' was either to choose his/her Indigenous community or to assimilate into 'white' Australian society. The in-between position was not envisaged, as Tasmanian historian N.J.B. Plomley explains in this often-cited 1977 extract:

⁴¹ GARDINER-GARDEN, John, *Defining Aboriginality in Australia*, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

⁴² See chapter 2 for an account of the effects of removal policies on the participants' families.

⁴³ BOND, Chelsea, BROUGH, Mark, COX, Leonie, "Blood in Our Hearts or Blood on Our Hands? The Viscosity, Vitality and Validity of Aboriginal 'Blood Talk'", *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2014, p. 5.

⁴⁴ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, op. cit., e-book

Structurally, physiologically and psychologically hybrids are some mixture of their parent. In social terms, [these people] belong to neither race (and are shunned by both), and lacking a racial background they have no history. (...) If they wish to obtain a history, they must wholly identify themselves with the culture of one or the other of the parents.⁴⁵

Indigenous academic Ian Anderson who quoted Plomley goes on to explain the impossible in-between position of the 'hybrid' in Australian society until the mid-twentieth century.

The 'hybrid' Aborigine inhabits the ambiguous social realm between the world of the coloniser and the colonised. They are between tradition and history, bush camp and town; black and white skins. But most emphatically, they are neither. Sentenced to a liminal zone, the 'hybrid' inhabited what A.P. Elkin⁴⁶ called 'a cultural hiatus'. (...) The fate of the 'hybrid' is to assimilate completely with the either part of their heritage, or remain forever dislocated in a socio-historical void. Yet, at the same time, a return to the realm of Aboriginal 'authenticity' was either impossible or, alternatively, it was made undesirable. Consequently, the 'hybrid' could only be productively transformed one way: white.⁴⁷

With the help of Plomley and Elkin, Anderson illustrates the impossibility of the existence of the 'half-caste'. Although a mixed-heritage population was growing in Australia, it was impossible to envisage its existence as legitimate. According to Anderson, this category of Australians must be short-lived and disappear into the 'white' population.

Patrick Wolfe explains why the idea of a 'hybrid' population appeared threatening to the Australian nation.

Authentic Aboriginality is everything that "we" are not and vice versa. Thus inauthenticity results from straddling this dichotomy, a situation that can be expressed genetically, culturally or both. Settler society was unified in contradistinction to the Aborigines and vice versa; the two categories mutually constructed each other. Thus hybridity was repulsive because, in threatening the Aboriginal category, it thereby threatened the settler one as well.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ ANDERSON, Ian, "I, the 'Hybrid' Aborigine: Film and Representation", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ A.P. Elkin was a famous Australian anthropologist who occupied the first chair of Anthropology of the University of Sydney in the 1920s (see 7.2.2.1).

⁴⁷ ANDERSON, Ian, "I, the 'Hybrid' Aborigine: Film and Representation", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ WOLFE, Patrick, "Nation and Miscegenation", *op. cit.*, p. 111.

According to Wolfe, the preservation of a binary opposition – and hierarchy – between settlers and Indigenous people was the foundation of the Australian nation. Consequently, the policy of assimilation and the decision to remove ‘half-caste’ children in order to turn them ‘white’ were meant to protect racial unity in the country (since ‘full-blood’ Indigenous people would die, leaving Australia ‘white’).

The political reasons for repudiating hybridity are not the only reason for the enduring opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities in Australia. As explained in chapter 7 (7.2.1.1), in the academic sphere, the belief held by anthropologists that only ‘pure’ forms of Indigeneity were worthy of study led to an important lack of attention paid to the growing populations of Indigenous people with mixed-heritage until the 1930s.⁴⁹ This partly explains why dominant representations on which the participants rely presented Indigeneity in a binary and stereotypical way.

Although blood-quantum definitions were gradually abandoned in the last decades of the twentieth century (the new three-part definition of Aboriginality came into being in 1981), the references to percentages of blood and degrees of Indigeneity have not disappeared from public discourses about Indigenous people. This was obvious in the way Andrew Bolt criticised Indigenous people he considered too ‘white’ to identify only as Indigenous, thus implying that their percentage of European blood should outweigh the Indigenous one (see 6.2.4.2).

In examples used in this chapter, both Adam and Casey resented being asked about their percentage of Indigeneity (see 9.2.2.1.1). They are two participants who are well aware of the implications of such questions, as well as of the fact that Indigenous people reject notions of blood-quantum as colonial impositions on their identities.

Adam thus told me he thought it was important that I knew about the tendency of Australians to still classify Indigenous people according to percentages of blood.

⁴⁹ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., pp. 34-35.

Adam *I'm putting it forward as something that's generally in Australian culture. (...) You'll say, "I'm Aboriginal." They'll say, "How much?" But it comes from this whole idea of the half-caste Aboriginal, or the fact that they're not Aboriginal, you know.*

According to Adam, the impossible existence of the 'half-caste' category is still very much present in today's society. Moreover, Adam's European appearance meant that even when he identified fully as Indigenous – instead of positioning himself in-between – his claim was rejected: his appearance signalled too-small a percentage of Indigeneity for him to be accepted as such.

Evidence that the notion of degrees is still an important criterion in Australian society to judge Indigenous people's right to identify was provided when I heard several other participants use expressions now rejected by the Indigenous community without realising how offensive these could be considered.

Andrew *So my mother's grandfather was – I don't know the correct term for it, but – pure Australian, uh sorry, pure Indigenous.*

Adina *My friend, she's Aboriginal, half-Aboriginal herself, (...) and her mother's a full-blood Aboriginal.*

Josh *My two grandparents on my mother's side were both part-Indigenous.*

Michelle *My father's mother is half-caste herself.*

I almost felt like it would be offensive to full-blooded Aborigines or Aborigines that are aware of their culture.

I'd like to know exactly where the Aborigine comes in, and what percentage of who had what, why they were where they were and everything else, but I can't because there's no documents to explain it.

Considering that, as I explained, the participants were usually quite knowledgeable about Indigenous people and culture and able to distance themselves from stereotypes, it appears that the use of such expressions was not meant to be denigrating. This is especially clear in Michelle's extract since she is talking about her fear of offending Indigenous people, had she accepted Aboriginal entry at university. The participants' intent was only to

describe their families' and friend's Indigenous heritages. Any denigrating intent is also contradicted by the participants' enthusiasm for mixed-heritage identities.

For example, Adina said,

Adina *I was sad that I didn't get to be bi-racial because of the time period. I'm sad that it couldn't be more open, sad that people were so negative towards it, that they felt that they had to hide it like it was something shameful. And I'm proud now that it doesn't seem to be that way as much anymore. (...) I was thinking about this last night: "Oh it's really, really cool that my son is [biracial]."*

It was clear from the participants' discourses that they did not share the negative vision of hybridity described in this section. As explained in chapter 3, most participants regard multiculturalism as a quintessential aspect of today's Australia, and as Kate said, "I think that in this day and age, for people to keep asking about your ethnicity is completely useless."

Consequently, it is evident that such a vocabulary is still commonly used to describe Indigenous people in today's Australia and that it is not considered offensive by non-Indigenous people.

Before I understood why Indigenous people rejected it, I myself used the expression "part-Indigenous" in the course of the interviews, in order to describe the fact that the participants had a mixed heritage. As far as I recall, none of them frowned at my use of this expression. As Chelsea Bond, Mark Brough and Leonie Cox point out, "colonial discourses of blood quantum, while absent from legislative and scholarly domains in post-colonial Australia, remains the 'standard test' in which Aboriginal people's identity are made comprehensible to non-Aboriginal Australia."⁵⁰

The reason why Indigenous people find such denominations offensive is that for many years, non-Indigenous Australians tried to impose their perception of Indigenous identity upon Indigenous people themselves. Indigenous people reject the idea that their identity

⁵⁰ BOND, Chelsea, BROUGH, Mark, COX, Leonie, "Blood in Our Hearts or Blood on Our Hands? The Viscosity, Vitality and Validity of Aboriginal 'Blood Talk'", *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2014, p. 6.

can be determined according to their blood percentage. This rejection is especially understandable in a post-colonial context in which many Indigenous families have lost connection with members of their families or with their entire communities because of such blood-quantum-based definitions and the policies which relied on them and broke up families.

However, as explained in 9.2.2.1.1, Indigenous people now use the same blood discourse now banned from official definitions. The vision of Indigenous identity based on the 'one-drop' rule allowed Adam or Casey to feel legitimate as Indigenous people in spite of their European physical appearance and lack of Indigenous cultural upbringing.

Bond *et al.* explain why such an essentialist vision of identity and culture is now taken up by the very people who were subjected to it for many years.

Aboriginal blood talk sits at an awkward juncture in Australian race politics (...) creating a quaint, but ultimately, unfashionable narrative of identity. Yet, it also represents a steadfast 'talking back'. (...) The dismissal of essentialist blood talk by Aboriginal people ignores the fact that Aboriginal people are forced to engage frequently with blood talk in response to non-Aboriginal inquisition and policing of their identity.⁵¹

"Aboriginal blood talk" is described as a tool of re-empowerment for the Indigenous community. As the examples from the participants' discourses revealed, Indigenous people's identities are still judged according to degrees of blood, often regardless of how someone chooses to identify or understands his/her identity, as Adam's example in 9.2.2.1.1 showed.

In the following section, I will analyse the use of essentialism by Indigenous people, as well as the resulting reaffirmed opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people it entails.

⁵¹ BOND, Chelsea, BROUGH, Mark, COX, Leonie, "Blood in Our Hearts or Blood on Our Hands? The Viscosity, Vitality and Validity of Aboriginal 'Blood Talk'", *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2014, p. 6.

9.2.2 One or the Other

9.2.2.1 Problematic Essentialism

The use of discourses presenting blood as an essential component which cannot be diluted over generations and in spite of miscegenation is part of a larger desire to present Indigenous people not only as resilient in the face of colonisation, but also as united. While in the past, blood was used in non-Indigenous definitions to divide Indigenous people into categories – ‘full-blood’, ‘half-caste’, ‘quadroon’, ‘octoroon’ – under the ‘one-drop’ rule, the unity of the Indigenous race is re-affirmed in spite of the effects of colonisation. As the example of Casey and Adam showed, knowing that their mixed-heritage and European physical appearance did not make them any less Indigenous according to Indigenous people’s standards is empowering.

As Bond, Brough and Cox explained, “Aboriginal blood talk” sits awkwardly with more modern understandings of identity. Despite its potentially empowering effect, the reference to colonial racial classifications was criticised by several academics at a time when identities are associated with cultural affiliation rather than biology, and when the Australian government recognises the importance of the relational aspect of Indigenous identities.

The right for Indigenous people to express their identities in essential terms – using references to blood, but also putting forward essential Indigenous identity traits – was strongly defended by some and rejected by others.⁵² For example, Andrew Lattas who I

⁵² For example, Andrew Lattas (“Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity”, *op. cit.*), Ian Anderson (“I, the ‘hybrid’ Aborigine: film and representation”, *op. cit.*) or the writer Mudrooroo (quoted in Lattas’ article) defend essentialism, while Kevin Keffe (“Aboriginality: Resistance and Persistence”, *op. cit.*), Steven Thiele (“Introduction”, *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 1997, pp157-160), David Hollinsworth (“Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia”, *op. cit.*) Mitchell Rolls (“The Meaninglessness of Aboriginal Cultures”, *op. cit.*) or Indigenous academic Yin Paradies (“Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity”, *op. cit.*) for example reject it. The concept of ‘strategic essentialism’ first used by Gayatri Spivak is a way out of this opposition. Avriell Bell thus defines it: “Strategic essentialism is a way of having your cake and eating it too, effectively – of accepting the theory of anti-essentialism and constructionism while, as a political strategy, asserting identity claims on the basis of some ‘essence’ shared by the collective united by the name.”

BELL, Avril, *Relating Settler and Indigenous Identities: Beyond Domination*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

quoted in 7.3.2.1 defending the right of Indigenous people to use “images of the past and images of primordiality” describes the use of essentialism as necessary to “the creation of a mythic space and a primordial identity capable of providing a community with a sense of continuity and a sense of groundedness”.⁵³ When it comes to blood in particular, Bond, Brough and Cox affirm that,

blood, in [the way Indigenous people use it], offers permanence of Aboriginality and counters miscegenative concerns. Neither diluted nor tainted, the social identity of Aboriginality can only be articulated because Aboriginal blood exists in one's veins.⁵⁴

On the other hand, Myrna Tonkinson repudiated the use of blood as a legitimate criterion for identity.

It is a sobering irony to hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda claim that 'if you have a drop of Aboriginal blood, you're Aboriginal'. As a person of African ancestry and a descendant of the slave population in the 'new world', I found this comment a little troubling. This and other comments on Aboriginality last week⁵⁵ hark back to an earlier and ugly period of classification based on ideas about race, culture and identity. Gooda's remarks are part of a new battle of words about Aboriginality, with a number of prominent persons voicing notions of what constitutes 'authenticity'. (...) Reference to blood (...) conjures up the absurd measurements that were used to classify and separate Aboriginal people in the past, including providing justification for removing children from their parents.

While Tonkinson is concerned with a return to a colonial racial understanding of Indigeneity, another concern is that the ‘one-drop’ rule also precludes Indigenous diversity. Indeed, if the phrase “If you have a drop of Aboriginal blood, you're Aboriginal” is empowering, it is because “all the way through” is implied at the end of the sentence. Thus, it is a sentence which, although it encourages someone to regard themselves as authentically Indigenous no matter their great number of other heritages, does not take

⁵³ LATTAS, Andrew, “Essentialism, Memory and Resistance: Aboriginality and the Politics of Authenticity”, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ BOND, Chelsea, BROUGH, Mark, COX, Leonie, “Blood in Our Hearts or Blood on Our Hands? The Viscosity, Vitality and Validity of Aboriginal ‘Blood Talk’”, *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2014, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Tonkinson's article was written in November 2012, following Tony Abbott's remark about “traditional” vs “urban” Aboriginality quoted in 7.2.2.2.

these heritages into account. The focus is placed exclusively on the Indigenous heritage, leaving no room for multiple or part identifications.

Several participants were familiar with the discourse presenting Indigenous identity as an “all-or-nothing” identity.

Adam *In theory...according to Aboriginal laws, you're an Aboriginal or you're not.*

Josh *People always say, “Well, how much are you?”, which is an unfair question, because most Aboriginal won't actually ask you that question: you either are, or you aren't.*

While in these extracts, both Adam and Josh present this discourse as empowering – in that it should prevent people from asking them about their Indigenous blood percentage or their right to call themselves Indigenous – both were also limited by it, as I will show in 9.3.3.1.1.

Casey, on the other hand, only found comfort in this unitary presentation of Indigenous identity.

Casey *I was like, “Yeah, I'm a white New Zealander and I'm Aboriginal” and [my Indigenous mentor] was like, “No you're not. You're black.” And those sorts of things stuck in my head and really influenced me to think...*

And to me that Australian flag is pretty much the equivalent of a swastika. That's how a lot of other Aboriginal people see it. But some don't. Some other Aboriginal people have no problem with it, but in my eyes, it's just an impact of the assimilation process. Well, you know the Stockholm syndrome? To me, it's something like that. Identifying with your invaders.

Casey explained to me that when he first arrived at university, before he became involved with Indigenous political activists in Brisbane, he announced himself as “part-Indigenous”. He later realised not only that this was offensive to Indigenous people who consider themselves fully, rather than ‘half’ or ‘a quarter’, Indigenous, but also that he did not believe his Indigenous identity could leave room for others. Casey does not envisage combining his ‘white’ upbringing and Irish or English heritages with his Indigenous

identity. He feels close to his Pakeha heritage which, he says, is “a portion of his identity”, but he points out that “that’s probably not something every blackfella would say” and still regards his Anaiwan identity as paramount. He extends this thinking to all Indigenous people: he refuses to understand that some of them might want to call themselves Australian, and he puts their choice down to the influence of the assimilation process, rather than envisaging this could be a deliberate choice on their part.

9.2.2.2 Racial Loyalty

Several academics use the concept of “racial loyalty”, theorised by Gillian Cowlishaw,⁵⁶ as an explanation for the discourse precluding someone from only considering themselves ‘part-Indigenous’.⁵⁷ Reuben Bolt explains that racial loyalty is “the process whereby Aboriginal people of mixed descent claim solely an Aboriginal identity.”⁵⁸ Racial loyalty is evident in Casey’s experience, for example. Indeed, as the previous extract from his interview showed, Casey believes in fighting for the rights of Indigenous people, which, to him, means opposing ‘white’ Australia. Therefore, his identity is not only based on a personal sense of belonging to the Indigenous community, but also on the responsibility he feels he has towards his people against ‘white’ Australia. Thus, it is also based on racial loyalty.

Mitchell Rolls criticised such as concept, considering that identities which do not fit into the clear-cut categories of Indigenous or ‘white’ cannot be represented.

Rather than identifying as white, or non-indigenous, or something other than Aboriginal that embraces mixed descent, the descendants of mixed marriages between black and white tend to identify as Aborigines. (...) Pressures to adopt

⁵⁶ COWLISHAW, Gillian, Black, *White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁵⁷ As I explained, I did not understand at first that ‘part-Indigenous’ was understood as less whole and authentic and as a present synonym of ‘half-caste’. I used this expression to convey the reality of a multiple heritage. As I will show in chapter 10, some Indigenous people such as Anthony Dillon also use this expression in this way: “I am a part Aboriginal person. I’m part European, part Aboriginal, very proud of both ancestries.” DILLON, Anthony, *SBS Insight*, “Aboriginal or not?” *Op. cit.*

⁵⁸ BOLT, Reuben, *Urban Aboriginal Identity Construction in Australia: An Aboriginal Perspective Utilising Multi-Method Qualitative Analysis*, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2009, p. 177.

particular identities remain. A young student who wished to acknowledge both sides of biological and cultural heritage and who was desirous of an inclusive identity, uncertain as to what to say when challenged in the politically charged environment of the University Aboriginal studies Centre in which I work, mumbled she 'was descended from aborigines'. An operational staff member – herself a person of mixed descent – pounced with the reprimand, 'I hate it when people say that'.⁵⁹

When I talked to Damita McGuinness from the UTS' Jumbunna Indigenous centre, she also emphasised the fact that one is either Indigenous or not. I told her about Vanessa's experience of keeping her Indigenous identification from the university in order not to "get spammed with extra services" or have people "question [her] personal achievements";

Delphine One of the girls I interviewed said that she could identify within the Indigenous centre and not let the university know, which is what she wanted because she didn't want to be, I don't know, treated differently or something. Do you offer that possibility here?

Damita *That would be something I'd discourage, personally. Either you're going to identify, or you're not. You know, you can't just be Aboriginal to a group of people, then white to another.*

We did not exactly discuss the possibility of acknowledging multiple heritages. However, the same idea of racial loyalty is present in Damita's words. Being Indigenous requires a full commitment to this identity.

Echoing Rolls' story is that of Kate. In the early days of her understanding of her heritage, Kate did not realise either that the expression 'part-Indigenous' was offensive to her Indigenous colleagues. She explained how she "got reprimanded" by them when she used it.

Kate *Somehow, it got back to [my Indigenous colleagues] that I did have some Indigenous heritage in me. They were quite upset that I said I was part-Indigenous and I didn't know anything about the history and stuff (...) You're not part-Indigenous. You either are, or you aren't. It's something that you have to identify, and it's a total part of that culture that, you know, you're Indigenous. You might bring in your other background, but first and foremost you're Indigenous. (...)*

⁵⁹ ROLLS, Mitchell, "The Politics of Miscegenation", *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Because I guess I kind of got reprimanded for talking about things I didn't know about, I kind of kept it under wraps and just went out doing my own business from there. (...)

Delphine How did it make you feel? The fact that they didn't like that you call yourself 'part-Aboriginal'?

Kate *I mean, I was upset. Not because of them...of me getting reprimanded, but I was upset that I had, you know, basically trashed their culture, because I didn't know anything about it. And I felt very stupid, and I guess ashamed of talking about stuff I didn't know about. (...) I was just sort of taken aback, and I personally just felt really upset by it all because I really enjoy working with these women, and I love the students, and you know, I didn't want to upset anyone or put them offside for that reason.*

Like Josh or Adam before, Kate reaffirms the power in some circumstance of the idea that you either are Indigenous, or you are not. Kate's approval of the idea that acknowledging other heritages is acceptable as long as the Indigenous identity comes first is in agreement with the principle of racial loyalty. She does not question the validity of such a principle and imputes it to Indigenous culture.⁶⁰ Such a vision of identity is considered an essential trait of Indigenous culture by Kate who, therefore, blames herself for her lack of knowledge and consideration. Because she respects the women she works with who also helped her find out about her Indigenous heritage, Kate does not feel they are to be blamed for restricting her freedom to identify as 'part-Indigenous'. However, having her freedom restricted is indeed what happened as Kate says that as a result of this incident, she "kind of kept it under wraps" in order not to create any more trouble.

To be fair, it is not as if Kate had reflected upon this question and was feeling that the 'one or the other' discourse was a limitation imposed upon her freedom to self-identify. By calling herself 'part-Indigenous', Kate only used words common in popular discourses

⁶⁰ Carlson points out that Indigenous academic Larissa Behrendt does the same thing, turning a historical choice of representation of Indigenous identity into an essential characteristic: "[I]n my culture we do not have notions of half-cast and quarter-cast. Those terms are only in white language. In our eyes you are either an aborigine or you are not. If you see yourself as an aborigine and are accepted by the aboriginal community as an aborigine, you are an aborigine. If you describe yourself as "part aboriginal" or of "aboriginal descent", you would be considered non-aboriginal, no matter what your skin colour."

BEHRENDT, Larissa quoted in CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* *Op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

about Indigenous people to convey the actual reality of her several heritages – she was not talking about her identity, that is to say who she feels she is as an individual, but only about where her ancestors came from. However, Kate’s reaction is precisely what Bronwyn Carlson noticed among the participants in her study. Although some of her participants’ stories seem to go further than Kate’s, she explains how most people did not think about calling into question the rule according to which one is either Indigenous or not.

Very few questioned why they were called upon to deny another heritage to be recognised as Aboriginal. Here the politics of identity emerge again to call individuals into an either/or choice of identity. This identity politics often insists as a condition of acceptance into the Aboriginal community that individuals demonstrate Aboriginality by not talking or acting or living or even thinking 'White'. (...) It asks individuals to deny their full sense of themselves, to overwrite or erase subjectivities that are significant parts of their personal and family histories. For some, it asks them to deny their forbears’ experiences of being Aboriginal, which led to decisions in the past that now position parts 'outside' the boundaries of Aboriginal identity discourses. In some cases, it asks individuals to deny one side of the family that has brought them into the world, in the same way that Aboriginal people were once forced to do by administrators. In the process, the descendants of some Aboriginal people are being punished for having a history not of their own making. In the process, as well, significant parts of the stories of Aboriginal Australia are denied, overwritten and silenced.

What has been coined as 'racial loyalty' places political solidarity and survival of (reconstructed and often highly generalised) culture ahead of personal freedom for more creative and complex expressions of what it now means to be Aboriginal. (...) For many participants, the desire to 'belong', itself a part of a wider Aboriginal discourse of belonging, overrode any disquiet about either the expectation to comply or about the narrowly prescriptive generalised cultural meanings and Aboriginal political 'correctness' demanded in the process.⁶¹

Carlson emphasises that what Kate described as “a total part of that culture” is actually part of a *constructed* vision of Indigeneity which is the consequence of colonisation. The survival of an Indigenous identity fundamentally different from that of ‘white’ Australians was privileged over individuals’ right to self-identification. Carlson thus concludes: “The sub-text is also a denial of Aboriginal people to freely choose the manner in which they live

⁶¹ CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., pp. 306-307.

and interact in the wider society, itself a principle of political self-determination. And yet, this is a widespread, common and popular discourse across Aboriginal Australia.”⁶²

9.2.3 Shifting Identities

When binary identity politics gained momentum in the 1990s, in response to legal rights vested in being Aboriginal, people who had counted themselves either way, at precisely the time when postcolonial consciousness elsewhere in the world asserted ‘creoleness’ as a viable identity. Some of them have become the victims of binary identity politics.⁶³

For the last four to five decades, we have come to adopt a very silly proposition that an individual is Aboriginal or an individual is not Aboriginal. There is no in-between position with which to identify.⁶⁴

Both Regina Ganter and Martin Nakata point out the paradoxical nature of the state of things regarding Indigenous identity in Australia today. Earlier, it was demonstrated that when they described their identity, the participants embraced a multiple and evolving vision of it, having grown up in a country where multiculturalism and diversity are presented as core values. As a result of finding themselves in an in-between position – as the first part of this chapter showed – while not being allowed to be there, the participants had to find their own ways to cope with discourses preventing them from embracing all parts of their heritages equally. The following section will look at how this was done. While, in chapter 10, I will show that there may be ways out of binarism, this section reveals that the impossible state of in-between-ness forced the participants to live with shifting identities.

9.2.3.1 “A Foot in Each World”

Gorringe, Ross and Fforde point out that the binary format in which discussion around Indigeneity is often framed can lead to tensions within an individual and within

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁶³ GANTER, Regina, “Turning Aboriginal - Historical Bents”, *op. cit.*, p18

⁶⁴ NAKATA, Martin, “Identity Politics: Who Can Count as Indigenous?” *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

individuals.⁶⁵ Carlson, for her part, deplores the perpetuation of “confusion, insecurity and uncertainty” this format creates.

Among the participants, this could translate into hesitation, as Josh’s example shows, into anxiety as Adam’s story reveals, or into identity crises in Casey’s case.

Delphine When did you start becoming interested in all this [your heritage and Indigenous culture]? Are you, actually?

Josh *Well that’s a confusing one, because I don’t know whether I am or not. (...) I think since I found out, or since I turned eighteen, there’s been two censuses in Australia, and I think on one I ticked, “No, I wasn’t Aboriginal”, and the other I ticked “Yes”. (...) I always get to that question when you fill that form, like medical form and all that sort of stuff, and I always sort of...I always think about it. I don’t know whether I would tick it. I’d probably go 50/50 whether I would tick it or not.*

Josh has a certificate of Aboriginality and identified at university where he received an Indigenous cadetship. Later in his life, however, he decided it would not matter in his job whether or not he was Indigenous and stopped identifying. However, the previous quote, like the one in which he said he was confused (9.2.2.1), reveals that Josh is not quite certain about how his interest in his heritage fits with his ‘white’ upbringing and life.

Adam expressed the same hesitation as Josh: he strongly identified as Indigenous when he was in his twenties then stopped for a while before identifying again in his thirties. He explains that finally understanding that he was in an in-between position where he was not allowed to stay helped him feel better, even though it did solve the problem.

Delphine Did you think about it when you were younger, the fact that you had this sort of double education, double culture?

⁶⁵ GORRINGE, Scott, ROSS, Joe, FFORDE, Cressida, ““Will the Real Aborigine Please Stand Up?”: Strategies for Breaking Up the Stereotypes and Changing the Conversation”, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Adam *I think it became clearer to me as I got older, mainly because you have more self-reflection. I think I knew about it as a teenager, but it just made more angsty than anything. I just always wondered why I would never fit completely, rather than understanding that there was something, a foot in each world sort of thing.*

Casey is fully identified as Indigenous. He explained to me that in the early days of his identification, he struggled with the binary discourse forbidding him to remain in the in-between space.

Delphine When you approached the ‘black’ community, you didn't feel that you lacked the culture, language, everything? That was never a problem for you really?

Casey *For the first six months that I was sitting around that fire, I'd have... I guess I'd have identity crises every five days or something! (laughs) (...) Like, it was, "Am I really black enough to be doing this? Do I really fit in with all these sorts of things?" (...) I guess it was just a natural reaction to all the things that were said to me at school, or uni. It was like, "You're what...20 percent or whatever", and I'd be like, "Fuck off. I don't care." But then in my own head, a few days later, I'd be thinking about it, "Should I really be doing this? Do I really fit in here?" And that was, like, the first six months. But now I've developed a thick skin for that sort of stuff, and if people question it, I'm like, "Say that again and I'll knock your head off!" "What's your right to question my identity? I'm a proud First-Nations man. That's my identity. If you don't like that, get lost."*

Casey's testimony shows that he was made to doubt his identity by non-Indigenous reactions to his claiming it. The fact that non-Indigenous Australians questioned Casey's right to be Indigenous also indicates a binary – or at least oversimplified – vision of Indigenous people according to which a white-looking person cannot also be Indigenous. We saw that in Casey's case, the binary discourse coming from the Indigenous community – “you're either black or you're not” – helped him find strength and accept his Indigenous identity.

9.2.3.2 Minimised Identities

As this thesis has illustrated, the participants feel ill-at-ease with their Indigenous heritages and/or identities in several ways. Influenced by limited representations of Indigenous people and by discourses summoning them to choose between being either ‘white’ or

Indigenous, they have to overcome the uncertainty revealed in the previous section. The following examples show that Megan's and Miriam's ways to deal with their in-between position is to minimise their Indigeneity when faced with people they think will judge them and probably find them wanting.

Megan *I'd never say... I think the way I would say it is, "We're quite sure we've got Aboriginal ancestry", and then I'd say, "But we're not entirely sure." It's almost like getting in there before somebody says, "Oh, but you're probably not sure." So, I always say, like, "Oh, but we're not entirely sure", even though, speaking to Dad today again, he re-confirmed. (...) It's almost like a disclaimer: if I share the information with someone, the disclaimer is, "Oh but we're really not sure", to get in there before they can say, "You're...it's not enough, or how?" I guess you stop them in their tracks before they would say, "How much is it?" Because if you say, "We're not really sure", you've already kind of answered that question. So they wouldn't bother going down that route of saying, "Oh yeah? But how much Aboriginality do you have?" (...) And then, you can just go into something else.*

Megan's 'tactic' is to forestall her interlocutor's questions. In so doing, she wants to remain in control of the situation and of the image she projects. By anticipating a rebuke, Megan protects herself from being seen as someone taking advantage of her heritage although she does not know much about it. This reveals how dominant and accepted is the idea of the right non-Indigenous people have to judge who counts or not as Indigenous. Megan does not anticipate questions such as "Oh, that's interesting. Could you tell me what you know about it?", but a form of inquisition which she does not really condemn. In refusing to give her interlocutor the opportunity to take the topic further, Megan does remain in control, but at a cost: she would rather abide by the rules dictating who can and cannot be Indigenous than put herself at risk. In so doing, it seems to me that she denies herself the right to embrace her heritage – which may be one of the reasons why she has not explored it further.

A similar mechanism is observable in the way Miriam jokes about or qualifies her Indigenous heritage.

Miriam *Well, that's funny. I feel bad for this, but I've always sort of...jokingly said to people up until eighteen or nineteen, "I am Aboriginal. My family's Aboriginal" but didn't start taking it seriously until eighteen or nineteen. Because I wasn't educated*

either. (...) I might have joked about it. (...) I would have said, "My great grandfather was Aboriginal" and they would have been, "Oh, yeah, look how white you are", and I would have been like, "Yeah. That's funny, right?"

It seems to me that saying, "My great grandfather was Aboriginal" is also a way for Miriam to keep a certain degree of control over the situation. She acknowledges that this heritage is present in her family but does not tie it to her own identity. She lets her interlocutor draw their own conclusions. The fact that she then jokes about it makes it sound as if she is almost taking back what she said, in the same way Megan added, "But we're really not sure" after having announced she had Indigenous heritage.

Miriam *I make jokes about it, and sort of... Sometimes I think, if I met...I should make a joke about it and make people feel more comfortable, and then I think, "No, why should I? I don't think it's a joke. So why should I make other people feel like it's a joke?"*

I sometimes qualify my Aboriginality. I'll say, "Yes, I identify as Aboriginal, but I have pretty much no lived experience as an Aboriginal person. (...)"

Delphine You would qualify your Aboriginality when speaking to a darker-skinned...

Miriam *Socially, I would feel quite comfortable with the fact that a dark-skinned Aboriginal person might think that it undermines my legitimacy to be Aboriginal. If a black Aboriginal person said that to me, I would say, "Yep."*

Miriam explained that as the years passed, she grew more confident about claiming she is Indigenous, regardless of the circumstances. Here this is apparent in her refusal to continue making jokes she used to accept about her heritage. However, she still regards her version of Indigeneity as less legitimate than that of someone with a darker skin and therefore a probable lived experience of racism. What Miriam's reaction shows is that, having internalised the fragility of their in-between position in a world of clear-cut binary definitions, most participants are ready to make concessions about their identity in order to be accepted. Earlier, Kate accepted being reprimanded as normal and felt very upset for having "trashed [her colleagues'] culture". Neither Kate nor Miriam considered the possibility that Indigenous people telling them how they should identify may not be acceptable.

Therefore, it seems almost impossible to make one's different version of Indigeneity accepted as just as authentic as that of people fitting dominant discourses. Instead, the participants have to remain in an in-between space, neither completely one, nor completely the other. This position seems untenable on the long term, and it is a cause of stress as the participants have to evaluate each audience before deciding how to present themselves.

9.2.3.3 "Taking the Plunge"

Considering that the in-between position seems impossible to maintain, some participants recognised that they had to embrace their heritage and become Indigenous all the way through. While this could be understood as a natural step for Casey, both Adam's and Vanessa's experiences show that giving up their 'white' life was not necessarily a choice.

Casey *I just sort of took the plunge, and, yeah, it's turned out for the best. (...) And ever since then, I think that was the turning point of where, like I went from being...knowing I've got black heritage to...beginning to live black, being around black people all the time. Like, now, I can honestly say that 95 percent of the people I'm around are black. Like, I've got two mates from high school who are white, and my mum, and maybe one or two other people. And that's pretty much it. Whereas everyone else is... So yeah, there's been that big shift within just – I think it's just over a year now, just over a year since I first sat down in that park around the fire.*

As explained earlier, for Casey, abandoning his 'white' life seems to be the natural outcome of embracing his Indigenous heritage. As he himself explained, this shift affected many aspects of his life: his values changed (see 8.3.1) as well as the company he keeps. Casey reaffirms the idea that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia are not only two separate but also essentially opposed universes which cannot cohabit.

Carlson quotes Amanda Katherine Lambert Pennington's conclusions on the subject of racial loyalty.

Lambert-Pennington found that in th[e] community [of La Perouse], Aboriginal identity was an exclusive identity defined in its difference from all other cultural identities regardless of the presence of other cultural heritage. From those that

were interviewed a strong sense of Aboriginal identity was evident, as “...the all-or-nothing quality of being “black, but not white” requires that Kooris forge a common indigeneity that connects them with other Aboriginal people”. A political stance *vis-à-vis* the nation state coupled with a strategic essentialism based on cultural understandings is understood as a loyalty to identifying as Aboriginal as opposed to having anything in common with what is perceived as White. Any non-Aboriginal heritage becomes inconsequential to cultural acceptance and therefore “forgotten”. Lambert-Pennington claims her research shows that “[l]inks to whiteness, whether ancestral, behavioural or geographic, are liabilities in constructions of a resolute Indigenous identity”.

Lambert-Pennington’s conclusions help clarify Casey’s defence of the division between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australia. Other participants did not live – like Casey – in strongly-knit Indigenous communities. Those who identify often work in Indigenous positions or with Indigenous people, but keep a link with other members of the Australian society. Consequently, the demands on racial loyalty are not as strong. However, Lambert-Pennington’s conclusions reveal the difficulty of maintaining a link with heritages other than Indigenous.

In a different way than Casey’s, Adam also had to ‘take a plunge’ in order to accept his Indigenous identity.

Adam *I think I probably saw my Aboriginal identity as more important [ten years ago]. (...) But I don’t think it now. I think [at the time], I needed to fully accept it, and in order to fully accept it, I had to make it more of me than my other identities because it’s harder to accept than the other identities. (...) If I say that I’m Aboriginal Australian: problems straight away.*

Adam was raised by a non-Indigenous mother and received what he called a ‘white’ upbringing. He is attached to his several heritages. Nevertheless, he explained that when he was in his twenties, his Indigenous heritage had become more important. The reason for this, he said, was perhaps due to the need to constantly defend this particular identity against constant attacks. In the same way as the ‘one-drop’ rule allowed him to overcome his doubts, making Indigeneity his whole identity could give Adam more confidence in his everyday life. Considering, however, that Adam values not only his mixed-heritage but also other important aspects of his identity such as teaching and researching, putting forward

his Indigenous identity only came at the cost of relegating other parts of himself to the background. This is something he no longer does.

A final example is that of Vanessa who, as she explained in 9.2.1.2.2, lost two thirds of her friends when she told them that she had Torres Strait Islander heritage. As a result, she said she had to start a new chapter of her life.

Vanessa *When I moved, that's when I decided to start afresh, I got rid of all of my high school friends...*

In Vanessa's case, starting afresh did not necessarily mean burning her bridges with the non-Indigenous community. However, she was forced out of her group of non-Indigenous friends who refused to accept her new identity.

The examples in this section have revealed that a way out of the in-between position the participants all started in is to identify completely, which, in Casey's case, meant cutting himself from his 'white' past. Although this seemed normal to him, Carlson rejects the binary discourse which prevents individuals from identifying freely and in a variety of ways showcasing every part of who they are. These restricting dominant discourses are not only reminiscent of colonial classifications strongly rejected by Indigenous people, they also deny the evolution of Indigeneity throughout the years, and the various ways and degrees in which people understand their Indigeneity. Thus, even though I understand the desire to protect a unique Indigenous identity from being assimilated into 'white' Anglo-Celtic society, I agreed with Carlson as I analysed the way in which most participants had integrated such discourses without questioning their legitimacy, and had learnt to work around them and to make concessions about their identities, rather than claiming their personal vision of their identities as equally valid options.

9.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to summarise and theorise the many ways already mentioned across this thesis in which the participants felt caught in an in-between position, due to their

Indigenous heritage, 'white' upbringing and links to the non-Indigenous, dominantly Anglo-Celtic Australian culture. I showed how problematic such in-between positions could be in an Australian society where essential definitions of Indigeneity often prevail.

In-between-ness is not a necessary state for people combining several identities. In fact, according to the post-modern understanding of identity I will analyse in the next chapter, we all live with fragmented and moving identities. This does not mean, however, that we all experience the kind of impossible in-between-ness the participants in this study often have to face. This state is the result of the complex colonial history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This history has produced various and often contradictory discourses presenting what it means to be Indigenous. Discourses imposed by Australian settlers are today rejected, taken up, adapted by Indigenous people, and cohabit with enduring dominant non-Indigenous representations of Indigeneity in today's Australian society. This creates what Cowlishaw called a "plethora of images, stereotypes and discourses" that the participants have to navigate in order to forge their own definition of Indigeneity. However, this seemingly great number of identity choices is actually restricted as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities monitor who has the right to call themselves Indigenous. Moreover, the divide between 'white' and Indigenous Australia is still strong, and the participants' choices of identification are very much limited by clear-cut oppositions preventing them from remaining in the in-between space they are in. The binary framework used to define Indigenous and 'white' identities restricts the participants' freedom to creatively approach their Indigenous heritages and identities, and to appropriate them in their own personal ways. In the next chapter, I will show how in spite of such restrictions, some participants attempted to create identities reflecting the different aspects of who they are.

CHAPTER 10

Fragmented Identities

10.0 Introduction

For many years, [government policies] were premised on the need to separate white and black (...). Differences in living conditions, life chances, political and civil rights were vast and unbridgeable. Australians had to be one or the other, white or black, European or Aboriginal. There was no third option, no intermediate resting point. But there could be movement across the bridge of assimilation. In the past, it was often forced and almost always from the black side to the white. In recent times, many of those removed – or their children – have passed back in the other direction. But no one has yet claimed the right to broaden the bridge itself and camp there between the two well-defended positions. That is where I think I would like to be – to be recognised as belonging to two families at the same time, and not forced to choose between them as our grandmother was compelled to do.¹

I (...) want to consider the hybrid state. If the world is only made up of 'us' and 'them', black and white, where do I fit in? Is it conceivable that by limiting ourselves to only two possibilities we have overlooked the incredible range within the category of 'we'? If anything is to be salvaged from my grandmother's life, her loss and her family, I hope that it is the opportunity to create a hybrid space, our place, where we can be many things at the same time.²

Lynette Russel and Henry Reynolds share their personal experiences as descendants of victims of the Stolen Generations, who now find it difficult to re-establish links with their Indigenous families. Both mention the dichotomy between 'black' and 'white' Australia,

¹ REYNOLDS, Henry, *Nowhere People*, *op. cit.*, e-book.

² RUSSEL, Lynette, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

which does not seem to leave room for people in-between, as I explained in chapter 9. Reynolds points out that at a time when Indigenous people are freer to choose how to identify, the lines are being more strictly drawn than before. As was explained, this is a paradoxical effect of the control Indigenous people have sought in order to take back the definition of Indigeneity. The result is sometimes a feeling of needing to assert their clear difference from 'white' Australians. Consequently, it seems impossible for the in-between position desired by Russel or Reynolds to exist as a viable space of identity. This was the argument I developed in the previous chapter. In this final chapter, I wish to explore the ways in which the participants in this study attempted to create "the hybrid" space Russel mentions, "to broaden the bridge", in order to build identities reflecting the different parts composing who they feel they are. Whereas chapter 9 showed how the participants were sometimes torn apart by their in-between status, this chapter is focused on analysing how they nevertheless find ways to work around their in-between-ness and make sense of their fragmented identities.

In order to analyse the participants' responses to in-between-ness, I want to recall two broad theoretical concepts introduced in chapter 1 and which underlie this thesis.

The first is the postmodern vision of identity defined by Stuart Hall in chapter 1, and which he further explains in these words:

The concept of identity deployed here is (...) not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is to say, (...) this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor – if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity – is it that 'collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are

subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.³

As explained in chapter 1, this vision of identity – and the more general paradigm of social constructionism – underpins the analysis carried out in this thesis. It is with the belief that identity is constructed, always in movement, and made up of multiple elements reflecting individual complexities and contradictions, that I have approached this topic and made sense of the participants' discourses about their identities. This definition of identity was problematic when opposed to the essentialist one also outlined in Hall's analysis. His definition of cultural identity described in terms of "true self", "shared history and ancestry", "unchanging oneness" and "belongingness" echoes several representations of Indigenous identity presented in this thesis. As was outlined, these representations influence the participants' understanding of Indigeneity and are both perceived as attractive and problematic given the participants' difficulty in relating to them. As I showed in 9.1.2, this essential vision of identity also clashed with the constructed definition of it that the participants often had, thus leading to self-doubt.

The second theoretical concept I want to come back to is that of hybridity. In 9.1.1, I explained the historical meaning of hybridity, a concept which, for a long time, was only considered negatively. However, the notion of hybridity has been re-evaluated within the context of post-colonial studies and widely used to make sense of in-between positions resulting from colonisation and its aftermath.

Quoting Ankle Hoogvelt, Paul Meredith, in his study of hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand explains how central the concept of hybridity has become in post-colonial studies.

[T]he concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-between-ness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference. This is particularly so in

³ HALL, Stuart, "Who Needs Identity?" in HALL, Stuart, DU GAY, Paul (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc., 1996, pp. 3-4.

Bhabha's⁴ discussion of cultural hybridity. (...) Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges from the interweaving of elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity. Hybridity is positioned as antidote to essentialism."⁵

Meredith's comment introduces the notion of a positive hybridity such as the one mentioned by some participants when they outline the benefits of being biracial, or of having multiple heritages. Following this vision, the 'hybrid', previously perceived as a threat to purity, and condemned to remain forever "dislocated"⁶ (see 9.1.1) is now regarded as the solution to binarism, a person in-between cultures, capable of relating to both and therefore of overcoming essentialisms. Although it is argued in the first part of this thesis that no culture can be regarded as a pure entity, but that all are hybrid constructs, the concept of hybridity as a response to essentialism remains useful because *discourses* presenting identities as essential still have currency in today's Australia.⁷

Homi Bhabha's most used concept is the rather elusive "third space". Meredith understands it as a space of new possibilities.

The third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. (...) This hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity'. (...) The hybrid identity is positioned within

⁴ I choose to focus on Homi Bhabha's theory as he is generally regarded, in Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman's words, as "the foremost theorist of hybridity".

KUORTTI, Joel, NYMAN, Jopi (eds), *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007, p. 3.

⁵ MEREDITH, Paul, "Hybridity in the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-Cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand", paper presented at the TeOruRangahau Maori Research and Development Conference, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 1998, p. 2, <http://lianz.waikato.ac.nz/PAPERS/paul/hybridity.pdf>

⁶ ANDERSON, Ian, "I, the 'Hybrid' Aborigine: Film and Representation", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷ One of the critiques against the use of the concept of hybridity is that it is "meaningful only as a critique of essentialism" (FRIEDMAN, Jonathan quoted by NEDERVEEN PIETERSEE, Jan, 'Globalization as Hybridization', in FEATHERSTONE, M., LASH, S., ROBERTSON, R. (eds), *Global Modernities*, London: Sage, 1995, pp. 45-68). Nederveen Pietersee's reply is that essentialism remains meaningful in today's world, and therefore, so does hybridity: "There is plenty of essentialism to go round. Boundary fetishism has long been, and in many circles continues to be, the norm. After the nation, one of the latest forms of boundary fetishism is 'ethnicity'. (...) Hybridity as a point of view is meaningless without the prior assumption of difference, purity, fixed boundaries. Meaningless not in the sense that it would be inaccurate or untrue as a description, but that, without an existing regard for boundaries, it would not be a point worth making."

NEDERVEEN PIETERSEE, Jan, "Hybridity, So What? The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition", *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2-3, June 2001, pp. 224 and 226.

this third space, as 'lubricant' in the conjunction of cultures. (...) At the point at which the colonizer presents a normalising, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy opens up a third space of/for rearticulation of negotiation and meaning. (...) The concept of hybridity and the third space contribute to an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic patterns of cultural exchange and maturation.⁸

It can be noted that while it is the colonial power that is destabilised in this definition, in the case of the participants, as I explained, pressure to conform to specific definitions of Indigeneity comes from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In any case, within this study, the use of this interpretation of Bhabha's third space and of this vision of hybridity lies in its reinstatement of in-between-ness as a potentially powerful position. Third spaces represent creative spaces where movement and plurality can thrive against an essential, unitary and static vision of culture and identity. In this, these concepts can be linked to the postmodern vision of identity described previously. Together, these notions can be used to make sense of the post-colonial development of multiple and unstable identities such as those of the participants.

One of the fundamental questions asked in this thesis is that of control: what kind of control do the participants have over the definition of their identities, considering their in-between position as people with Indigenous heritage but with a 'white' upbringing? I have tried to answer this question across this thesis and will continue exploring it in this chapter. I will analyse to what extent the concepts of a postmodern and hybrid identity can help explain the participants' understandings of their identities and the control they have over them.

I will use the notion of fragmented identities – hybrid and in movement – in order to explain how participants made sense of their own in-between identities or even embraced them. I will first consider the notion of fragmented identities in space by focusing on the notion of 'safe spaces' – in-between spaces where re-definitions of identity are possible. I will then look at how the evolution through time of the participants' identities reveals

⁸ MEREDITH, Paul, "Hybridity in the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-Cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand", *op. cit.*, pp. 3 and 5.

fragmentation, and study the concepts of process and relevance. Finally, I will question the compatibility of a postmodern and hybrid vision of identity with Indigenous identity and in today's Australian context.

10.1 Fragmented Identities and Space: Safe Spaces⁹

As explained throughout this thesis, several participants mentioned the importance of space in the way they managed their Indigenous heritage. The participants talked about spaces where their claim to have Indigenous heritage or their identifications were well-received, while in others they were rejected or feared to be so, which induced silence. An example given by several participants is the difference between the generally tolerant urban space where they live as adults compared to a country environment often described as more likely to be racist. While some spaces are clearly regarded as friendly or unfriendly, in most of the spaces in which they find themselves, the participants have to ask themselves whether revealing their Indigenous heritage will be welcome or not. This constant need to evaluate their surroundings when talking about Indigeneity contributed to several participants' reluctance to mention their heritage at all. This behaviour is caused by and contributes to perpetuating the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous spheres of society, and to the difficulty envisaging spaces where they overlap.

However, it was also clear in the participants' discourses that there exist in-between spaces which helped them discover their heritage safely and progress on their way to understanding and/or embracing it. These spaces are meaningful in that they help people with very few or no links with Indigeneity cross the boundary between two worlds presented as separate.

In her overview of the Australian higher education sector and how it has been integrating Indigenous students, Maryann Bin-Sallick quotes Robyn Williams' definition of cultural safety:

⁹ In this chapter, the notion of space is to be understood quite generally: while it sometimes literally means a delimited space such as a university Indigenous centre, it can also be understood as a broader space, such as the family or governmental spheres.

An environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.¹⁰

It was indeed important for the participants to find spaces where their claim to Indigeneity was not constantly challenged, but also spaces where they could meet both Indigenous people like them – who are not heavily involved in the community – as well as Indigenous people with different stories. The experience of diversity within a safe space allowed the participants to move across lines otherwise neatly drawn.

In this section, I will study three spaces several participants described as allowing them to identify safely and to test their limits. These are university Indigenous centres, the private space and the ‘official’ space.

10.1.1 University Indigenous Centres

The important role of university – as an accepting environment and a place of learning – in the participants’ understanding of Indigeneity has already been mentioned. For the participants, university played a role in shaping a more complex vision of Indigeneity in different ways. For example, Michelle took an Indigenous studies class, while Josh received an Indigenous cadetship and worked with Indigenous people. Beyond the generally stimulating environment university represents, Indigenous centres were mentioned by half of the participants as privileged spaces in which they were accepted in spite of their lack of Indigenous cultural background. These were spaces where they could grow more confident about their heritage.

The first Indigenous Centre was created in 1973 in Adelaide¹¹ in the wake of the policy of self-determination set up by the newly-elected Labor government.¹² Its aim was not only to help Indigenous students navigate the higher education environment, but also to create

¹⁰ WILLIAMS, Robyn, quoted in BIN-SALLICK, Maryann, “Cultural Safety: Let’s Name It!”, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, Vol. 3, 2003, p. 27.

¹¹ At the former South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT).

¹² BIN-SALLICK, Maryann, “Cultural Safety: Let’s Name It!”, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

“structures supporting the maintenance of an Aboriginal identity” as well as a “separate space to complement the above.”¹³ Therefore, the idea of cultural safety defined earlier by Williams was given an actual space within universities. For various reasons I will now detail, the participants considered these centres to be privileged spaces for personal development. Indeed, Bin-Sallick mentions the “*maintenance* of an Aboriginal identity” as an important goal answering a fear that Indigenous students would be “whitewashed” when entering an educational system traditionally hostile to Indigenous people and worldviews.¹⁴ However, in the participants’ case, these centres were often an entry point into Indigenous identity. While other Indigenous students may regard the Indigenous centres as places where they can maintain a connection with their culture, in some ways, they are even more significant places for people whose link to the Indigenous community are tenuous or non-existing, and who rely on such spaces to introduce them to Indigenous culture and people.

10.1.1.1 Recognition

The first reasons why Indigenous centres were attractive to the participants is because they are places where Indigenous identity is not only not questioned, but also formally recognised.

Several participants like Casey, Vanessa, Adina or Miriam remember high school as an environment in which it was not safe to declare their heritage, where judgements were easily made about Indigenous people, and where stereotypes often prevailed over more complex and diverse visions of Indigeneity. Some examples I have already cited show this: Adam declared he was always considered either too ‘white’ or too Indigenous; Casey’s percentage of Indigeneity was not judged sufficient for him to qualify as Indigenous.

As an Indigenous student quoted in Jumbunna’s brochure – UTS’ Indigenous centre – explains, being questioned by students was not the only rejection Indigenous people faced

¹³ BIN-SALLICK, Maryann, “Cultural Safety: Let’s Name It!”, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

at school. This person explains that at school, Indigenous students, when not openly criticised, were not properly recognised as different from other students.

Indigenous students at my high school were not really acknowledged, so it was hard to feel as though I belonged. At Jumbunna, I feel as though I can be myself. I have a place to go where I am understood.¹⁵

This idea was repeated by Adam who feels that university is a more welcoming space where services are especially set up to cater for the needs of Indigenous students.

Adam *University was much easier. University is such an accepting environment compared to high school. I mean everybody can account for that. (...) The services that are set up at university are really good.*

In their recent analysis of Indigenous Australians in higher education, Ekatarina Pechenkina and Ian Anderson explain the importance of the mere existence of a space recognising the presence and specific needs of Indigenous people.

Since the establishment of the first designated Indigenous support unit in 1973, nearly all Australian universities now have a dedicated Indigenous centre, ensuring a culturally safe environment, space and facilities for Indigenous students and staff. The symbolic dimension of having a centre is also important. Even Indigenous students who only occasionally use the services provided by a centre report that the very existence of the centre is an indicator that Indigenous education matters at the university and that there is a place for them to go if they need any help.¹⁶

Michael Peachey explained that the recognition of the importance of the Indigenous centre Nura Gili at the University of New South Wales had grown over the years. Whereas Nura Gili used to be located at the far end of the UNSW campus, it now occupies a very

¹⁵ HIGHFIELD, Magenta, "Jumbunna Indigenous house of Learning prospectus", *University of Technology Sydney*, p. 20.

¹⁶ PECHENKINA, Ekatarina, ANDERSON, Ian, "Background Paper on Indigenous Australian Higher Education: Trends, Initiatives and Policy Implications", prepared for *The Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, September 2011, https://sydney.edu.au/documents/about/higher_education/2011/20110930%20IndigenousHigherEducationReview-ResearchPaper.pdf, accessed on 20 November 2016.

central place, a symbolic step forward in the acknowledgement of Indigenous people in higher education.

Michael *The numbers of students coming here are increasing. (...) We're seeing a lot more students on campus now because of where we're located: we're right in the middle of campus, right in the middle of the main walkway!*

For the Indigenous community, as Bin-Sallick explained, this symbolic recognition is all the more important as until the 1970s, Indigenous people were mostly denied the right to a proper education.¹⁷ For the participants, the importance of being recognised as Indigenous lay in their personal history of having experienced if not rejection at least disbelief.

An important reason why the participants felt Indigenous centres were safe spaces was their open approach to defining Indigeneity – again, something the participants had little opportunity to find in a society where clear-cut representations prevail.

10.1.1.2 Diverse Definitions of Indigeneity

The difference Adam highlighted between high school and university in Australia is seconded by Michael Peachey from Nura Gili. He agrees that Indigenous students are indeed better recognised within the higher education environment. Peachey emphasises the variety within the people identifying as Indigenous who visit the centre.

Michael *We see a lot more students that are very fair-skinned – blond hair, blue eyes (...) I suppose they're all minorities where they come from: there are not many Indigenous people within the[ir] school[s], or they haven't grown up as Indigenous, so they don't acknowledge that they're Indigenous either because they're scared of both sides, of repercussions from both sides. (...) But they're a majority once they get into that programme, and they're all together, and they learn about culture, or they learn about Indigenous people.*

In his description of Indigenous students, Peachey emphasises both difference and sameness. The students were minorities at school because there was a majority of non-Indigenous students, but with the term “minority”, Peachey also seems to say that some

¹⁷ BIN-SALLICK, Maryann, “Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!”, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

students may have been marginalised because they did not fit the usual description of an Indigenous person – physically or culturally. Thus, they were also a minority within the Indigenous group. At Nura Gili, their difference is accepted: the diversity of the Indigenous community in Australia is recognised and valued.

This is something Miriam noted: she felt more legitimate claiming her Indigenous identity when she realised other fair-skinned students also visited the Indigenous centre:

Miriam *For a while I was going to the Indigenous centre at uni to study a little bit. (...) You walk into a room of ten people who say they're Aboriginal and they're all the same colour as me... It makes it ok, I guess.*

On the other hand, once they enter the centre, the minority Peachey described becomes a majority – since more and more students like the participants identify. They also stop being marginalised as they join the general Indigenous community that is the centre and “learn about culture together”. Therefore, it is the combination of unity and diversity which allows the students to feel like they belong.

This combination was also highlighted by Andrew.

Andrew *The first day I went into the Indigenous study room, it was quite daunting for me in the sense that I thought, “This is going to be really, really awkward”, because aesthetically I don’t... That was quite a step, but everyone that was in there, whether appearing in a more traditional sense or more similar to my appearance, everyone was really accepting, and welcoming, and they’d organise barbecues and what not to kind of draw that community in that sense of belonging within Macquarie university.*

Delphine Did these people have a similar story to yours or were they closer to their Indigenous communities?

Andrew *It was completely mixed. I wouldn’t be able to narrow it down to an area or a group, but obviously those people that were there identified as Indigenous, and that would have been the common thread.*

Andrew had apprehensions before visiting the centre, being influenced by representations of Indigenous people as dark-skinned. His fears were alleviated as he

realised that Indigenous students all had different physical appearances and cultural experiences. Diversity seemed to be the reassuring factor in Andrew's case. However, he also stresses the importance of sameness. The fact that the students organised barbecues – an activity Adam described as typically Australian, and which must have been a familiar cultural element for Andrew too – made him feel as if he was not different from other Indigenous students. Moreover, Andrew also underlines that the sense of belonging created within the centre was due to “the common thread”, the fact that, in spite of their diversity, all students identified as Indigenous. This is important because, while he may have had doubts about his skin colour or cultural links to Indigeneity, identifying was something Andrew was allowed to do within the centre, just like everyone else.

The reason for this is that the Indigenous centres I read about or went to do not ask for formal evidence of Indigeneity.

At the time when Andrew enrolled at Macquarie University, he did not – and still does not – have a certificate of Aboriginality. He explained that this did not matter to him and that he felt that the way Macquarie University understood Indigeneity was what had allowed him to embrace his heritage.

Andrew *Macquarie university understood, to an extent, some of the difficulties which took place during the 70s and 80s in Australia. (...) So their ideology of what defines you as Indigenous, or your Indigenous heritage is somewhat different¹⁸ in the sense that [they asked], “Have you known or has it been said within your family that you come from Indigenous background? Have you identified with your friends and close family; do you identify?” There were all these questions, and I went, “Yep, yep, yep”. And that was when I was kind of accepted into that Indigenous community there. (...) And that was probably the first time I sat there and said, “Yep. I feel very comfortable now openly acknowledging it”. (...) Macquarie university accepted me based on my Indigenous heritage. I was formally recognised.*

¹⁸ Andrew compared Macquarie University's policy of welcoming Indigenous students without a certificate to policies from other universities where he believes this document is required. From what I gathered after interviewing Indigenous people working at the Indigenous centres at UTS or UNSW, certificates were required when Aboriginal Entry (a pathway to university for Indigenous students who do not have the required marks) was asked, but not for students wishing to enter the centre.

Therefore, the Indigenous centre at Macquarie University privileges the second criterion of the official definition – “An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person (...) who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.”¹⁹ This also means that Indigenous identity is understood as constructed rather than inherent. The focus is less on someone’s genetic heritage than on their choice of identity, and on someone’s links with the community within the university. When I asked Damita McGuinness from UTS’ Jumbunna whether Indigenous students needed any proof of their Indigenous status to get into the centre, she replied that they do not, and emphasised the fact that the students form a community and that “generally the students know who’s who.” Jumbunna’s understanding of Indigeneity as diverse was highlighted in their brochure which, again, puts forward the notions of belonging and of community: “Everyone is welcome at Jumbunna. Everyone is important. No matter what your background, you are accepted into our Jumbunna community.”²⁰

Michael Peachey emphasises the importance of understanding Indigeneity as a cultural construct rather than as an essential attribute, and, above all, of teaching this vision of identity at university.

Michael *You know, that’s a big thing, racism within our own race. (...) And we get that a lot. And we used to get it in our programmes until we introduced the cultural aspect, and identity, and what identity is. So, after we did that, the programmes were easier in a way.*

His university’s approach to Indigeneity allowed Andrew not only to have access to the centre, but to experience belonging and formal recognition for the first time. The fact that his physical appearance and lack of knowledge about his heritage – which means he has no certificate – mattered less than his commitment to being part of the university’s Indigenous community, allowed him to move beyond the opposition between his ‘white’ and Indigenous identities. At the Macquarie University centre, he felt legitimate as Indigenous

¹⁹ “Kinship and Identity: Legal definitions of Aboriginality”, *Australian Government-Australian Law Reform Commission* website, <http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/36-kinship-and-identity/legal-definitions-aboriginality>, accessed on 12 November 2016.

²⁰ “Jumbunna Indigenous house of Learning prospectus”, *University of Technology Sydney*, p. 4.

and most of all was accepted as such. As we saw, personal understanding and acceptance by others are the two basic tenets of identity. Moreover, it does not seem as if Andrew was ever asked to renounce his 'white' identity to become part of this community. The Indigenous centre was a bridging space between his 'white' upbringing and culture, and his Indigenous heritage and burgeoning identity.

10.1.1.3 Discovering Indigeneity

In the participants' discourses, Indigenous centres appeared to be spaces where they felt they could explore their Indigenous heritage without being judged for their lack of knowledge or involvement in the Indigenous community.

The participants were aware of the importance for Indigenous people of belonging to a community, and several lamented their lack of connection to their community. As has been argued, the concept of community is at the heart of the definition of Indigeneity in the Indigenous centres I mentioned. In their study of the role played by a "dedicated Aboriginal student space" (ARC) at the Canadian university of Guelph, Natasha L. Smith and Jeji Varghese show that Indigenous centres can have even more significance to people like the participants who have no other community to turn to.

For some of the participants, the ARC was the only community they had ever had: "I don't particularly consider my 'status' community as my community, I've never lived there. Coming to the University of Guelph and spending time at the ARC is really the first Aboriginal community I've ever had" (Participant I).²¹

This is something Damita McGuinness once again emphasised: the variety in the students' family histories means that Indigenous people with strong links with their community mix with others for whom Jumbunna is their only community. All students, according to her, mingle happily in this safe space.

²¹ SMITH, Natasha L., VARGHESE, Jeji, "Role, Impacts and Implications of Dedicated Aboriginal Student Space at a Canadian University", *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 2016, p6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1167065>

Damita *For the most part, our students are very comfortable with their Aboriginal identity and they've grown up as an Aboriginal person. They're very connected to their community. You get a lot of students who, as you said, have grown up not sort of really knowing much –they know they're Aboriginal – but they haven't really connected to community for whatever reason, and there's many, many reasons why that happens. (...) We've spoken to a lot of people that are in that position, but they like to come here to Jumbunna and hang out, and connect, and talk to other students. (...) And you can come at any time of the day, and you know, find bodies just lying around. You know, because they know they can get comfortable out there. (...) They just like to come in and hang out, and have a cuppa, and have a sense of...belonging. You know, they're a community to themselves.*

This community did bring a sense of belonging, as Andrew explained, but it also helped the participants who became involved with it learn more about Indigeneity.

Smith and Varghese explain how students like the participants who are still in the process of discovering their heritage felt safer asking questions within the centre. Their participants' concerns echo those of the participants in this study.

"How can I say that I'm Aboriginal, but have no idea what that means? I still struggle with that. (...) I always felt stupid and guilty for not knowing things."

The majority of participants spoke to the process of searching for or finding their identity and the difficulties they faced. (...) Cultural identity is firmly located in particular places that house stable, cohesive communities of shared tradition and perspectives. For these students, going to the ARC and participating in the cultural programming available there was their first opportunity to really explore their Aboriginality. For Aboriginal students, there is a lot of confusion, guilt, or embarrassment about their lack of knowledge or understanding about their identity. The ARC offers them a place where they could get their questions answered and a space where they felt safe to ask questions and admit they did not have the answers.²²

Vanessa and her brother's stories confirm Smith and Varghese's remarks: Vanessa explained that an Aboriginal elder working at the Indigenous centre at her university in Adelaide "took [her] brother under his wing" to introduce him to "the local Land Council,

²² SMITH, Natasha L., VARGHESE, Jeji, "Role, Impacts and Implications of Dedicated Aboriginal Student Space at a Canadian University", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

the local men's group" to try and "immerse" him despite the fact that the community where they come from is in the Torres Strait Islands.

For his part, Andrew explained that his visits to the Indigenous centre helped him start learning about his heritage.

Andrew *I had more exposure to people that were proud and open to discuss it. We had an Indigenous study room, so I would have exposure to people who would be able to assist me, and kind of just discuss it. (...) It gave me that opportunity to really start to talk to people about it a little bit more.*

In Andrew's case, it is the combination of feeling admitted within the Indigenous community – even though it was only that of the centre at Macquarie University – and learning about his heritage in a safe space that led him to identification. Andrew explained that his confidence grew to the point where he felt confident enough to identify openly: "[I felt comfortable] to the point where, on Graduation Day, I was the only actual student who wore Aboriginal colours."

Indigenous centres are spaces designed for students already identified as Indigenous. That is why it is interesting to see that they also appear as spaces where people like Andrew, who are first hesitant about their Indigeneity, can familiarise themselves with the idea of being Indigenous. Consequently, Indigenous centres can also be considered safe spaces in that they accept that Indigenous identity is constructed, and that due to varied personal histories, it is a process not everyone has achieved by the time they arrive at university. Indigenous centres are bridging spaces: while the participants are often told that they either are or are not Indigenous (see 9.2), within Indigenous centres, it seems that there is room for in-between-ness and evolution.

Another example illustrating this is that of Vanessa. As she previously explained, Vanessa was originally reluctant to declare her Torres Strait Islander background at university.

Vanessa *I think I identified at my university third year in. The [Indigenous] centre knew [since my first year], but the university didn't. And I had strict confidentiality. (...)*

They can't release your data. (...) I had got quite a high ATAR²³ and I was like...I didn't want anyone questioning that I was in my degree.

Following the negative reactions of her non-Indigenous friends when they learnt about her heritage, Vanessa started university with apprehensions about the way people would treat her if they knew she had Torres Strait Islander heritage. Here, the Indigenous centre is a space allowing an in-between position: Vanessa can learn about her heritage safely while keeping it from other people and protecting herself from their potentially negative reactions. Thus, the centre recognises that a process may be needed before someone is able to openly claim one's Indigeneity – something Vanessa now has no problem doing.

Thus, Indigenous centres can be seen as transitional spaces where the participants can learn about Indigeneity itself but also about how to personally relate to it. Like university, they are thresholds for people discovering their identities.

10.1.1.4 Building Bridges or Drawing Lines?

The recognition that identity construction is a process, and that diverse Indigeneities are the product of a complex history is also a form of acknowledgement that non-Indigenous and Indigenous histories have been constructed together since 1788. As Marcia Langton writes, “the creation of ‘Aboriginality’ is not a fixed thing, it is created from our histories. It arises from the inter-subjectivity of black and white in a dialogue.”²⁴

As explained in 5.3.2.3, to Michael Peachey, encouraging this dialogue is a priority goal at the Indigenous centre Nura Gili.

²³ Australian Tertiary Admission Rank: the primary criterion for entry into most undergraduate-entry university programs in Australia

²⁴ Langton's statement is echoed by several writers. For example, George Morgan writes: “Aboriginality is not simply a vestige of something that has survived from the past. Like all cultures it is formed in a process of dialogue, engagement and resistance and involves the incorporation of elements of the cultures of the colonisers”, while Indigenous academic Natascha McNamara acknowledges the British influence and writes: “We must begin to understand ourselves in the wholeness of our Australian identity and not only part of it.” MORGAN, George, *Unsettled Places: Aboriginal People and Urbanisation in New South Wales*, op. cit., p. 143. MCNAMARA, Natascha, “Australian Aborigines: A Question of Identity” in HOCKING, Brian (ed.), *Australia Towards 2000*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 98.

Michael *It's also to build reconciliation and more understanding about Indigenous issues and Indigenous people within the university itself.*

Michael Peachey presents Nura Gili as a space meant not only to help Indigenous students but also dedicated to educating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students about Indigenous culture, and to bringing both communities together. Nura Gili, in Peachey's mind, is a bridge between both groups, symbolised by its central location on campus. However, while UTS' Jumbunna adopts a welcoming approach towards Indigenous students (who do not need a certificate), this particular Indigenous centre is also designed as a space for Indigenous students only.

When I visited the centre in 2014, I was initially surprised to find a sign on the door stating that only Indigenous students are admitted. I discussed this with Damita McGuinness.

Delphine [Jumbunna] is not open to non-Indigenous students? It's just for Indigenous students here, right?

Damita *Yeah, that's right.*

Delphine So that they can feel comfortable...

Damita *Yes, that's exactly right. We've got a sign on the glass door there.*

Delphine Yes, I saw it, actually. And I almost didn't come in! *(both laugh)* "They've told me to go and sit in there...but I'm not sure I can..."!

Damita *You can come in at our invitation! We have a lot of non-Indigenous people that come in here: we get a lot of tutors that come in, you know, that goes without questioning. Sometimes our students will bring non-Indigenous students in because they might be doing group work. We allow that, as long as they are with one of our students.*

Reflecting on what had happened, I remembered that my initial reaction had been quite negative. I felt that a space reserved for Indigenous students was only perpetuating an already too-present division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities at a time when reconciliation should be happening, especially in a privileged space – a

university – for cultures to mingle. At first, I also felt confused at being forbidden to enter a room because of my origins – or lack of them. I recount this personal anecdote because it helped me recognise the need to find a balance between a theoretical point of view on the question of identity and one taking into account the power struggle between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the past and the present, something I will pay particular attention to in 10.3.2.1. From a theoretical point of view, it seemed irrational to me to continue excluding people based on their heritage, in the same way it happened in the past. However, the sign on the door also made me realise that considering the history of Indigenous exclusion from educational spaces, and the more general rejection of Indigenous people in Australian society analysed in this thesis, a separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students may still be needed. Indeed, these spaces are safe spaces for Indigenous people who feel that, still today, they are not completely included at university. This is what a student explained in the brochure for Jumbunna.

Jumbunna is definitely the first place I head to when I go to uni. It's also the first place I go when I'm after some advice and the only place to go where I really have a sense of belonging.²⁵

If the Indigenous centre is the only place where this student feels she belongs – because it is only frequented by Indigenous students – then excluding non-Indigenous students may make sense. Jumbunna is then designed as an empowering space for Indigenous people. As McGuinness explained, non-Indigenous people are welcome into Jumbunna, but only “at our invitation”. She also said, “That’s their space, you know, in this whole universe, that’s their space. That’s what we offer them.” By being able to decide who to include in their community, Indigenous students can take back some degree of control over the definition of Indigeneity – something, as we saw, Indigenous people are often denied in an Australian society where ‘white’ definitions of Indigeneity often prevail.

The way Casey perceived the Indigenous centre at his university was aligned with a conception of this space as protected from the rest of society, a space where Indigenous people can feel safe among themselves.

²⁵ RANBY, Karla, “Jumbunna Indigenous house of Learning prospectus”, *University of Technology Sydney*, p. 16.

Casey *I turned up at this morning tea when they opened the Indigenous centre there and that's when I started... Like from that point on...that's where I'm all the time at uni. If I don't have class, I'll just go there, be on a computer, do some general work, or whatever... Always around, always around other First-Nations people, and I feel a lot more comfortable, a lot more relaxed. I identify with how the Aboriginal, First-Nations people operate.*

For Casey, as has already been illustrated, there is a clear difference between the way non-Indigenous and Indigenous people work in their daily lives. His remarks echo those of the student from Jumbunna. They give the impression that the Indigenous centre is a sort of sanctuary preserved from non-Indigenous influence. This is a very different vision from that promoted by Michael Peachey at Nura Gili.

It seemed to me that Indigenous centres should be places recognising that Indigeneity is the product of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories and presents, and promoting reconciliation. The experience at Jumbunna, however, made me ponder the reality of enduring tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and therefore question my assumptions.

Thus, the effect of Indigenous spaces seems mixed. All those cited in this section chose a definition of Indigeneity based on personal identification, something which allowed several participants to experience a sense of belonging to an Indigenous community – often for the first time. In so doing, Indigenous centres are hybrid spaces like the ones mentioned in Meredith's description of the third space: "a space that engenders new possibility, (...) where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity'." Indeed, Indigenous centres were described as spaces where diversity is embraced, thus accepting new ways of being Indigenous. However, depending on their orientation, Indigenous centres do not always make it their goal to move the lines separating Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.²⁶ Meredith explained that "the concept of hybridity and the third space (...) develops inclusionary, not exclusionary (...) patterns of cultural exchange". Jumbunna cannot be described as an "exclusionary" space since Indigenous students can bring in their non-Indigenous friends. However, as a result of what I understand to be a

²⁶ I am aware that the scope of these conclusions is limited considering the number of Indigenous centres I visited or was told about. A broader study of these spaces should be carried out to refine these findings.

strategy of re-empowerment, non-Indigenous students need to gain approval before being able to enter the Indigenous space. Thus, the roles are reversed but the boundaries remain. It is difficult to say whether they remain only because they are still needed for the time being, or because a choice is made to keep a separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and cultures.

As a conclusion to this analysis of Indigenous centres, I can also say that another potential limit to the inclusive role they play is the very fact that they are safe spaces, and therefore somehow preserved from the outside world – a vision developed by Casey. While Indigenous centres can be seen as transitional spaces, helping people like the participants on their path to identification, I wondered how the identities built within these walls will be accepted outside.

This is an issue Damita McGuinness mentioned. While being accepted as Indigenous based on identification helped someone like Andrew feel formally accepted, this recognition may not be valid to other people outside of the centre.

Damita *You know, just because we accept someone as an Aboriginal person here, that doesn't mean the community is going to. (...) We're not the Aboriginality police here. If someone's identified, we can't say, "Well, you're not." It's not our job. Very different in the community, but in here, we can't do that.*

10.1.2 Private Indigeneity

A second safe space the participants mentioned is the private space. In his discussion of the role of the state in the definition of Indigeneity, Jeremy Beckett uses a distinction made by Sally Weaver between “private” and “public” ethnicities.

[Private ethnicity] is practised by groups or networks of Aboriginal minority members in their daily lives. (...) In short, private ethnicity is defined and rationalized by the Aboriginal groups, not the nation-state, and it is private because its content and use are not dependent upon public (non-Aboriginal) debate and determination. Public ethnicity, by contrast, consists largely of symbols. It is part of the political culture of the nation-state, being determined in

the public arena of relations between the nation-state and Aboriginal minorities.²⁷

Unlike private ethnicity, which is behavioural, situational and heterogeneous, public ethnicity is symbolic, global in application (to all or specified members of a minority) and uniform in concept.²⁸

It is the influence of restricting and dominant discourses about Indigeneity that impacts the participants' understanding of their heritage. These dominant discourses can be understood in terms of Weaver's description of "public ethnicity": the representations I studied in previous chapters are indeed based on positive or negative symbols – such as a black skin, remote communities, among others – reducing Indigeneity to a limited set of characteristics, which in turn create a "uniform" vision of Indigenous people. These characteristics may be used by Indigenous people, but as Weaver writes, are often "dependent upon [a non-Aboriginal] public". It is when they are compared to these public representations of Indigeneity and found wanting that the participants feel unsafe. Consequently, I would argue that "private ethnicity" as described by Weaver could be considered a safe space where the participants can develop "heterogeneous" conceptions of Indigeneity. I will now analyse to what extent this resonated with the participants' experiences.

10.1.2.1 Overarching Families

Adam is one of the participants who has contacts with his extended Indigenous family. His freedom to define what being Indigenous personally means to him was often denied. Not, however, by his Indigenous family.

Adam *We went to family gatherings where there were heaps of Aboriginal people around, and we knew them all. But it's your family, so I'm not going to the family gathering saying, "You're such an Aboriginal person!" (...) That's the interesting*

²⁷ WEAVER, Sally quoted by BECKETT, Jeremy, "Aboriginality in a Nation-State: The Australian Case" in HOWARD, Michael C., WALKER, Ranginui, LECKIE, Jacqueline (eds), *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in the Pacific*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1989, p. 119.

²⁸ WEAVER, Sally quoted by BECKETT, Jeremy, "Introduction" in BECKETT, Jeremy, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

thing: my family itself didn't give a crap. They were happy for me to do whatever I wanted to! Especially my nan: she didn't care whether I worked with the Aboriginal community, or I just got a good education...

One of the issues Adam faced was the pressure put on him to give back to the Indigenous community by doing research in Indigenous studies, even though his interests lay elsewhere. However, while he felt this pressure at university, he explains this was not the case within his Indigenous family where his personal understanding of his Indigenous identity was accepted.

In this case, the family space can therefore be considered a safe space: Adam's personal understanding of Indigeneity was validated there.²⁹

As far as Josh is concerned, the private family space was also one where the boundaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities could be blurred. This is because, in his mind, family ties are stronger than any difference in skin colour or culture. This is similar to Adam saying, "But it's your family, so I'm not going to the family gathering saying, 'You're such an Aboriginal person!'".

Josh *Why do I not want to know more [about my heritage]? I suppose it's not a big deal because, well, they're your family either way. So, I'll still see fifty of my Indigenous family – probably more so now than I did when I was younger, particularly [since] I live near some of them now. (...) They're just your family, I guess, so it wouldn't matter whether they're black or white. (...) If they're Indigenous, they're Indigenous, and if they're not, they're not. And knowing about the culture...is not going to change that.*

Josh did not feel comfortable calling himself Indigenous as he felt he had not been raised as such. However, his remarks show that not knowing much about his Indigenous culture does not prevent him from associating with his extended Indigenous family. In his case, their geographical proximity at that time in his life counted more than their cultural proximity. Josh's is another example of the possibilities emerging within the private sphere. Josh's relationship to his heritage may be complex, but the importance granted to family is

²⁹ As we saw in chapter 8, however, such acceptance was not experienced by Adam's sister who was called an "uptown nigger" by "her own extended family members" and was rejected by them. For several years, this experience had a strong impact on Adam's willingness to continue identifying as Indigenous.

a means to go beyond the “incommensurable” divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

10.1.2.2 Uncanny Families

Reconnecting with their extended Indigenous families and thus creating a private link to their heritage seemed to be a natural – and sometimes relatively easy – step for some participants, while it was considered a daunting prospect for others. While Josh, Casey and Adam were taken to visit their communities by their parents, other families hid their Indigenous heritage or denied it. As a consequence, today, Adina or Michelle are more reluctant to meet their relatives. Michelle especially fears being rejected.

The relationship the participants have with their extended Indigenous families varies from person to person. It also evolves as they grow older, and fluctuates according to their level of confidence in reclaiming their heritage. However, overall, not having known a private form of Indigeneity as children, this relationship illustrated the ambivalence arising from the in-between position the participants grew up in and still often occupy. Indeed, the participants described their upbringing as ‘white’ or at least as non-Indigenous. This resulted in the participants’ lacking the daily-life Indigenous experience described by Weaver, and which can counter “public ethnicity” discourses. That is not to say that the participants’ non-Indigenous family members all rejected Indigeneity, but, not being involved in the Indigenous community themselves, their understanding of Indigeneity was also premised on “public ethnicity” discourses.

As a result of not being in touch with their Indigenous relatives on a regular basis, several participants remembered what could be called uncanny experiences when meeting Indigenous members of their families.

In *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Jane M. Jacobs and Ken Gelder explain this concept defined by Freud:

Freud elaborates the ‘uncanny’ by way of two German words whose meanings, which at first seem diametrically opposed, in fact circulate through each other. These two words are *heimlich*, which Freud glosses as ‘home’, a familiar or accessible place; and *unheimlich*, which is unfamiliar, strange, inaccessible, unhomely. An uncanny experience may occur when one’s home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and ‘out of place’ simultaneously. This simultaneity is important to stress since, in Freud’s terms, it is not simply the unfamiliar in itself which generates the anxiety of the uncanny; it is specifically the combination of the familiar and unfamiliar.³⁰

Casey and Michelle both experienced meeting members of their Indigenous families who were dark-skinned at a time when neither of them knew about their families’ Indigenous heritage. This created a surprise which can be explained by the intrusion of an unexpected element – black skin – within the familiar family space perceived as white.

Casey *My dad got in contact with my grandfather's sister, then we went down there about a month later and met everyone. (...) I think I would have been eight. I didn't really know what to think. (...) And then, we went down there, met all the cousins, all these black kids running around. I'm freaking out: "What's going on here?"*

Michelle *I remember once we went to a petrol station on the way to go fishing somewhere [with my dad] and we ran into my supposedly uncle Jack, but it would have been my great uncle actually (...). Dad said hello to him, talked to him. We were in the car, you know kids watching my dad talk to this guy, and when dad got back in the car, he said, "That's your uncle Jack", and we were quite surprised because he was black. (laughs) Ok, how did that happen?*

These stories told by Casey and Michelle are some of their first experiences of in-between-ness. The uncanny feeling they experienced stems from the fact that the participants were then too young to comprehend their position, but were still confused by the clash between the concept of family – a familiar, safe space – and Indigeneity, considered unfamiliar within this particular space. These experiences are similar to Adam’s who expressed his “angst” at not understanding for a long time that growing up ‘white’ and having Indigenous heritage meant he had “a foot in each world”.

³⁰ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p.23.

Another childhood experience is that of Josh who, when he visited his community as a child, had to make sense of the fact that people who lived differently from him and his immediate family were still part of his family.

Josh *It was interesting I suppose to see people you were essentially related to living...in bad conditions. (...) I suppose I'd never been out to a mission before, and then they say, "Oh this is your auntie." And you see that she doesn't cook inside; she cooks on a frying pan on a fire. (...) They live differently to us, and you can see that very clearly.*

Casey and Michelle's uncanny experience was based on physical discrepancy. For Josh, it is the cultural gap between him and his extended family that appears disconcerting. The familiar concept of family – represented by the “essential” blood link – is disrupted by the unfamiliar vision of Josh's relatives' unfamiliar way of life.

Gelder and Jacobs describe the concept of the uncanny as valuable in that “it refuses the usual binary structure upon which much commentary on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations is based.”³¹ In the participants' stories, although Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity interact, the beneficial effect of bringing unfamiliar elements into the familiar concept of the family is not immediately visible. It is only as adults that several participants realised what these childhood experiences meant. On the contrary the collision between the familiar and safe private family space with foreign Indigenous elements was – at least temporarily – a source of disquiet. This is linked to a perception of hybridity as not simply celebratory but also potentially disturbing.

As Meredith explained, for Bhabha, the third space is an “ambivalent site” where a process of trying to hold together different elements and to make sense of their coming together is taking place. The previous examples show that the private space can be a safe and familiar space, but that it retains a degree of unfamiliarity which can be unsettling. The combination of the concept of family with the unfamiliarity of Indigeneity sometimes had

³¹ GELDER, Ken, JACOBS, Jane M., *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, op. cit., p.24.

the power to move binary lines separating the non-Indigenous and Indigenous sides. Sometimes, however, it served to highlight differences.

For example, while Michelle says she is attracted to some aspects of Indigeneity in general, she keeps very few links with her Indigenous relatives and draws a clear line between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous sides of the family, even mentioning essential differences between the two.

Michelle *I've actually made friends with a few of [my Indigenous relatives] on Facebook, but I don't really talk to them about my family as such because it just causes arguments. They see my dad as someone who was treated badly by my mother. (...) I kind of know that my dad beat my mum. They don't believe that's true...or rather that's ok for them more so. A slap every now and then, that's normal for them, and it's not normal for us. So it's really two different sides of the family; it was like black and white, quite literally.*

10.1.3 Public Indigeneity: The Official Space

In her description of “public ethnicity”, Sally Weaver emphasises the role of the nation-state in shaping and controlling “global”, “uniform” representations of Indigeneity which do not reflect the heterogeneity of private Indigeneities. There was, however, another side to the role played by the state as far as the participants were concerned. Several participants mentioned that official spaces – spaces where the official definition and certificates of Aboriginality prevail as forms of identification – were safe spaces where their identifications were not questioned. In this section, I will analyse to what extent the official space helped the participants keep control of their identities, but also whether or not this space contributed to blurring boundaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities.

10.1.3.1 An Empowering Official Definition of Aboriginality

Not all participants were familiar with the three-part definition of Aboriginality adopted in 1981 and based on descent, self-identification and community recognition. Those who

worked with Indigenous people, or who had asked for a certificate of Aboriginality were familiar with it. This definition helped shape their understanding of Indigeneity as constructed. Indeed, as explained in chapter 9, while the first criterion is based on genealogy, the other two point to a vision of identity which is both personal and relational. Most participants emphasised the importance of “feeling” Indigenous over dominant discourses on skin colour or traditional ways of living. The great majority also stressed the significance of being recognised by a community. While, as the previous section showed, for several participants, this third criterion may have been more difficult to identify with, the fact that this definition presented identity as a personal choice rather than as dependent on physical appearance or lifestyle mattered to Adam and Miriam.

Adam *I'd applied for university degrees based on my Aboriginality. (...) I think it helped me to recognise my Aboriginality better, because I was being recognised as an Aboriginal person for the sake of entry.*

I do think it's an important definition. It's one of the things that's allowed me to accept myself a little bit more. Throughout all the struggles, there's always a level to stay above it.

That definition has allowed Aboriginal people like myself to identify without feeling like we're being illegitimate. Whereas if it was just, "Must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent", I think it would be harder for people. Because then it's purely based on a genetic look, or on a genetic way of being, and I think the main focus then would be, "Do you look Aboriginal?" rather than I do feel, or the community accepts you. They are the key points of being Aboriginal, the last two.

Miriam *Our government will recognise you're Aboriginal not because of your skin colour, but by the other three criteria. And so you know that it's legitimate.*

Both participants refer to skin colour which, as explained in chapter 6, is often problematic for the participants used to representations of dark-skinned Indigenous people, and used to being judged on this criterion. As Adam explains, this definition and the piece of paper legitimating it did not prevent people from questioning his identity. However, the knowledge that he was officially recognised as Indigenous helped him remain “above it” all.

It is interesting to see that this three-part definition combines two things that are important to the participants. First, it allows them to identify even though they do not fit traditional representations of Indigeneity. This is because this definition, which departs from previous definitions based on racial criteria, recognises diversity by focusing on a personal understanding of identity. Secondly, it also allows the participants to feel that they belong to the Indigenous community. While the participants need their difference to be recognised, they also need their sameness to other Indigenous people acknowledged. Therefore, it is also important to them to fit the criteria of a definition encompassing all Indigenous people.

The need for an official validation of Indigeneity seemed particularly important to several participants. This is linked to the fact that the participants were not able to obtain validation from their communities or Indigenous families, from the private sphere of Indigeneity, when they were growing up. This lack of 'lived experience' made them more vulnerable to criticism and therefore in greater need of official proof of their Indigeneity.

In her study of Indigenous people's sense of selves in suburban situations, Yuriko Yamanouchi noticed the reliance on government recognition of people "with fragmented family history".³² As shown by the reflections on the necessity or not of having a certificate of Aboriginality, the participants who, as Yamanouchi explains, did not "ha[ve] the opportunity to develop relational selves through early or formative social relationships with kin or wider Aboriginal networks"³³ felt an official recognition could compensate for their lack of involvement in the past.

10.1.3.2 Certificates of Aboriginality

Michelle *Now I feel like without having that, I don't have any legitimacy to say that I'm Aborigine. You know, I know it exists in the family, but I can't prove it. I've got no documents. (...) It's not that the piece of paper matters, but it does in a way. It's to know for sure that what's being said... It's like legitimating what's being said,*

³² YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³³ *Ibid.*

instead of it being, "Oh someone told you this". It's actually written.

Michelle was one of the participants whose links with her Indigenous community were the most tenuous. However, she comes from a small Victorian town where her family is known. It seems to me that if she went back, she could possibly get a confirmation of her heritage. However, the fact that she lives in France, and the clear divide between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous sides of her family make it very difficult for her to do this. In Michelle's case, it is the lack of community links which makes her turn to the government for recognition of her heritage. However, the very fact that Michelle has almost no remaining connection to her community made her reluctant to ask for a certificate. There is a paradox in the fact that, in order to obtain a certificate of Indigeneity, the participants must be recognised by their respective communities but that such certificates are especially needed by those whose links to community are tenuous – even though considered important.³⁴

The fewer links the participants had in their daily lives with an Indigenous community – not necessarily the one they were from – the more they seemed to need government recognition of their Indigeneity. For example, in the early years of her identification, Miriam explained that having a certificate gave her more confidence.

Miriam *I still wanted [a certificate of Aboriginality]...just for myself. (...) I can't explain it. I guess it's just legitimacy. (...) Even though I think it's shit that people have to get a certificate, (...) it's a mechanism that you can draw upon to say, "I'm Aboriginal because of this." I guess I feel more empowered to say that I'm Aboriginal.*

The official recognition of her status allowed Miriam to be more confident about her right to claim her heritage in spite of her lack of Aboriginal cultural background. Miriam seems torn between feeling that she personally needs this piece of paper, and her belief that being Indigenous is not about owning a certificate.

³⁴ However, the third criterion does not necessarily indicate that a person is involved with their community. In Adam's, Josh's and Miriam's cases, for example, it is their parents who asked for certificates since they knew family members at the local councils who could certify that they were of Indigenous descent. Josh is not involved in his Indigenous community and does not identify as Indigenous. Both Adam and Miriam do identify but have loose links with the communities where they come from.

In the same way, Vanessa explains that she and her brother asked for a certificate because they were told to do so. At the same time, she believes it added to her legitimacy.

Vanessa *We [asked for a certificate] because [the elder at university] said it was a good idea. But yeah, once we got it, it was kind of...a great feeling; we were just like, "Ok."*

Delphine So you felt like it added to your...I don't know...

Vanessa *...Identity, yeah. It is [like a form of recognition]. We never were told, and now it's official. It's official. But it wasn't because it was official to Australia. It was official to everyone we knew, and other Indigenous people recognised us as being Indigenous. I think that was...that validation.*

Vanessa recognises here that validation was important and that her need for it is linked to not having grown up identified as Indigenous. However, she explains that, to her, validation should come from the Indigenous community rather than the government. This can be explained by the fact that Vanessa was already rather confident about her Indigenous identity and becoming involved with the community when I interviewed her. As I explained, the more at ease the participants were with their heritage, the more involved they were in the community, the less they felt the need to have governmental approval.

The definition of Aboriginality currently used, and the certificates associated with it, are tools bridging a divide between the government and the Indigenous community. While the government used to be in control of the definitions of Indigeneity, the new definition is designed to recognise Indigenous people's right to self-identification. As it is accepted and used by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, it allows the participants to gain recognition as Indigenous from both communities.³⁵

Nevertheless, Adam points out that while a certificate is official recognition of Indigeneity, this does not remove people's doubts about his authenticity as Indigenous.

³⁵ There are, of course, instances when this definition will not be considered sufficient proof of Indigeneity. Vanessa was once told by an Indigenous person that having a certificate of Aboriginality does not make her Indigenous (see 9.1.1.2.2).

Adam *Whether I feel that [I am Aboriginal] or not, if I go for an interview where Aboriginality is a requirement – I very rarely do that these days – I have to present my letter. And I have to because of how I look. I can say to them, “I’m Aboriginal.” And tell them I’m part of the community. I can even show them pictures of my family, and whatever I want, but without the letter, I’m not Aboriginal. And that’s kind of sad, to a degree. It means a piece of paper says I’m Aboriginal, instead of who I actually am, but there’s no choice.*

Adam points out a limit to the recognition granted by a certificate of Aboriginality. While the certificate is based on a definition recognising someone’s right to self-identify, as well as the relational aspect of identity, if the certificate cannot be produced, then such criteria are no longer valid, and physical appearance, which Adam decried, is once again used to judge Indigeneity. Therefore, while the official definition of Indigeneity and the certificate of Aboriginality can be ways for the participants to feel safer in their identifications, their presence does not erase the influence of dominant representations of Indigeneity used to judge Indigenous people’s degree of authenticity.

10.1.3.3 Limits of the Official Safe Space

Miriam and Adam’s ambivalent feelings towards the certificate of Aboriginality reflect the limits of the official sphere as a safe space for identity construction. Indeed, while a certificate of Aboriginality is perceived as a tangible proof of Indigeneity helping them feel that their claim is taken seriously, the participants are also well aware of its limits.

10.1.3.3.1 Surface Recognition

This piece of paper may allow the participants to apply for Indigenous positions or Aboriginal entry at university. However, it may not always convince people – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – of their authenticity as Indigenous. Thus, Yuriko Yamanouchi mentions some Indigenous people being suspicious of people with a certificate

but who are not well-known within the community, and their reluctance to accept them as part of them.³⁶ This attitude is shared by non-Indigenous people.

This is something Josh and Miriam experienced. Both pointed out that working for the public service sheltered them from open rejections of their claims to Indigeneity. However, both felt that although their certificate gives them legal protection, it does not convince everyone of the legitimacy of their claims.

Miriam *I mostly work in the public service, so people are informed enough to know that they can't put their personal views out...(laughing), so they kind of say, "Oh, ok, cool. Good job. You look really white."*

Miriam's story reveals the weight of what remains unsaid. Miriam is well aware of what people think but cannot say – that she looks too white to be authentically Indigenous. Although she laughs this away, this is an example of the pressure put on the participants and which can chip away at their confidence.

Josh's example shows that he also used the public service as a safe space where people could not openly attack him. In his case, this compensated for his lack of confidence in his right to call himself Indigenous.

Delphine So you were pretty comfortable saying, "I'm Indigenous" and doing this program [the Indigenous cadetship at university]? (...)

Josh *Probably not really, no. (...) [But] I suppose it was for the public service, so people couldn't say anything to me.*

In both cases, it is clear that although the official sphere is considered a safe space protecting them from blatant denials of their Indigeneity, this safety is only superficial as it does not extend to people's genuine acceptance of the participants' Indigenous identities.

Therefore, in the same way that being recognised within a university Indigenous centre does not guarantee recognition by the Indigenous – and non-Indigenous – communities,

³⁶ YAMANOCHI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *op. cit.*, p. 71.

official evidence of Indigeneity is not always accepted as enough proof of the participants' authenticity.

Several participants like Adam or Miriam emphasised the fact that among the three criteria in the definition of Aboriginality, the last two mattered most. This is something Kate also re-affirmed.

Kate *Once I'm ready to identify, and if anyone questions it, then I have that [certificate], but I don't think a certificate or proof of Aboriginality proves that you're Indigenous or not. It's how you feel. About yourself.*

However, as the previous examples show, a certificate of Aboriginality is not always understood as evidence that someone self-identifies as Indigenous and is accepted by the community. It is taken as evidence that someone has Indigenous ancestry – something which, as Michelle said in 9.1.2.3, is true of many Australians, but is not seen as enough reason to claim benefits reserved for people perceived as more truly Indigenous.³⁷

As Kate's remark shows, the certificate is therefore perceived by the participants as a sort of safety net. The examples in this section show that several participants felt an official recognition of their identity claim matters. Nevertheless, several also recognised that people's acceptance – Indigenous people's especially – was the type of recognition that really matters, and that an official piece of paper could not guarantee it.

10.1.3.3.2 Rejecting the Official Stamp

While Miriam, Josh and Kate felt they were only safe to a certain extent within the official sphere, Michelle explained that she would rather avoid it and not have the government know about her Indigenous heritage.

Michelle *When it comes to the government, I would not see them as seeing me as being Indigenous being an advantageous thing, because (...) being Aborigine... It's not a*

³⁷ Again, this is something Yamanouchi notices. She links the certificate to a genealogical vision of identity only, which is not considered enough for Indigenous people to accept someone as part of the community. YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, "Managing 'Aboriginal Selves' in South-Western Sydney", *op. cit.*, p. 71.

great thing still in Australia. I mean, it's better now than what it was, but...(...) Even in terms of government, or people that I work with today – cause I'm a civil servant now – they might seem like they're empathetic to Aborigines, but secretly – because you would never express it publicly or anything – they might actually be quite racist themselves at home. So I would be careful as to who I would tell, because (...) it may actually still affect your chances to get a promotion or a job.

Michelle's remarks echo those I have just analysed. But Michelle adopts an even more cautious stance when it comes to the government. While the participants in the previous section were not naïve about what people may think, they still regarded the official sphere as a safe bubble in which their claims had to be accepted. On the contrary, Michelle's vision of the government is that of an anti-safe space. This is reminiscent of the mistrust a lot of Indigenous people continue having for the Australian government³⁸ due to its historical and ongoing interference in their lives.³⁹ While Michelle fears for her own safety, not knowing whether or not racism still lurks behind appearances of acceptance, Miriam recounts the story of Indigenous people rejecting government recognition of their Indigeneity on the grounds of past mistreatment.

Miriam *I know some dark-skinned Aboriginal people who refuse to get [a certificate]. I had a teacher at university once – Aboriginal – who said, "They didn't need certificates to take our parents. They didn't need a certificate for them to take us, so why should I get one now?"*

Miriam points out a lingering distrust in the government within portions of the Indigenous community, but also reaffirms a difference between fair-skinned and dark-

³⁸ For example, in a guide published by the government of New South Wales, *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A Practice Resource*, non-Indigenous Australians are warned about mistrust and advised to keep their word when working with Indigenous people: "Historically the words protection and intervention have not been associated with positive outcomes for Aboriginal people. (...) There is an understandable mistrust of people who offer services based on these concepts. Some reasons for this mistrust stem from European colonisation. (...) There are a number of other underlying social issues faced by Aboriginal families that impact on the issue of mistrust such as power differences, lack of representative structures and a lack of Aboriginal people in influential positions in government."

Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A Practice Resource, Ashfield, NSW: NSW Department of Community Services, 2009, p. 3.

³⁹ Bain Attwood points out the difference between past and present generations in the relationship between Indigenous people and the government. He criticises Sally Morgan for seeking recognition of her Indigenous heritage from the government while her ancestors' choice of passing means they tried to keep away from it. ATTWOOD, Bain, "Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality", *op. cit.*, p. 304.

skinned Indigenous people. Her remark implies that, while a dark-skinned Indigenous person may reject a certificate he/she does not need to be recognised as Indigenous, she, on the other hand, needs it when her Indigeneity is doubted.

Nevertheless, Casey, who is fair-skinned, also rejects the idea of a certificate. In so doing, he aligns with other participants' belief that a piece of paper does not mean that someone is Indigenous. But while others still used it as a safety net, Casey refuses to do so.

Casey *My father has a certificate of Aboriginality. I do not. I don't want one, really, because I don't feel like I require a government document to say that I'm of Aboriginal descent, or any of that sort of stuff. I know who I am. I know where my people are from. I'm getting to know my tribal history. I'm getting to know my language. I don't need some government statistics or certificate to tell me that.*

Casey fully takes on the idea that Indigeneity is based on self-identification and recognition by the Indigenous community. His rejection of a certificate confirms that the more people are integrated in the Indigenous community, the less they need proof of their status (apart from situations requiring proof: asking for benefits or applying for an Indigenous position, for example). Casey's stance is also evidence of his rejection of the government's right to influence the definition of Indigeneity. Again, Casey draws a clear line between non-Indigenous – most strongly represented by the government, as far as he is concerned – and Indigenous Australia. Casey does not wish to blur boundaries between these two groups as he feels non-Indigenous Australia is still trying to dominate Indigenous people.

10.1.4 Conclusion to 10.1

The concept of safe spaces studied in this section has the potential to move binary lines separating Indigenous from non-Indigenous Australians, and to unsettle fixed, uniform representations of Indigenous people. As such, safe spaces can be analysed as hybrid spaces where elements usually kept separate are brought together. In all three spaces, examples of re-workings of definitions occurred. Within the private space, Adam's Indigenous family accepted that he was not interested in working for his community.

Within the public space, the definition of Indigeneity and certificates force people to accept definitions of Indigeneity which may differ from their representations of it. In Indigenous centres, the participants were accepted without official proof of their ancestry and without questions about their physical appearance or cultural background. While the existence of such spaces can have a significant impact on the way the participants view their identity, I have also shown the limits of such spaces. While they allow definitions to be shifted, most of the time, they do not permit full displacement. These safe spaces are bubbles in which the participants can test their identities and grow more confident about them. But outside of them, homogeneous demarcations of groups and definitions remain present. Moreover, even within hybrid spaces, tensions are not always resolved by the combination of different elements. As the example of what I called the official space shows, tensions can remain even when the lines are shifted. Miriam's and Josh's interlocutors accepted their Indigenous identity while making the two participants feel that they nevertheless still questioned it. In turn, the participants felt both empowered and disempowered within this space. As in uncanny experiences where the familiar and unfamiliar coexist, the hybrid space is one where tensions are held but not necessarily resolved, as Nikos Papasteriagis explains.

The hybrid is formed out of the dual process of displacement and correspondence in the act of translation. As every translator is painfully aware, meaning seldom moves across borders with pristine integrity. Every translation requires a degree of improvisation. The hybrid is therefore not formed out of an excavation and transferral of foreignness into the familiar, but out of this awareness of the untranslatable bits that linger on in translation.⁴⁰

It seems to me that the participants had to forge their identities by working around these "untranslatable bits", by holding disparate elements together.

As Papasteriagis' analysis reveals, the construction of a hybrid identity does not only happen in space but also in time: it is a "process".

⁴⁰ PAPASTERIAGIS, Nikos, "Restless Hybrids", *Third Text*, Vol. 9, Issue 32, 1995, p. 18.

10.2 Fragmented Identities and Time

[Bhabha's] hybridity refers to the necessary instability and impurity of all identities, the figure of migration no longer the bearer of ontological mixture, but signifying movement itself, conceptualizing identities as forever in process, unstable, dynamic, nomadic and 'uprooted'. Rather than attend to the substance (hybridized or essentialized, 'open' or exclusionary) of identity claims, Bhabha's focus is the process by which identities are uttered, reiterated, performed.⁴¹

Avril Bell's analysis of Bhabha's work on hybridity rejects the idea that hybridity is constituted through the addition of essential elements which together form a new whole. As the previous section showed, the process of hybridity seems more convoluted. Bell's analysis shows that all identities are in fact hybrid since they are constructed over time, and are constantly in movement. Therefore, Bell's description of the concept of hybridity puts fluidity at the heart of its definition, which is also what Stuart Hall emphasised in the introduction when he described identities as "subject to a radical historicization, (...) constantly in the process of change and transformation."

In this section, I will study the ways in which the participants' identifications were constructed in time, and show that, as Hall described, the participants' identities do not "[unfold] from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change", but on the contrary, are fragmented through time.

10.2.1 Identities in Progress

In chapter 9 (9.1.2.4), Richard Jenkins makes a distinction between primary identities, which he describes as "more robust and resilient to change in later life than other identities"⁴² and identities chosen later in life. Indigeneity was not a primary identity for the participants since it was not a consistent part of their childhoods. Their relationship to it was therefore more subject to change. As this thesis explores the lives of young Australians who were not raised Indigenous, it turned out that the participants' views on

⁴¹ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, op. cit., p. 93.

⁴² JENKINS, Richard, *Social Identity*, op. cit., p. 21.

their Indigenous heritage and/or identity were often unstable. Indeed, several of them were still in the process of discovering it.

Some participants mentioned that the construction of their identity was a work in progress. Andrew was aware of the different steps he went through in the discovery of his heritage, and of the fact that his identity would not remain static.

Andrew *I've got friends who are much more...who want to do work with Indigenous groups, who are listening to Indigenous radio stations and stuff. Those things don't appeal to me as much at this point. I don't think my views are going to remain static about how I view myself.*

It's been baby steps in the sense that initially I was joking about it with my close friends, and then from there, being able to openly discuss, and then choosing the groups, and then ticking the boxes. There have been different steps throughout my life that have taken me to the next step of acceptance or understanding of my heritage.

Miriam added that confidence in her Indigenous identity came with time and therefore lived experience as an Indigenous person.

Miriam *I think it is still a work in process, and probably identities are like that throughout your whole life. I'm probably more serious about it now than I was at this time last year. Because I continue learning, and putting things together. (...) As you get older, you just get more confident. Also practice at saying it, being around...you know, being at the ALS [Aboriginal Legal Service]. (...) In hindsight, maybe if I'd waited a few years, I would have got more confident, then I probably wouldn't have wanted [a certificate].*

Miriam's remarks emphasise the fact that Indigeneity is not an inherent part of herself, but that it is constructed over time through interaction with other Indigenous people. This fact, as explained in chapter 9, is often masked by discourses presenting Indigeneity as a fixed identity transmitted through blood. Such a perception of Indigeneity does not recognise that time is an important factor in identity construction.

While the participants mentioned that their personal cultural identities were built gradually, they did not necessarily envisage Indigeneity itself as evolving. In her study of people discovering their Indigeneity, Fiona Noble explained that

[the participants] saw themselves as going through a process of ‘stripping back the layers’, learning to be ‘black’ just as their relatives had to learn to be white.⁴³

Noble’s comment shows that while learning about Indigeneity requires a process, its aim seems to be to reach an already-formed, no longer evolving, Indigeneity. Moreover, Noble’s participants envisage becoming Indigenous as freeing themselves from their ‘white’ world views to become ‘black’, rather than as creating a hybrid identity in which both ‘white’ and ‘black’ elements could coexist and evolve.

It is this particular definition of Indigeneity several academics defend. Adopting a constructionist position, they argue that culture and identities in general should be understood as fluid.⁴⁴

There is nothing static or unchanging about Indigenous cultures and therefore, Indigenous identity. It, like every other culture, is fluid and must change and adapt over time.⁴⁵

By describing Indigeneity as historicised, Harris, and Rolls in the following quote, aim at debunking the myth of a separate Indigenous identity existing in a bubble outside of time and protected from other cultural influences.

The unshackling of cultural identity from some imagined pure originary form to seeing it instead as something unstable, in continuous production and a constituent element of all its histories (rather than insulated from selected historical trajectories) means that ‘white’ Australia and western cultural forms are not altogether separable from Aboriginal cultural identity. (...) If we understand cultures and the identities produced within them as an ongoing and

⁴³ NOBLE, Fiona, *Who Do We Think We Are? People Learning about their Aboriginality*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ See also LANGTON, Marcia, “Urbanizing Aborigines: The Social Scientists’ Great Deception”, *op. cit.*, p. 17, or HOLLAND, Wendy, “Rehearsing Multiple Identities” in *Visibly Different: Face, Place and Race in Australia*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ HARRIS, Michelle, “Emergent Indigenous Identities: Rejecting the Need for Purity” in HARRIS, Michelle, NAKATA, Martin, CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, *op. cit.*, p.21.

contingent process (...) we are also able to allow for the full range of responses – both cultural and individual – to the forces of colonisation and post-colonialism.⁴⁶

Adopting this vision of identity, as Rolls explains, allows for the recognition of the past, present and future impact of non-Indigenous culture on Indigenous identities, and vice versa, something Marcia Langton, quoted in 10.1.1.3, also stressed.

This is a vision of Indigenous identity Adam adhered to, as the following quote shows.

Delphine So you grew up believing in all this, in the Aboriginal mythology more than any other religion?

Adam *Not necessarily. It's a mix. It always is a mix, I think, for every Aboriginal person – I'm not talking just for white Aborigines here. Christianity comes into it because we live in Australia. You can't avoid Christianity.*

By following this vision of culture and identity, instead of being engaged in a process of becoming Indigenous – that is to say, eventually fitting a set of pre-defined criteria – individuals like the participants can be active players in the construction of Indigeneity, and have agency over how to integrate it into their identity.

10.2.2 Relevance

The idea of constant progress towards a final objective – being Indigenous – is further disrupted by some of the participant's convoluted identity journeys. Andrew, who described a series of phases gradually increasing his knowledge about and confidence in his Indigeneity, describes his progression as linear. This was not the case of all participants. The “fragmented” and “fractured” aspect of identities described by Hall was visible in some of the participants' complex identity journeys.⁴⁷ For example, Adam explained that when he was twenty-three and interviewed for an article on fair-skinned Indigenous people, he identified confidently as Indigenous. However, when his sister was rejected by her

⁴⁶ ROLLS, Mitchell, “The Meaninglessness of Aboriginal Cultures”, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁷ The participants' timelines can be consulted in Appendix 3.

community, he became weary of having to defend his right to call himself Indigenous and stopped identifying for a while. Now in his mid-thirties, he identifies again, but Indigeneity is no longer at the centre of his life, the way it used to be. Another example is that of Josh who admits not knowing whether or not he is interested in his heritage. He identified at university but later decided that his job did not require him to continue identifying.

The participants' willingness to identify or not depends on how relevant Indigeneity is to their daily identities. For the participants, identifying as Indigenous is a choice. Because most participants learnt about their heritage as teenagers or adults, they were at a time of their lives when identity was not imposed upon them but developed freely. Moreover, as explained, the participants have to decide whether or not to mention their heritage, since it is not physically detectable – Indigeneity is not an identity ascribed by others.

Generally, the participants who identify most strongly as Indigenous are those whose heritage has an impact on their daily lives: for example, when I interviewed them, Adina was identifying as Indigenous at university and was learning about Indigeneity through her son; Casey, Kate, Miriam and Vanessa were all working with Indigenous people.

Vanessa *I tell everyone I meet now, pretty much. I'm pretty open about it because I work in the field, so I feel...it's my everyday life now.*

On the contrary, Michelle said that moving to France and losing touch with her father's Indigenous side of the family diminished her interest in her heritage.

Michelle *I really was passionate about it [when I was at university], and now that I'm getting older...not so much. I guess it's because I've been over in France for a long time.*

In the same way, Josh explained that, while he had felt connected to his Indigenous heritage while he had an Indigenous cadetship and worked with other Indigenous people, at a later stage in his life, he felt his Indigenous heritage was no longer relevant enough in his daily life.

Josh *Maybe at this point I was twenty, twenty-one. I thought maybe yes, I would explore*

it, but then...I was like, "Nah, I'm going to go work somewhere else in a job that's quite interesting to me, which is agriculture, and it doesn't matter whether you're Aboriginal or not there. (...) So I sort of just went out the back door.

In the same way, at the time of the interview, Adam explained that his Indigeneity was still present but not at the forefront of his life.

Adam *These days I'm de-prioritising my Aboriginal identity. And that's not because I don't like it, or because I want to get rid of it, or anything like that. I don't think – ah this is going to sound bad but – I don't think it serves me any purpose, and that's terrible, because I understand that that's very utilitarian and very cold, but truthfully my grandmother passed away; my auntie just passed away.*

Adam feels that his identity as Indigenous is relevant when linked to the Indigenous family members who influenced him. At the moment, he finds relevance for his Indigenous heritage in his teaching job. As he explained, he feels it is his responsibility to be a role model for Indigenous students, to show that having a fair-skin and being educated are not incompatible with identifying as Indigenous. However, Indigeneity is no longer as central as it used to be in his life, which is why he talks about “de-prioritising” it.

As explained in chapter 7, for most participants, approaching their heritage through a connection to the past – to their ancestors – is easier than finding relevance for it in the present. Not being embedded in the Indigenous community can put a stop to some participants' desire to embrace their heritage. On the contrary, as Vanessa explained, finding relevance for Indigeneity in everyday life justifies identifying as Indigenous and gives the participants legitimacy. Josh's example reveals that when relevance disappears, it can become more difficult to maintain a link with Indigeneity.

Michelle Harris contends that identities are performances which depend on an individual's need for them.

Emergent identities recognise the performative nature of identity (...) and any performance's endurance or demise will depend on either feelings of satisfaction (and the subsequent decision to continue an action), or appraisals of diminishing utility (and a decision to cease acting in a particular way). This element of enactment does not entail fixity or essentialism, rather, it speaks to

the complex appraisals of costs and benefits that are the motivational heart of identity performance.⁴⁸

Harris describes the concept of identity as plural and volatile, in the same way Hall defined it. Harris uses the word “emergent” to describe the fact that identities are not inherent but constructed through interactions with others, interculturalisation and relevance.⁴⁹ As I explained, these identities are not imposed but chosen, and then sometimes discarded if, as Adam said, they no longer “serve any purpose”. The choice the participants made to identify or not, and to continue identifying or not, depends on how meaningful this identity is to them. Meaning took different shapes according to different participants: a connection to the first inhabitants of Australia and their culture, a feeling of obligation to revive a stolen culture or to act as a role model for Indigenous students, for example.

The idea developed by Michelle Harris goes against a discourse presenting Indigenous identity as inherent. Examples of this discourse can be found in Yuriko Yamanouchi’s interviews. For example, one of her participants said that “being Aboriginal is from ‘the heart’. It is not something ‘you choose’.”⁵⁰ My analysis suggests that this discourse caused issues of legitimacy to some participants. Many emphasised that a person identifies as Indigenous because he/she feels Indigenous. However, while some participants like Adam, Andrew, Miriam or Casey emphasised that they did experience this feeling, other participants had more trouble relating to the inherent aspect of Indigeneity when it did not play a significant part in their daily lives. Thus, Megan, for example, explained that this lack of present connection made her feel as if her heritage was not “real”.

Once again, the participants were caught in-between two discourses about Indigenous identity, presenting it either as inherent or constructed. The previous examples show that they tried to accommodate both definitions. However, not being recognised as Indigenous, the participants had more freedom to adopt or set aside their Indigeneity – or any other of the various identities they hold, as every individual does if we follow a postmodern vision

⁴⁸ HARRIS, Michelle, “Emergent Indigenous Identities: Rejecting the Need for Purity”, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

⁵⁰ YAMANOUCHI, Yuriko, “Managing ‘Aboriginal Selves’ in South-Western Sydney”, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

of identity. The various identity timelines of the participants show that for some of them, identities are indeed fragmented through time.

10.3 Fragmented Identities: Theory and Reality

In this last section, I want to consider postmodern and hybrid identities as choices made by the participants. While in chapter 9 in-between-ness was analysed as a problematic and sometimes impossible position, within the participants' discourses, there were also accounts of positive hybrid identities. The postmodern vision of identity can help analyse the participants' understanding of their identities as evolving and plural. An example of this is the significance of multiculturalism mentioned by most participants in chapter 3. The postmodern definition of identity is one which can transcend essential definitions and strict oppositions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities.

I will first analyse how the participants understand identity: as capable of going beyond binaries, as composed of multiple parts, and as based on individual choices. I will then wonder to what extent this postmodern understanding of identity is compatible with the reality of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today. By introducing the concepts of postethnicity and symbolic ethnicity to analyse the participants' views on their identities, I will question the relevance of such concepts when studying mixed – 'white' Anglo-Celtic and Indigenous – identities. I will finally ask whether, when analysing such mixed identities, postmodern and hybrid visions of identity allow the participants to find confidence in their identities.

10.3.1 Embracing Postmodern and Hybrid Identities

As I will show, the participants as well as several academics point out that identities are not uniform, static, or ruled only by race or ethnicity. Most participants considered their identities in a postmodern way, and embraced hybridity not only as positive, but as natural in today's society. Indeed, while all participants were aware, to some degree, of the pressure to conform to strict definitions of Indigeneity, some did not pay much attention to

this. Others claimed their right to move away from such definitions and to identify following individual preferences.

10.3.1.1 Moving Away from Binaries and Recognising Multiple Identities

Andrew *In the areas where I grew up, there was quite a dichotomy. (...) And there was kind of an almost racial divide; it was one or the other, and growing up I've been exposed to more ideas: I think it's quite outdated, and now, there are just different shades of identity within that. (...) I don't view it as black or white anymore in the sense that there's just a whole lot of shades of grey. (...) We're starting to move away from that idea of requiring it to be (...) "I am Aboriginal or I am Caucasian". People are starting to realise it's more so how you identify yourself, what parts of your heritage or culture you want to embrace. (...) I think it's a little bit outdated to go back to the idea of...racial profiling*

Andrew clearly saw an opposition between 'black' and 'white' Australia, but was convinced that it belonged to the past. No doubt being accepted as Indigenous in spite of what he called his "non-traditional" physical appearance and 'white' upbringing when he was at university helped him gain an optimistic outlook on the present and future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. Whether or not Andrew's views reflect the reality of today's Australian society, several non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous Australians now speak up in favour of the recognition that within an individual, a plurality of identities coexist.

Yin Paradies, Anthony Dillon and Wendy Holland are three Indigenous academics who reject discourses presenting Indigeneity as overarching. They refuse to have such discourses dictate how they should identify, and defend their right to make Indigeneity only a part of who they are.

We do not experience the world only as Indigenous or non-Indigenous. (...) Such policing serves to alienate past and potential future Indigenous people or force those who inhabit Indigeneity into a 'prison-house' of identity which may isolate them from contemporary life and full citizenship. (...) I refuse to "surrender my other identities" in order to be Indigenous and, as such, I also identify as

'and/or' as well as 'not/nor' Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian (...). I am both colonizer and colonized, both Black and consummately White.⁵¹

Let anyone identify any way they want. (...) I am a part Aboriginal person. I'm part European, part Aboriginal, very proud of both ancestries. (...) My life does not begin and end with my Aboriginality.⁵²

By my very being, I disrupt essentialist notions of aboriginality and no longer find it useful to identify in a way that denies a part of myself or any part of my family. These days, I find it much more useful and liberating to be able to speak of myself as being multiple identities and recognise that in different contexts and at different times, I assume different identities.⁵³

Both Paradies and Dillon insist on having all their heritages recognised. In so doing, Paradies emphasises how cultures influence each other, and the inevitable mingling of Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritages and cultures mentioned earlier by Marcia Langton. He also stresses the negative effects of essential representations of Indigenous people which effectively place them outside of society (see chapter 7). Holland stresses the fragmented aspect of her identities, which change depending on context and time. She thus adheres to the postmodern vision of identity Stuart Hall describes. All three refuse to be identified as Indigenous only. Paradies' use of the word "surrender" implies that pressure is put on them to comply with racial loyalty, and that fighting is necessary to be able to identify rather than be identified.

During the interview, Casey criticised Anthony Dillon's position.

Casey *There's this guy, Anthony Dillon, who's at the complete other end of the spectrum. (...) Anthony Dillon calls himself 'part-Aboriginal'. (...) He says, "If you call yourself just Aboriginal, or just First-Nations, or whatever, and you're not full, then you're being dishonest." But he doesn't take into account that it's not just about the percentage of blood, or whatever. It's about yourself in terms of your own identity, how you feel as a person.*

Casey believes in racial loyalty because he sees colonisation as an ongoing process, and believes that the non-Indigenous government and society pressure Indigenous people into

⁵¹ PARADIES, Yin, "Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity", *op. cit.*, pp. 356-357.

⁵² DILLON, Anthony in "Aboriginal or not? Who Gets to Determine Who Is Aboriginal?", *SBS Insight*, *op. cit.*

⁵³ HOLLAND, Wendy, "Mis/taken Identity", *op. cit.*, p. 109.

assimilating into non-Indigenous society. However, I believe he misunderstands Dillon's statement. Casey refuses the expression "part-Aboriginal" on account of its reflecting a genealogical status rather than a feeling of identity. But Dillon's statement shows that it is precisely because only identifying as Indigenous does not reflect who he feels he is, that he wants to be able to have his other heritages recognised. Therefore, through this statement, Dillon, like Paradies and Holland, claims that to feel whole as a person, one does not need to have only one identity, or at least that one identity can be composed of many different parts. The three Indigenous academics ask for the recognition that a fragmented identity – or a "part" identity to use the more controversial expression – should not be viewed negatively. As explained in chapter 9, "part-Indigeneity" is an expression rejected because of its colonial undertones pointing to the disappearance of Indigeneity through assimilation into 'white' society. However, people like Paradies, Holland or Dillon reclaim this expression and change its meaning by placing themselves within the discourses of positive hybridity and postmodern identity.⁵⁴

Several participants considered having a variety of heritages as something positive. Both Adina and Michelle used the comparison with mongrels.

Adina *It's kind of like dogs: everyone thinks the pedigree ones are better. But they're not. The mongrel is where it's at, because they're the ones who survive, because they've got so many different types of dogs in them. We're kind of like that. (...) We're more the kind of make-love-not-war people. We go over to another country; we make love to the inhabitants, but we don't start fights with them. And that's how our family's gone, from country to country, we just picked up a little bit more, and we've gone to the next! (laughs)*

Michelle *I wonder how [my daughter] is going to see herself. (...) Her father's American. Her mother's Australian. She was born in France. And her father has Native American*

⁵⁴ Bronwyn Carlson also advocates for Indigenous people's right to identify beyond essential definitions. But because she also acknowledges the colonial history behind expressions like "part-Aboriginal" or "mixed-descent", and the fact that these are rejected by many Indigenous people today, she talks about "variant selves": "Variant selves is a term I am using to depict the complex nature of Aboriginality without resorting to the uncomfortable term "mixed descent" which, to my mind (...) implies a quantum of Aboriginality that can be measured and reduced according to colonial discourses. (...) The term variant selves represents the possibility and availability of multiple subject positions. [Aboriginal people] are not limited by the dominant discourses that ascribe and dictate their identity. Variant selves give Aboriginal people the possibilities to name, discard already given terms, and reposition themselves in the everyday."

CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., p. 157.

Indian on his side, and Swedish. And I've got Aborigine and Scottish. So, how is she going to identify herself? I guess it's on the sort of stories and the way we bring her up, if we tell her about it or not. (...) I see myself [as] a bit of everything. I joked with friends before about being a mongrel breed, a non-pure bred dog...

Delphine It's more interesting this way!

Michelle *That's it!*

As the mention of “stories” as part of education and identity formation shows, Michelle understands identity as a construct. Therefore, although she talks about her daughters’ ancestry, she believes that her daughter will identify following cultural affiliations⁵⁵ rather than genealogy. Michelle’s story also illustrates the importance of choice and relevance to identity: as she said, she was attached to her Indigenous heritage when she was in Australia, but choosing to move to France changed this.

Both Michelle and Adina value plurality. Other participants, as explained in chapter 3, do not value it as much as believe that it is very common in today’s Australia. For example, while Josh recognises the need for some people to claim only one cultural identity, he personally sees his multiple heritage as neither original nor problematic.

Josh *I can see how others in similar situations feel marginalised as they feel they don't belong to either black or white culture. It would be easy to think like this, however, to me having multiple cultures in your family and ancestry is what makes Australians Australian. (...) There's probably that much crossover in everyone. If you went through anyone whose relatives moved to Australia before 1901, they probably all have some Aboriginal genes in them.*

In their study of mixed-race identities in Great-Britain, Aspinall and Song also found that for some of their participants, race was no longer considered a central criterion of identity.

⁵⁵ David Hollinger prefers the word “affiliation” to the word “identity” in order to focus on identity as a construct but above all as a choice rather than an imposition: “The word *identity* implies fixity and givenness while the word *affiliation* suggests a greater measure of flexibility. (...) Affiliation is more performative, while identity suggests something that simply is. To be sure, one can construe the achievement of identity as an action, but “affiliation” calls attention to the social dynamics of this action.”

HOLLINGER, David A., “Introduction” in *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1995], p. 7.

[some respondents] played down the importance of race for their sense of selves and their everyday lives. These respondents tended to note: (a) the fact that they were British, regardless of 'colour', thus emphasising the growing importance of national belonging over membership in 'race'; and (b) the relative unimportance of race in cosmopolitan, metropolitan settings such as London, where degrees of conviviality and mixing were high, and where being of any hue or mixture was regarded as unremarkable – at least in many situations. (...) These claims should not be interpreted as naive denials of the existence of racism. Rather, these respondents tended to articulate the view that they refused to take racial thinking and ideology seriously. In Britain, it appears that, at least for this predominantly middle-class, metropolitan sample, an increasingly inclusive and race-neutral nationality, as British, is a central part of the experiences of many (though not all) younger mixed Britons.⁵⁶

Aspinall and Song's findings correspond to the image given by several participants in this study: while aware of the existence of racism, people like Michelle, Josh, Kate or Adam, by defining themselves as Australians, also defended a vision of their country as inclusive and multicultural. The participants in this study had all lived in major urban centres, like the sample in Aspinall and Song's study, which partly explains such a vision of Australia.

Beyond embracing the plurality of ethnicities in their backgrounds, some participants also brought in other elements to describe their identities. For example, Adam explained that at the time of the interview, the most important feature of his identity was his job: "These days, it's actually my career which is going to define me more. (...) That identity has become my most important... It has very little to do with my Aboriginal identity these days." As far as Vanessa and Andrew are concerned, being female, or being a son or a brother are also parts of their identities they want to highlight.

Delphine If you think about your identity, what would you say matters most, when you define yourself? (...)

Vanessa *Personality. (...) Who I am as a person, my intellect, I would say. (...) Then I'd probably go 'female'; it would be my second... And then probably 'mixed-culture'. I don't think it'd just be 'Indigenous'...at all. (...) I think I've always identified as Scottish, so I'm just catching up with Torres Strait Islander. But I think it also gives me two different perspectives. I think, you know, a majority of people eventually are just going to be multicultural.*

⁵⁶ ASPINALL, Peter J., SONG, Miri, *Mixed Race Identities*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

Andrew *I'm kind of proud of having a mix of heritage. (...) I really love the idea of kind of bringing it all together. (...) So to me [my Indigenous heritage] is a part of who I am, and I'm proud I can communicate that to people. (...) There are other elements to my background and heritage which make up who I am. I'm proud of those things – so it's not just Indigenous heritage. I'm proud of being English just like, I don't know, I'm proud of being a son and a brother.*

Both participants envisage their identity as a mosaic, something they perceive as enriching and enjoyable. Moreover, in acknowledging that their identities are not only the result of their ethnicities, the participants identify in a postethnic way. Terry Moore defines this concept:

Interest in the idea of postethnicity began with the forms of ethnicity that emerged amongst third and subsequent generations of 'white ethnic' migrants to the United States [who] integrated, intermarried and moved beyond the ethnic enclaves of their grandparents and parents. (...) Unlike previous generations, these peoples' ethnicity was no longer the sole organising principle of their lives. (...) They no longer unconsciously accepted ancient customary structures and practices as binding. (...) Some abandoned their ethnic identity altogether, but many chose to live within and without their communities of origin. (...) [Postethnicity] acknowledges the existence of structures that obstruct (...) freedom, including those from without that stigmatise and marginalise, and those from within that demand conformism to prescribed ethnic modes of behaviour. (...) In postethnic social orders everyone is situated at 'unstable borderlines of difference', necessarily crossing borders and 'juggling cultures'.⁵⁷

Moore uses a concept generally applied to 'white' ethnics to talk about Indigenous people who, he claims, now also live postethnic lives.⁵⁸ As Moore explains, a postethnic view of identity implies that ethnicity no longer is the core of someone's identity. As the previous examples show, while the participants do identify as Indigenous, as Australian, as French Irish, etc., other elements such as work or family come into play. The example of Adam and Josh placing family – whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous – over colour divisions is evidence that race and ethnicity are not the only criteria chosen to describe what matters to them and who they are. Moore's remark about obstructing structures,

⁵⁷ MOORE, Terry, "Interculturality, Postethnicity and the Aboriginal Australian Policy Future", *Ethnicities*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2016, pp. 714-715.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 716.

stigmatising and marginalising, strongly resonates with the fixed representations of Indigeneity studied in this thesis, and their negative effects on the participants' confidence in their identity. While the participants may value a multiple and evolving definition of identity, they are constrained by these representations which pressure them into declaring themselves Indigenous or not rather than 'part' or 'mixed'.

10.3.1.2 Recognising the Right for Individual Understandings of Identity

The examples of the way the participants identify, the concepts of a postmodern and postethnic identity, accentuate the idea that identity is a matter of individual choice. The participants quoted in the previous section do not see themselves as bound to a set of definitions, but work around existing definitions, choosing how to integrate the elements they relate to into their identity and everyday lives.

In his study of Indigeneity in New South Wales, a state where the effects of colonisation were significant, Howard Creamer attempts to find a way out of the description of Indigenous people as "cultureless outcasts",⁵⁹ not 'white' and yet seen as no longer Indigenous. A solution he offers is to look at culture as distributed⁶⁰ across the years, individually rather than collectively. Thus, it is recognised that Indigenous culture will be interpreted differently depending on individuals and the experiences they have had. "Sooner or later, Aboriginality has to be studied at the level of the individual."⁶¹ Creamer's point of view is particularly adapted to a study of Indigenous people and culture too often reduced to homogeneous descriptions. However, it can also be related to the more general postmodern outlook on identity which, in emphasising fragmentation and diversity, also stresses individuality in identities.

⁵⁹ CREAMER, Howard, "Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the Image of Cultureless Outcasts", *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁶⁰ Creamer quotes Schwartz's 1978 "distributive model of culture" and its explanation by Keesing: "Such a view takes as fundamental the distribution of partial versions of a cultural tradition, among members of society (...) [and] can take into account the different perspectives on a way of life of women and men, young and old, specialists and non-specialists."

CREAMER, Howard, "Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the Image of Cultureless Outcasts", *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Andrew was one of the participants who focused on an individual point of view of identity, stressing that his personal feelings about it matter more than people's acceptance or rejection of his choices.

Andrew *I'm not sure where I belong, but I know where I feel that I belong. I'm not sure where I belong in the eyes of others, but I know where I belong in my own. (...) It's been more so about personal acceptance and how I view myself. (...) I am acutely aware that my decisions – even at a younger age when I was choosing the audience I'd speak to – do affect people on both sides, both Caucasian Australians and Indigenous Australians in the sense where, I'm not sure where I fit in in their opinion, but I probably have more priority about where I fit in in my personal opinion, if that makes sense. (...) I think the whole idea of what is Indigenous is going to change from person to person.*

In the same way Aspinall and Song explained that not taking race into consideration was their participants' choice rather than evidence of naivety, Andrew's comments show that he does not take identifying as Indigenous lightly since he is "acutely" aware that it is a sensitive matter in today's Australian society. Therefore, his emphasis of individuality is a deliberate choice on his part to place his personal views above needs to comply with dominant definitions of Indigeneity.

One of the participants' in Bronwyn Carlson's study expressed the same kind of feelings when talking about the need to have the community recognise his/her Indigeneity.

"I think it is your own private business if you say you are or not. (...) Who has the right to say if I am Aboriginal or not? No, I don't like that."⁶²

Carlson comments on the participant's reaction:

These difficulties could only be set aside by some participants by placing more emphasis on the personal meanings of being Aboriginal. In this way, some participants conceded the need for Confirmation of Aboriginality for official purposes but that they did not need it for self-affirmation, thus drawing the line between private and public selves and domains.⁶³

⁶² CARLSON, Bronwyn, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* Op. cit., p. 291.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Carlson's analysis points out one of the limits of identity safe spaces such as the private or official spheres studied in 10.1. Outside such spaces, it may be impossible to hold on to one's identity choices. In this case, the emphasis on an individual definition of Indigeneity means ignoring that identity is a combination of personal choices and of their validation by others. Whether this participant's or Andrew's positions are tenable in the long term is difficult to say.

Adam is one of the participants who tested such limits in the course of his rather complex identity journey. Growing up 'white' but with a non-Indigenous mother introducing her children to Indigenous culture, and influenced by his grandmother involved in the local land council, Adam was taught how to combine different cultural elements. Thus, he created his own individual version of Indigeneity.

Adam *I think the Aboriginals and the scientists [Adam is a researcher] are compatible. I don't see that one needs to exclude the other because they're about two totally different things. One is about a personal connection to the land, and the other is about explaining it in a deeper way. But neither of them excludes each other. Aboriginality doesn't have any gods. The spirits are more about stories of connecting, to me –I can't judge how other Aboriginal people feel about that – but for me, it's the way of narrating our connection with the land, those Aboriginal stories, and the way that they work, and it feels – sorry, I'm struggling a little bit to explain – but it feels, again, it just feels right. It feels right that those things are connected to me. And again, it could just be my mum having been so good at making those connections.*

Like Michelle, Adam believes that it is partly the stories he was brought up with that shaped his understanding of Indigeneity, and of his identity. In analysing Adam's story, it can be seen that, across the years, he has tried to find ways to make all the different things he is compatible with each other. At some points, he had to force things to "feel right" because other people rejected his identity. For example, when he was in his early twenties, he explained he felt he had to focus on his Indigenous identity to convince himself that it was truly a part of him. Now in his mid-thirties, he seems to have reached a point where things are simpler: his Indigeneity is a part of his identity, and is especially relevant in his professional environment, but so are his research and other elements.

The feeling that the different cultural elements he mentions fit together, he stresses, is personal. Adam's ease at identifying today comes from the fact that he has learnt to balance the concepts of individuality and community by achieving personal success through his studies and work before giving back to the community in his personal way – by being a role model for Indigenous students. He is part-Indigenous (my words, not his) not because he only partly identifies with Indigenous culture, but because this is only one of the parts forming his identity. This emphasis on the right to form an individual understanding of Indigeneity is visible in this comment he makes about his work.

Adam *I want other Aboriginal students to be able to use me as a role model –if they want to!*

By adding “if they want to”, Adam once again stresses that there is a variety of role models for Indigenous people, and therefore a variety of ways of understanding Indigeneity.

10.3.2 The Limits of Hybrid and Postmodern Identities

In the previous section, I pointed out that the concepts of postmodern and hybrid identities are linked to an individualisation of the process of identity construction: in-between, multiple and moving identities are the result of personal choices depending, as Holland said, on context and time. The example of Adam I have just analysed expresses both the possibility and the benefits of understanding identity as a personal choice, and the limits of such a perception, which Carlson alluded to.

It is these limits I now want to study, by asking two questions. First, within the Australian context, should the participants be able, as Andrew said, to “pick and choose” elements of Indigenous culture they relate to? Secondly, if they do so, can they maintain such identities outside of their personal sphere?

10.3.2.1 The Ethics of “Picking and Choosing”

In this thesis, I have defended a constructed, evolving and individual understanding of identity. However, I have also studied the question of identity in the twenty-first century Australian context, and applied to people learning about their Indigenous heritage while having received a ‘white’ cultural upbringing. As mentioned in 10.1.1.3, such theoretical concepts as postcolonial hybridity or postmodern identity need to be tested within specific contexts. This is what I intend to do in this last section.

In chapter 3, I analysed the participants’ privileged position as ‘white’ Anglo-Celtic Australians in relation to their support of multiculturalism (see 3.4.4.2.1). I wish to come back to this privileged position but this time to question the participants’ individual understandings of Indigeneity. I will then question to what extent the participants’ plural identity choices are viable in today’s Australia.

10.3.2.1.1 Symbolic Ethnicity and ‘White’ Privilege

The concept of symbolic ethnicity (briefly mentioned in 3.5.4.2.2 and 8.2.1.2) was conceptualised by Herbert J. Gans in 1979.⁶⁴ Gans describes the ways in which descendants of European immigrants in the United States relate to their heritages. He found out that while these people remain attached to their European roots, they are no longer tied to ethnic communities in the way previous generations were, and instead can choose to enjoy only symbolic aspects of their heritages. As Gans writes, such a relation to one’s heritage “does not interfere with the economic, social and other imperatives of everyday life.”⁶⁵ Gans and Mary C. Waters, who further studied this concept in the 1990s, thus define symbolic ethnicity.

Symbolic ethnicity proposes that ethnicity can survive without significant social or cultural participation; the notion of ethnic options argues that the later

⁶⁴ GANS, Herbert, J., “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1979, pp. 1-20.

⁶⁵ GANS, Herbert J., “Reflections on Symbolic Ethnicity: A Response to Y. Anagnostou”, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 123.

descendants of immigrants have some choice in the ethnicity with which they identify.⁶⁶

[F]or later-generation white ethnics, ethnicity is not something that influences their lives unless they *want* it to. In the world of work, and school and neighborhoods, individuals do not have to admit to being ethnic unless they choose to. Ethnicity has become a subjective identity, invoked at will by the individual.⁶⁷

The concept of symbolic ethnicity is easily linked to the postmodern vision of identity in that it consists in people making individual choices about which parts of their ethnic heritages they want to maintain. This form of identity is therefore fragmented and subject to evolution, depending on the relevance of an ethnic background to a person's everyday life.

On several occasions, the participants in this study related to their Indigenous heritage in what could be described as a symbolic fashion. Several examples of this were provided, especially in chapter 5 when I analysed 'white' desire for Indigeneity. For example, Josh organised pretend corroborees with a friend at school; Michelle admitted enjoying aspects of Indigenous culture such as a lack of interest in material possessions "in a hippie way"; Megan explained she enjoyed being able to claim a connection to the first Australians without it putting her at risk, and Adina talked about cooking "aboriginally".

Another example is that of Kate who explained that identifying as Indigenous would not change her everyday life or identity in any significant way.

Kate *To be honest, (...) it's not like it's going to drastically change anything for anyone. (...) I might have, you know, a new group of people, a new family that I'm closer with, but by me, I guess identifying as Indigenous is not going to have any significant effects other than, I think, on my work life, and that's just because of what it means in my work environment to declare that, and the implications that it has, but you know, it's not going to change how I function day to day, or change, you know, what I do. It just might give me a better insight into why specific days,*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ WATERS, Mary C., "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?" in PEDRAZA, Sylvia, RUMBAUT, Ruben (eds), *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Press, 1996, pp. 1-2.

for example, are important like why Reconciliation Week is important, and all that sort of things. So I just hope to learn more, but I don't think it's going to change anything.

Kate's description of what she thinks the effects of identifying as Indigenous will be can be linked to Gans' description of symbolic ethnicity. Indeed, Kate does not envisage that identifying as Indigenous implies she will necessarily be more involved in the Indigenous community. Gans specified that relating to one's heritage in a symbolic way does not presuppose any significant interference in someone's everyday life. The changes Kate does foresee are actually linked to a symbolic view of Indigeneity: she thinks identifying will help her learn more about the symbolic importance of particular events for Indigenous people. Another way in which Kate – and all participants – can be said to relate to their heritage symbolically is the fact, as Waters explained, that revealing their Indigenous background is always a choice. Kate's hesitation to reveal her heritage at work shows that her Indigenous heritage is indeed “a subjective identity”.

This last remark about Kate's power to decide whether or not, when and where to mention her Indigenous heritage leads us to a questioning about the problems linked to relating to Indigeneity in a symbolic way in today's Australia.

I wondered to what extent a concept used to analyse 'white' Americans' links to their European origins could be applied to the participants in this study. There are indeed important differences between relating to a European ethnic background, and to an Indigenous one. First, the Americans Gans and Waters mention live in a country where their ancestors' cultures are only maintained by immigrants, whereas the participants, although they have tenuous links with their Indigenous heritage, live in the country of their ancestors, and where Indigenous cultures still exist. Secondly, while European identities are no longer problematic – in the same way as Anglo-Celtic and European heritages in Australia are now part of what is seen as the mainstream culture – Indigenous people, a minority in their own country, are disadvantaged in several ways compared to other Australians, which means that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

Australians is unequal. This in turn places the participants – who are in-between the two groups – in a difficult position.

Considering this, I wondered to what extent the participants' symbolic approach to their Indigenous heritage could be considered problematic. As I will explain their privileged position as 'whites' gives them a freedom to identify that other Indigenous people may not have.

In chapter 3, Andrew mentioned that his girlfriend who has Persian heritage was "starting to realise she can pick and choose what parts of her identity she wants to stand out". Andrew said the same applied to him, as his previous comments emphasising individual feelings showed. In 5.2.1.2, I mentioned the issue of cultural appropriation as Andrew talked about a non-Indigenous friend who embraces Indigenous people's relationship with the land in the same way he would a religion.

Andrew *[My friend] hasn't actually tried to claim Indigenous heritage, but (...) he's taken what he needs as a person or as an individual without having to put a label on it.*

Andrew embraces this way of thinking about identities. According to him, someone should be able to identify with whatever elements feel right with who they are, regardless of ethnicity or other categories preventing overarching identities. Although this view seems coherent within a theoretical postmodern outlook on identity, it is more problematic within the unequal post-colonial context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships.

As was explained in chapter 3, Mary C. Waters shows that "White ethnics" do not always realise their privileged position and therefore do not consider it a problem to identify according to individual preferences.

The reality is that White ethnics have a lot more choice and room for maneuver than they themselves think they do. The situation is very different for members of racial minorities, whose lives are strongly influenced by their race or national origin regardless of how much they may choose not to identify themselves in terms of their ancestries. (...) One important implication of these identities is that they tend to be very individualistic. There is a tendency to view valuing diversity in a pluralist environment as equating all groups. The symbolic ethnic

tends to think that all groups are equal; everyone has a background that is their right to celebrate and pass on to their children. (...) However, this assumption ignores the very big difference between an individualistic symbolic ethnic identity and a socially enforced and imposed racial identity. (...) The legacy and the present reality of discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity must be overcome before the ideal of a pluralist society, where all heritages are treated equally and are equally available for individuals to choose or discard at will, is realized.⁶⁸

Waters' analysis reveals why "picking and choosing" can be considered problematic when applied to Indigenous culture. In a context of power struggles between a minority culture which the dominant culture tried to suppress for many years, the choice of identities is not the same for everyone.⁶⁹

Despite examples of symbolic identifications with Indigenous culture, Waters' restrictions were not lost on the participants. Andrew himself said he was "acutely aware" of the effects identifying could have on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The following extracts from Adina's interview also reveals an ambivalent approach to her heritage.

Adina *I started researching the clans, and the tribes, the Aboriginal family things, just like I did when I found out I had French ancestry. (...) Just like people who haven't been Scottish in eight generations around here can suddenly wear the tartan and think they're all Scottish, I figured, why can't I be Aboriginal?*

As Waters explained, here, Adina sees all her heritages as equal. She places her Indigenous and French heritages on the same level, although it is unlikely that anyone would question her right to claim her French ancestry. Her evocation of descendants from

⁶⁸ WATERS, Mary C., "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?" in PEDRAZA, Sylvia, RUMBAUT, Ruben (eds), *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Press, 1996, pp. 2 and 5.

⁶⁹ Waters gives a concrete example of how inequality in identity choices affects different groups. She explains that while 'white' Americans consider it flattering to be asked about their ethnic background, this is often not the case of Asian Americans who take offense at such probing into their heritage. This reminded me of Megan's point of view on being asked about her heritage. She thought that it was only natural that people should wonder about it, and took no offense in being asked "what she had in [her]". Other participants like Adam or Casey who had had their identities doubted did not see being questioned as flattering. WATERS, Mary C., "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?", *op. cit.*, p. 2.

Scottish immigrants wearing the tartan is an example close to those chosen by Waters to illustrate symbolic ethnicity. For example, Waters mentioned descendants of Irish immigrants wearing green on Saint Patrick's Day.⁷⁰ Adina therefore envisages identifying as Indigenous in a symbolic way. However, she later adds:

I don't know how [my community] would feel about [me going there], whether it's the same deal that Irish people feel about Americans on Saint Patrick's Day with 1/16th of a heritage coming over and saying, "Look at me, I'm Irish." No, you're not.

Like Andrew before, Adina has doubts about her legitimacy as Indigenous, considering her lack of knowledge about Indigenous culture as a hindrance.

10.3.2.1.2 Identity Construction and Power Struggles

My experience has shown me that among Aboriginal people there is generally a singularity of identity that overarches all other identities. My own plural identities are a product of my having grown up as part of the dominant cultural group. Aboriginal people, confronted with racism, injustice and the overt power of the European legal and social systems, have found strength in their cohesion, safety, in their singular identity.⁷¹

Lynette Russell explains that while non-Indigenous Australians understand identity as plural in today's society, this is not the case of Indigenous people. The reactions against people claiming part-Indigenous identities shows this. Russell explains the historical reasons for the need to regroup around a "singular identity". As seen in chapter 9, the use of strategic essentialism is a way for Indigenous people to fight against "racism, injustice and the overt power of the European legal and social systems".

According to Darlene Oxenham, while Indigenous people are willing to accept diversity within the Indigenous community, they also fear that this community will become so diverse that Indigenous people will no longer have anything in common.

⁷⁰ WATERS, Mary C., *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, op. cit., p. 123.

⁷¹ RUSSEL, Lynette, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*, op. cit., p. 138.

If we're emphasizing self-identification and saying, 'No we're all individuals' and 'I'm Aboriginal because I say I'm Aboriginal (...), if we accept this individual diversity and self-identification, then where is the common thread (for all aboriginal people)?⁷²

The individual outlook on identity Oxenham describes is what Andrew defends. Evidence of Indigenous ancestry, in his mind, should not be compulsory since self-identification is what matters most. If the need for an overarching common thread is important to Indigenous people, it is because of constant attempts to erase their cultures in the past, and because of ongoing attacks on their identity in the present. For example, the idea that, in settled areas in particular, Indigenous culture no longer exists is still common. The need to display a coherent, uniform identity is the response of a minority feeling threatened by a dominant power. In such a context, it is understandable that Indigenous people may reject people who do not comply with racial loyalty, particularly when they are, like the participants, people who have the freedom to choose which ethnicity to hide or highlight.

In the same way as I pointed out the limits of symbolic ethnicity when used within the context of unequal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Avril Bell stresses the limits of a positive, post-colonial understanding of hybridity.

In a context in which a fractured and destabilized identity is understood as the outcome of colonization, the idea that this is a condition to be embraced is a difficult sell. (...) From th[e] perspective of indigenous peoples living under colonial conditions, Bhabha's call to indecidability is not enough. It may represent a powerful and crucial mode of resistance on the terrain of identity politics, but it doesn't offer any 'ground' for projects of indigenous recovery, which are themselves crucial forms of resistance to domination.⁷³

Bell makes a difference between a theoretical understanding of hybridity and the concept applied to Indigenous people. Using hybridity as an antidote to essentialism may seem to be an answer to strict oppositions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. However, Bell emphasises that as far as Indigenous people are concerned, more than

⁷² OXENHAM, Darlene et al., *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts'n'All*, op. cit., pp. 56-57 and 71.

⁷³ BELL, Avril, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, op. cit., p. 111.

identity choices are at stake. Thus, while an identity that is in movement and fragmented may be appealing to people whose identity is not under threat, to Indigenous people, the promotion of such a vision of identity can be understood as another attempt to dilute Indigenous culture and identity, and therefore to ignore the unique status of Indigenous people and culture in Australia.⁷⁴

In the same way as the postmodern, postethnic or symbolic views of identity, as well as the theory of hybridity, can be criticised when applied in a context of inequality, the discourse of multiculturalism is also denounced. As I explained, the participants presented multiculturalism as the epitome of today's Australian identity. However, as was demonstrated in chapter 3, 'white' Australians do not always realise that this discourse emphasising the equal recognition of diverse groups, not only masks inequalities but also fails to recognise different statuses such as that of Indigenous people as the first inhabitants of Australia.

Birgitta Frello links the discourse of multiculturalism to that of hybridity to show the limits of such concepts, and the need to study in which contexts and for what purposes they are used.

Transgression concepts do not have some inherently critical function. They can be applied in favour of various interests just as it is the case of the idea of purity. This is very well exemplified by Ien Ang⁷⁵ in her discussion of the 'liberal hybridism' of the official Australian discourse on national identity where the ideal of multiculturalism has replaced the ideal of whiteness. In this context, the idea that every Australian citizen somehow has a stake in a shared culturally

⁷⁴ RagagopalanRadhakrishnan maintains that the theory of hybridity can be used in contexts such as the Australian one. To do so, he makes a difference between what he calls "metropolitan hybridity" and "postcolonial hybridity": "'Metropolitan hybridity, notes Radhakrishnan, is 'characterized by an intransitive and immanent sense of *jouissance*,' whereas postcolonial hybridity is marked by 'a frustrating search for constituency and a legitimate political identity'. Metropolitan hybridity is (...) a structure of identitarian thinking informed by the cultural logic of the dominant West. Postcolonial hybridity, in contrast, seeks authenticity in 'a third space that is complicitous neither with the deracinating imperatives of Westernization nor with theories of a static natural, and single-minded autochtony'."

RADHAKRISHNAN, Ragagopalan quoted in MCLAREN, Peter, "Introduction: Fashioning *Los Olvidados* in the Age of Cynical Reason" in *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: Pedagogies of Dissent for the New Millennium*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁵ SENG, Ien, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

and racially mixed past can be seen as just another attempt to deny and gloss over the history of racism against the aboriginal population. Celebrating hybridity can be potentially oppressing, as can celebrating purity. (...) Hence, we should always be attentive to the question of whose interests are served by articulating identity in terms of 'hybridity', rather than 'purity' in specific instances. (...) There is no guarantee that the introduction of the hybrid and the impure works in favour of the powerless and the excluded.⁷⁶

In this section, the authors emphasise the difficulty of using postmodern, postethnic or symbolic visions of identity, or the concept of hybridity in a context of unequal relationships between a dominant group and minorities. Indeed, although such ways of identifying came naturally to the participants as they talked about their experiences, several often took a step back as they understood that identifying as Indigenous had more complex implications than claiming their European heritage or calling themselves Australian. The extent to which the participants were aware of the difficulty of their in-between position – one foot on the dominant 'white' side, and the other on the side of the Indigenous minority – was often visible in their narratives.

However, while the reasons why many Indigenous people may not want to embrace plural identities and emphasise self-identification were made clear in this section, complying with essentialism and uniformity is also problematic. By doing this, dissonant voices are banished and debates about the meaning of Indigeneity are rejected. Indigenous people like Dillon, Paradies or Holland who wish to embrace multiple heritages have difficulty being heard in a context of racial loyalty. Thus, adhering to this definition of Indigenous identity equals to taking away from Indigenous people the right 'white' Australians have of choosing how to identify according to personal preferences. Also perpetuated is the idea that Indigenous people's identities are not as complex as those of Westerners. This is something Terry Moore notices and rejects in his advocacy of postethnicity and interculturality.

⁷⁶ FRELLO, Birgitta, "Essentialism, Hybridism and Cultural Critique", *Cultural Studies Now: Conference Journal*, University of East London, 2007, <http://culturalstudiesresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/FrelloEssentialism.pdf>, p.4.

[Indigenous people's] selfhood is every bit as complex as that of their settler-Australian compatriots. They are but are not simply Aborigines dominated by kin obligations. They are neither rootless nor tied ineradicably to their ethnic roots. (...) Postethnic Aboriginality does not imply that an individual's identification with his or her Aboriginal culture is less important than previously. Rather, it highlights the tendency of public policy to over-emphasise difference and ignore what is shared. Postethnicity complicates Aboriginal difference without devaluing it.⁷⁷

Moore sees postethnicity as the answer to the problem of protecting a unique Indigenous identity while allowing Indigenous people to express identities in their full complexity. Moore promotes a complex vision of identity – something valued in Western culture – leaving room for more than ethnicity. Rather than weakening the Indigenous identity, Moore contends that it better reflects its diverse reality.

10.3.2.2 Viable Individual Indigeneity?

Considering the difficulty of using theories of identity which may better apply to Western identities than to Indigenous identities, I wondered to what extent the participants' ways of accommodating different elements of their identities was evidence that individual Indigeneities could exist and be maintained.

It is important to recognise the criticism of postethnicity: that it is idealistic to assume that others will not continue to label some people as members of a group and communicate with them as members of that group and not as individuals.⁷⁸

Fred Jandt's remark confirms what Bronwyn Carlson also stressed: the participants in her study who refused to conform to dominant definitions of Indigeneity or refused to produce evidence of their heritage could only maintain this stance by avoiding confronting their individual vision of identity to the outside world. This brings me back to the notion of safe spaces. Although such spaces allowed the participants to learn about and accept their

⁷⁷ MOORE, Terry, "Interculturality, Postethnicity and the Aboriginal Australian Policy Future", *Ethnicities*, *op. cit.*, pp. 716 and 718.

⁷⁸ JANDT, Fred E., "Postethnic Cultures" in *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community*, 8th edition, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc., 2016, e-book.

Indigenous heritage, they could also remain bubbles outside of which their personal definitions of their identities would not be validated. The individual space can be perceived as another safe space. It sometimes seemed as if the participants who defended their right to identify as they wish, regardless of exterior pressures, had not fully “tested” their identities outside safe spaces.

I have already mentioned several participants’ reluctance to meet the community where they come from, or to claim their heritage when talking to people they see as more authentically Indigenous. The fact that the participants could on the one hand adopt an individual vision of identity yet continue doubting their legitimacy as Indigenous shows that it is difficult to transcend the in-between position.

Therefore, I wondered to what extent the participants ignored the categories created by representations of Indigenous people, or reinterpreted them in order to accommodate their vision of identity with such representations.

An example of the various ways in which elements of the definition of Indigeneity could be interpreted is that of the community. As I explained, most participants believe that the relational aspect of Indigenous identity is an important one, and that the community should indeed accept them before they can claim their Indigenous identity. However, the meaning of community changed according to participants. For example, Adam who refused working as a doctor in an Indigenous community or to do research in Indigenous studies does not, however, discard the concept of giving back to the Indigenous community. Instead, he works around it by choosing his definition of ‘giving back’ as well as his definition of community.

Adam *So it's now selfish for me not to identify. (...) I had to go through my struggle for the last five years to come to that point. The last couple of years, I've been definitely telling all my students, and doing all this stuff. (...) I know that I have that choice. And in the end I was starting to feel that it was a selfish choice because I have the choice to keep up my Aboriginality and other people don't. (...) I was privileged and I need to be... (...) a role model, that's it. I need to be the one who takes the risk of identifying so that other people can do it without feeling the way I did.*

The realisation that the choices he is free to make regarding his identity position him as privileged make Adam identify again in order to give back to the Indigenous students' community.

Another understanding of community is that of Andrew. To him, having been accepted by Macquarie's university Indigenous community, and by his friends and family seemed enough recognition to fulfil the requirement set by the third criterion of the official definition of Aboriginality.

In the same way, Kate had not reconnected with her Indigenous family but explained that she already felt involved in the community through her work.

Delphine So eventually, you think you'd like to, I don't know, be involved in the community...?

Kate *Absolutely. And I mean, I sort of already am involved in the community here at the university. (...) I think that I'm already very aware of, you know, culturally, how things need to be consulted that affect Indigenous people. (...) So I feel like I'm already across that, but...yeah, I don't know if it means I'll be a white person that just says they're Indigenous. I'm not really sure.*

The last remark was prompted by a question I asked Kate about the compatibility of a 'white' life – Kate said earlier that she did not think identifying would change her everyday life – with an Indigenous identification. The fact that Kate had not envisaged that identifying as Indigenous could impact her everyday life could mean that participants like Kate, who start thinking about identifying, are not fully aware of the pressures they can encounter as Indigenous. This is because she understands identifying primarily as an individual decision. It could also mean that the definition of Indigeneity is opening up to a greater variety of definitions, to different ways of accommodating various aspects of an Indigenous person's life.

The following example given by Vanessa goes in this direction. It is evidence that interculturality is possible.

Vanessa *I'm the youngest in my team [of Indigenous workers], right? And I sit above a majority of my team, which is awkward, but I call one 'Mum' and I call one 'Auntie' – it's like my work mum, and my work auntie. (...) And (...) it's like, "Let's go grab the baby" even though, like...traditionally, I know my ranking traditionally. They know my ranking career-wise, but it just works, and it's quite nice to be able to – because I'm around them all day, every day – I feel quite close to my identification at the moment.*

Although Vanessa mentions awkwardness, she emphasises that the combination of the traditional Indigenous and work hierarchies allows her to feel “close to [her] identification” while she is at work.

The fact that the concept of community remains at the heart of the definition of Indigeneity for many participants shows that they have to accommodate existing elements of this definition. But is not this always the case? Can any identity exist in a vacuum? While freedom to re-interpret existing definitions varies according to the status of identities – mainstream or minority –, and while definitions of Indigeneity are ruled by stricter definitions, the example of the different interpretations of the concept of community reveals that the participants do take the freedom to fashion their own definitions of Indigeneity.

10.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the in-between position the participants in this study inhabit to see if there were ways in which they could transcend it. If one adheres to a postmodern and hybrid vision of identity, the state of in-between-ness previously studied as problematic becomes a creative space in which plural and fluid identities are being created. Within safe spaces such as university Indigenous centres, the private or the official spheres, the participants were able to get a better understanding of their Indigenous heritage, and a sense of belonging to the Indigenous community many have difficulties finding. But I also revealed the limits of such spaces which, although they create favourable conditions for identity exploration and construction, cannot completely shift the binary lines separating Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

A postmodern and hybrid vision of identity also emphasises individual choices in identity constructions. I analysed the ways in which the participants crafted their own personal definitions of Indigeneity but above all of their individual identities. In a context of power struggles over the definition of Indigeneity between Indigenous people and privileged 'white' Australians like the participants, I asked whether such individual choices were possible.

Moreover, in analysing the ways in which the participants managed their identities, I wondered to what extent the participants' personal definitions of Indigeneity would be considered legitimate, or even 'real', outside of their personal spaces. I wondered whether or not the participants were still constrained by representations of Indigeneity which they merely shifted but could not discard. I also asked myself if, on the contrary, these personal re-interpretations of existing categories, these processes of accommodating diverse elements, did not actually lead to the creation of hybrid spaces where tensions remain but where creative re-interpretations blur existing boundaries. I do not think I can bring definitive answers to these questions, especially considering the fact that most participants were only at the start of their process of identification. But beyond this, following the paradigm of interpretive social constructionism I presented in chapter 1, the reality of the participants' definitions of Indigeneity matters less than the meaning it has for them, and how this meaning affects their lives. At this stage in their lives, the participants' various understandings of Indigenous identity reflect the means they have designed to integrate their Indigenous heritage into their everyday lives and identities, and to make sense of this heritage. As Adam's experience reveals, when shared, these personal definitions may be rejected by some and accepted by others. But the confrontations that occur when Adam's sense of his identity clashes with others' opinions of who he is are also what helped him redefine what being Indigenous means to him today. Thus, the participants' identities are bound to evolve, especially through confrontations, as it seems impossible for identities to remain forever contained within an individual safe space. However, for now, these identities do have meaning and help the participants move beyond dominant representations and their restrictive effects.

Conclusion to PART IV

The fourth and final part of this thesis analysed the concept of 'part-identities'. Part identifications as Indigenous are often rejected by Indigenous people who refuse to see their identities quantified in the same way they were in the past. By rejecting the concept of part-Indigeneity, they also refuse the idea that Indigenous identity is being diluted as Indigenous people adapt to life in a post-colonial society in the twenty-first century. The empowering process of reclaiming the right to self-identification leads some Indigenous people to emphasise their essential difference from non-Indigenous Australians. The dichotomy between the two groups is thus reinforced at a time when Indigenous identities are becoming increasingly diverse. As Terry Moore explained in the introduction to the fourth part, "Aboriginal Australians are living increasingly intercultural lives and identify in postethnic ways."¹ Moreover, an increasing number of Australians discovering their Indigenous heritage are now willing to embrace it and to identify as Indigenous. The re-affirmed separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians does not allow intercultural and postethnic Indigenous identities to be recognised, nor does it allow people like the participants in this study to identify in ways that reflects both their non-Indigenous and Indigenous heritages and identities.

Chapter 9 analysed how the participants in this study often remained caught in-between, especially in-between their desire to embrace their Indigenous heritage, and their

¹ MOORE, Terry, "Interculturality, postethnicity and the Aboriginal Australian policy future", *Ethnicities*, Vol. 16, Number 5, 2016, p. 713.

ties to the non-Indigenous culture and society. For several participants, the only way to move beyond in-between-ness was to accept a full identification as Indigenous.

Chapter 10 analysed the notion of “part-identities” from another perspective. As Moore explained, following a postmodern vision of identity, interculturality is now part of many Indigenous people’s lives. The last chapter analyses part-identities not as lacking in substance, but as a more accurate picture of a person’s identity. Such a vision of identity recognises that an individual’s identity is not only composed of many parts – or fragments, as Hall writes – but that it is fluctuating. The postmodern vision of identity, linked to the theory of hybridity as a way to transcend binaries, was often reflected in the participants’ choices to highlight the parts of their identities they felt express who they are. Theoretically, such a way of identifying recognises the diversity of identities and an individual’s right to determine how to identify himself/herself. It also seems to be an answer to the persisting separation between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australia inherited from colonisation. Nevertheless, this chapter, and indeed this whole thesis, showed that the reality of the Australian context, the struggles for control over the definition of Indigeneity, and the lines drawn between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as a result, make it difficult to move beyond such a dichotomy. The participants’ hesitation and recurring feelings of in-between-ness were evidence that, while Indigenous people and cultures are now regarded more positively than they used to be, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains a difficult one.

General Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to analyse how eleven young and fair-skinned Australians who have grown up during the reconciliation era and who have Indigenous heritage construct their identities in today's Australia. In studying the perception of Indigeneity of people in-between, I also wanted to analyse the perception of Indigeneity in contemporary Australian society, and to look at the state of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians almost twenty years after the end of the reconciliation decade.

The central concept in this thesis is that of identity. I looked at the construction of several identities: those of Indigenous people, those of 'white' Anglo-Celtic 'mainstream' Australians, those of the participants, in-between 'white' and Indigenous cultures. An underlying question structuring the study of identity in this thesis is the question of control. Who controls the construction of these identities and how they are built was an important aspect of this project. In order to answer these questions, based on the participants' stories, I analysed discourses about whiteness and Indigeneity, and their evolution in Australian history.

The Perception of Indigenous People and Culture in Today's Australia

I argue in this thesis that Indigeneity is a construct. Indeed, although Indigenous people lived on the Australian continent long before the arrival of the British at the end of the eighteenth century, they did not think of themselves as Indigenous before the colonisation of their country. Indigeneity – like Australian-ness – was constructed through the confrontations brought about by colonialism.

From the beginning of colonisation to the present, the definition of Indigeneity has been dominated by non-Indigenous perceptions and discourses about Indigenous people and culture. I paid particular attention to these discourses and their constructions since they have had and continue to have a significant impact on the participant's and on the general non-Indigenous population's perception of Indigeneity. The process of colonisation, and the subsequent policies aimed at managing Indigenous people established a dominance of 'white' Australians over Indigenous people. This resulted in Indigenous people's definitions of themselves being eclipsed by the plethora of discourses about Indigenous people produced by non-Indigenous Australians. Governments, academics, the general public produced and propagated definitions of Indigeneity which continue to influence the perception of Indigeneity today. Despite a gradual recognition of Indigenous people's right to self-determination in the last decades of the twentieth century, and a growing interest in Indigenous culture during the reconciliation era, stereotypical views about Indigenous people continue to circulate in 'mainstream' Australian society.

These views can be positive or negative. I explained how the way non-Indigenous Australians have perceived and continue to perceive Indigenous people is characterised by ambivalence. Early colonial descriptions of Indigenous people reveal that they were either regarded as savages, as an inferior race doomed to extinction, or as noble savages, living a simpler life, free from the constraints of Western societies. These opposed and yet co-existing representations of Indigenous people are still present in today's Australia where I argue that Indigenous people continue to be regarded as somewhat inferior, as incapable of adapting to the rules of 'white' society, or at least as unwilling to do so.

General conclusion

The participants were strongly influenced by the media's depiction of Indigenous people as violent, alcoholic, and abusing the welfare state. However, they were also attracted to positive representations of Indigenous people reminiscent of the myth of the noble savage. In today's Australia, Indigenous people can be both rejected and desired, perceived as the quintessential Australians whose ancestral links to the land are envied by some 'white' Australians lacking a strong identity. The use – or appropriation – of Indigenous symbols in today's Australia is evidence of the significance of Indigenous culture in narratives of national identity. Several participants were attracted to these positive representations of Indigeneity and mentioned Indigenous people's link to the land or their lack of focus on material goods as qualities they valued.

Thus, the participants grew up in a country both valuing its Indigenous traditional cultural heritage but also rejecting other forms of Indigeneity which do not fit the idealised, pre-colonial vision of Indigenous people and culture non-Indigenous Australia still clings to.

I particularly studied three discourses presenting what non-Indigenous people often regard as 'authentic' Indigeneity.

'Authentic' Indigenous people are still perceived as dark-skinned. The discourse linking skin colour to authenticity is still a dominant one in today's Australia despite a move away from race in the definition of Indigeneity, and a recognition in the second half of the twentieth century of the importance of the cultural and relational aspects in identity constructions.

A second prevalent discourse is that representing Indigenous people as living traditionally in remote locations. During the assimilation era (until the 1970s), it was believed that Indigenous people no longer following this model were losing their Indigeneity and becoming 'white', both physically and culturally. This second discourse was relayed not only by governments promoting assimilation, but also by anthropologists focusing on a salvage approach to the study of Indigeneity, and thus ignoring the

development of new forms of Indigenous culture in response to the new living conditions brought about by colonialism in more settled parts of the country.

These two discourses present a version of Indigenous people and culture untouched by the passage of time, and especially unchanged by the process of colonisation. They do not recognise the diverse reality of today's Indigenous population which is now mixed, both biologically and culturally. As in the era of assimilation, it is not uncommon to see urban Indigenous people portrayed as 'fake', claiming an Indigenous identity but living a 'white' life. Similarly, fair-skinned Indigenous people are considered less 'authentically' Indigenous than their darker counterparts, as was evident in Andrew Bolt's articles a few years ago.

The third discourse I studied is that linking 'authentic' Indigeneity to disadvantage. This discourse also has its roots in the early representations of Indigenous people. Indeed, Indigenous people were perceived as inherently disadvantaged by 'white' settlers. However, the discourse of disadvantage has evolved and now associates disadvantage with past mistreatments of Indigenous people. The representation of Indigenous people as disadvantaged is common in the media, in government discourses, as well as within the general public. It is, again, an ambivalent discourse, sometimes presenting Indigenous people as victims, and sometimes criticising them for taking advantage of the welfare state. Today, one of the reasons why the need to define Indigeneity remains so strong is the issue of benefits reserved for Indigenous people.

The Relationship Between Indigenous and 'White' Australians in Today's Australia

The participants in this project were strongly influenced by the ambivalent representation of Indigenous people and culture I described, and especially by the three discourses I presented. Because most of them had few links with the Indigenous community – at least when they were children – they developed their understanding of Indigeneity based on such dominant discourses.

General conclusion

One of the issues I highlighted is that by relying on discourses which are ever increasingly at odds with the reality of most Indigenous people, non-Indigenous Australians do not have a relationship with Indigenous people, but with representations of them. This was noted by Marcia Langton who wrote that “The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between ‘white’ Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists.”¹

I noted the difficulty non-Indigenous Australians have of relating to Indigeneity beyond culture and symbols. This is one of the criticism made against the movement of reconciliation which is said to have failed to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together. Thus, while ‘mainstream’ Australia has recognised the significance of Indigenous culture as part of the national story, as Indigenous journalist Stan Grant observed, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remain “strangers to each other”.²

The absence of a real relationship between both groups was visible in the participants’ discourses. The vast majority had grown up learning about simplified definitions of Indigenous people and culture, and relying on stereotypical representations of Indigenous people to which they had difficulty relating. It is not until the participants became adults and took a personal interest in Indigenous culture, studied it at university and/or socialised with Indigenous people that their views about what it means to be Indigenous in twenty-first century Australia expanded.

I insisted on the persisting dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today. In spite of demonstrations of goodwill towards Indigenous people and towards the idea of reconciliation in the 1990s especially, there is still often a line drawn between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australian society. As the participants

¹ LANGTON, Marcia, *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...”: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, op. cit., p. 33.

² GRANT, Stan, “I’m Tired of Aboriginal People Being Seen as Anthropological Curiosities”, *The Guardian*, 28 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/28/im-tired-of-aboriginal-people-being-seen-as-anthropological-curiosities>, accessed on 25 February 2015.

explained, Indigenous people are part of Australia, but they are also apart from it. Indigenous people remain on the margins of 'mainstream' Australian society. Part of the reason why the dichotomy between both groups is still strong is the desire of portions of the Indigenous community to maintain it. One of the participants, Casey, fiercely defended this separation, arguing that 'mainstream' Australia does not respect the unique status of Indigenous people as first inhabitants, and that colonialism and attempts at assimilating Indigenous people into 'white' society are ongoing.

A reaction of parts of the Indigenous community I have particularly emphasised is the use of strategic essentialism as a response to past attempts at eliminating Indigenous people and cultures, and as a means to re-empower Indigenous people in the present. To this end, there is a tendency to appropriate colonial discourses about Indigenous identity such as the blood discourse, and to use them against 'white' society. An example of this is the 'one-drop' rule. Someone is said to be Indigenous all the way through even if he/she possesses only one drop of Indigenous blood. This type of discourse is a response to ongoing perceptions of mixed-heritage Indigenous people as 'fake' Indigenous whose culture has been diluted through miscegenation.

More generally, the use of essentialism means that some Indigenous people describe Indigenous identity as inherent rather than constructed. Indigenous people are said to inherently possess a special relationship to the Australian land, or a sense of 'caring and sharing' for their community. Very often, these attributes are opposed to 'white' characteristics. While such descriptions allow Indigenous people to emphasise unique qualities pertaining to Indigenous people only, they also reinforce the idea of an "incommensurable"³ difference between 'white' and Indigenous Australians, and leave no room for people in-between like the participants in this project.

The dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in today's Australia is thus enforced by both communities. Indigenous people often remain invisible to

³ MORETON-ROBINSON, Aileen, quoted in DUDGEON, Pat, WRIGHT, Michael, PARADIES, Yin, GARVEY, Darren, WALKER, Iain, "The Social, Cultural and Historical Context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians" in DUDGEON, Pat, MILROY, Helen, WALKER, Roz (eds) *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practices*, op. cit., p. 6.

‘mainstream’ Australians who restrict their vision of Indigeneity to a set of characteristics which do not allow them to recognise the presence of other Indigenous people or cultures. On the other hand, parts of the Indigenous community, as a consequence of dominant discourses taking away from them the control over the definition of Indigeneity, remain suspicious of non-Indigenous Australia. Others, on both sides, continue to promote the idea of reconciliation, but the power of this idea appears diminished in today’s Australia.

Identities In-between

Within this context, I studied the difficult in-between position the participants inhabited when I interviewed them. As I explained, these participants grew up mainly identifying as ‘white’ Australians, not embedded in their Indigenous communities. Consequently, for several years, they were more influenced by non-Indigenous representations of Indigenous people than by Indigenous people’s definitions of their own identity. As adults, the participants gained a more complex knowledge of Indigeneity which allowed them to distance themselves from dominant and restricting discourses. But as I showed, the different and sometimes contradictory discourses about Indigeneity could be confusing for most participants who became caught in-between their knowledge about the way Indigenous people understand identity (for example not based on the colour of the skin) and dominant non-Indigenous representations they kept returning to as if these were benchmarks of ‘authentic’ Indigeneity. This tendency was exacerbated by the fact that some of the discourses I presented are adopted by parts of the Indigenous community as well. For example, I explained how success – the opposite of disadvantage – was sometimes regarded as a ‘white’ value and rejected by some Indigenous people.

Another reason why the participants experienced issues of legitimacy was because of their upbringing as ‘white’ Australians, and therefore of their privileged position in Australian society. I explained how whiteness in Australia is no longer superior in the way it was during the era of the White Australia policy. However, whiteness and the Anglo-Celtic culture remain central and dominant in Australian society. Having grown up in a ‘white’ Australian culture but having Indigenous heritage placed the participants in a

difficult position, especially considering the strong dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – especially ‘white’ – I described. The participants were overall much more concerned about offending Indigenous people than about receiving negative comments from non-Indigenous Australians. They were well-aware of past mistreatments of Indigenous people by their ‘white’ ancestors and consequently cautious when it came to claiming their Indigenous heritage.

Although such caution is understandable in a context of power struggles between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians over the definition of Indigeneity, the dichotomy between the two groups which, as I explained, is often presented in essential terms, limited the participants’ freedom to explore and embrace their Indigenous heritage.

In today’s Australia, the negative consequences of colonisation and of the policies designed to manage Indigenous people are known in ‘mainstream’ Australian society. More people are now identifying as Indigenous as they want to reclaim a heritage stolen from them. This interest both from the general public and from people with Indigenous heritage is evidence that the reconciliation discourse – although fading in the new millennium – did have a positive effect on the perception of Indigenous people and culture. The participants in this study do not feel ashamed about their Indigenous heritage in the way their parents or grandparents did. On the contrary, most of them are proud to be able to claim a connection to the original inhabitants of Australia and to their culture. However, at a time when people whose families were victims of past policies and who grew up deprived of their Indigenous culture are interested in claiming it, as I explained, the line between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Australia is drawn more strictly.

Until the end of the assimilation era, mixed-heritage children, then called ‘half-castes’, were perceived as lost to both cultures, neither ‘black’ nor ‘white’, belonging nowhere. The in-between position was regarded as impossible and assimilation into ‘white’ society was seen as the only way forward for mixed-race Indigenous people. To a certain extent, today, the separation enforced between ‘white’ and ‘black’ Australia perpetuates this image of the hybrid belonging nowhere. Adam told me that he felt he had a foot in each world, but a

place in none, as his identity was neither accepted by the non-Indigenous nor the Indigenous community.

It is not only the dichotomy between both groups which limits the participants' freedom to identify as Indigenous, but also the presentation of differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as essential.

Today, the official definition of Aboriginality recognises that Indigeneity is not only based on ancestry, but also on self-identification and on the community's acceptance. It is perceived as a choice and as a construct.

At the same time, identities in general are also understood as cultural constructs. The postmodern vision of identity Stuart Hall defined (see chapter 10) describes identities as multiple and in constant evolution. However, in today's Australia the representation of Indigenous identity as inherent rather than constructed, and as whole rather than composed of several parts ("You're either Aboriginal or you're not" (see 9.1.2.1.1)) prevents people in-between from embracing all their heritages.

I explained how the participants in this study understand identity as multiple and in evolution. They are attached to the policy of multiculturalism and consider a plurality of heritages as characteristic of contemporary Australia. Some of the participants who embraced this view extend it to the perception of their Indigenous heritage. I showed how some participants consider that their Indigenous heritage is only a part of who they are and wish to acknowledge others. They echo voices in academia now questioning essential definitions of Indigenous identity and the strict dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. This thesis aims at adding to the existing literature on the issue of mixed-heritage Australians and on the relationship between Indigenous and 'white' Australians.

As explained in the last chapter, I am aware of the limits of a postmodern and hybrid vision of identity in today's Australian context. I described the problems linked to the participants embracing an Indigenous identity in a symbolic way, thus not recognising their

privileged position as 'white' Australians and the freedom to identify as they wish which is not given to all Indigenous people. However, none of the participants in this study took identifying as Indigenous lightly.

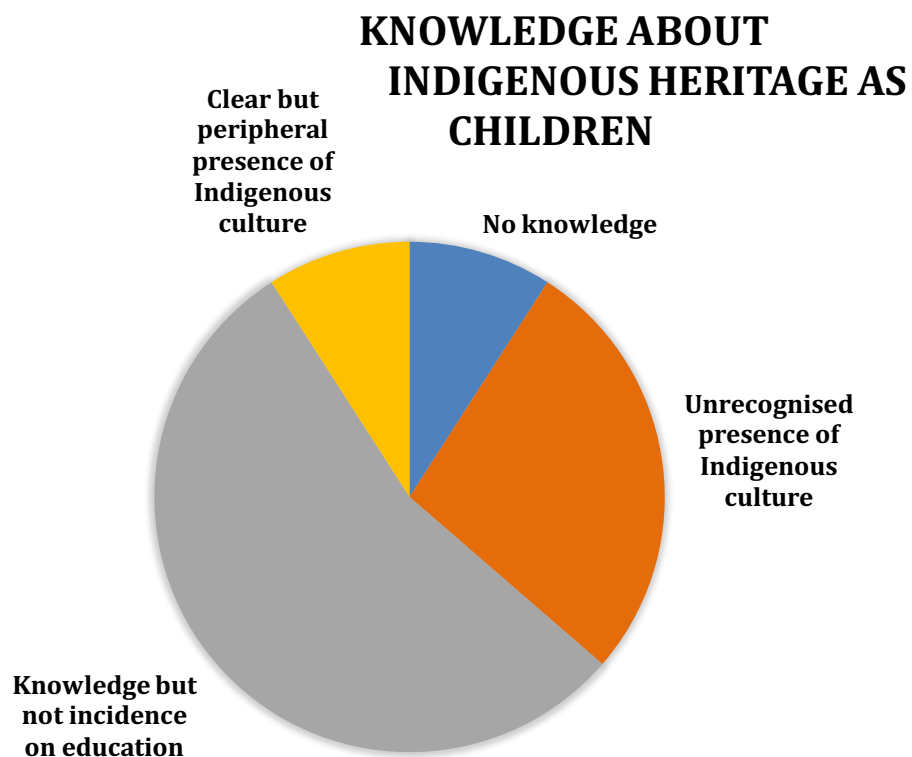
But the participants were constrained by discourses presenting Indigenous identity as inherent and opposed to 'white' Australian identity. At a time when the effects of colonial policies are recognised, their mixed identities, which partly result from this history, rarely are. Not only are individual's identity choices negated, but the dichotomy between Indigenous and 'white' Australians is perpetuated.

I believe that this thesis, as well as similar works showing the detrimental effects of discourses presenting Indigenous – but also non-Indigenous – people in restricted ways, and of identity policing can lead to a better understanding of the complex position of people in-between cultures like the participants in this project.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Spectrum of Knowledge about Indigenous Heritage As Children/Teenagers

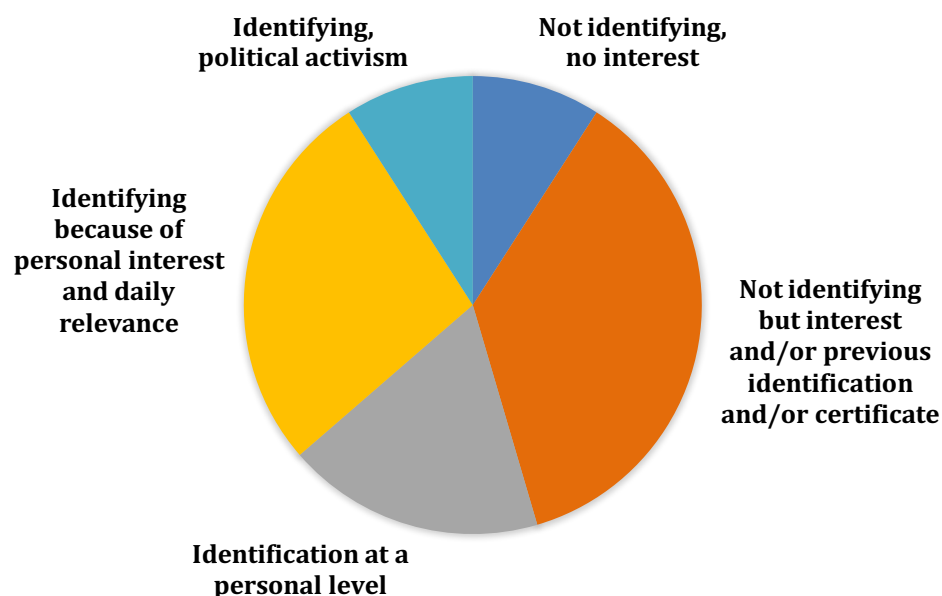
No knowledge		→	Strong knowledge
No knowledge about Indigenous heritage until late teenage years/adulthood.	Unrecognised presence of Indigenous cultural elements in education.	Knowledge about Indigenous heritage as a child but little incidence on education.	Clear but peripheral presence of Indigenous cultural elements in education.
Ben	Michelle Adina Vanessa	Josh Miriam Casey Andrew Megan Kate	Adam



Appendix 2: Spectrum of Identification at the Time of the Interviews

Weak identification		→	Strong identification	
Not identifying as Indigenous. No interest in the present.	Not identifying as Indigenous but interest in heritage, and/or previously identified as Indigenous, and/or interest in future identification, and/or have a certificate of Aboriginality.	Identifying as Indigenous but more on a personal level.	Identifying as Indigenous because of a personal interest, or because it is relevant in everyday life.	Identifying as Indigenous and involved in political activism. Limited interactions with the non-Indigenous community.
Ben	Josh Michelle Megan Kate	Andrew Adina	Adam Vanessa Miriam	Casey

IDENTIFICATION

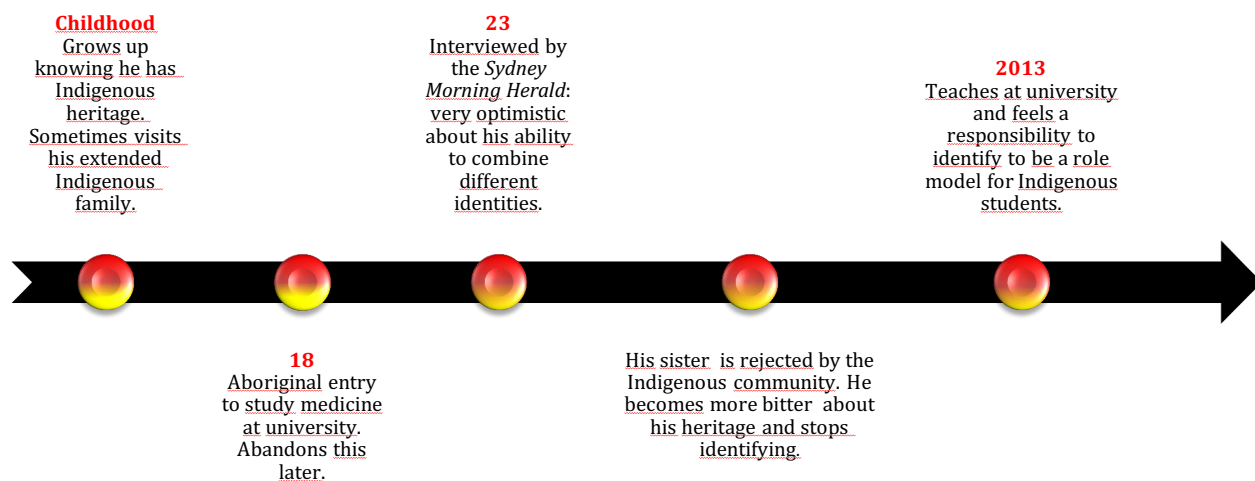


Appendix 3: Information about the Participants and Timelines

Adam

Date of the interview	July 2013
Age at the time of the interview	34
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Mount Druitt, Londonderry, NSW
Studied in...	Sydney (UTS, UWS, University of Sydney)
Lives in...	Penrith, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, Irish, French, English, Scottish
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Academic (Sociology)
Identification	Identifies publicly but little involvement in the Indigenous community.

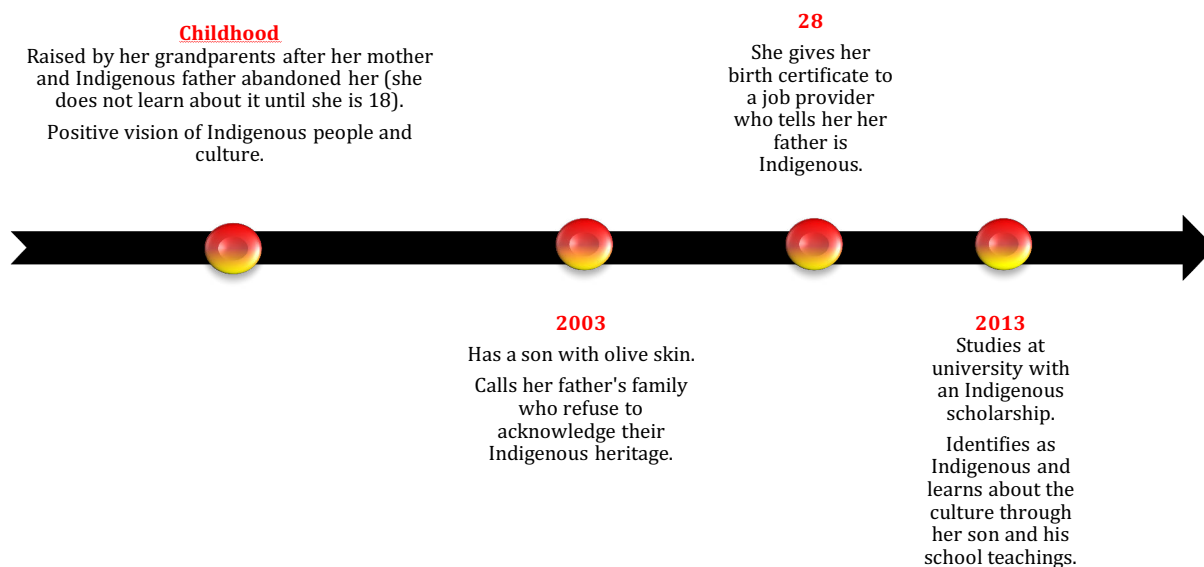
Timeline



Adina

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at time of the interview	31
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Saint Marys, Wyong, Central Coast, NSW
Studied in...	Newcastle, NSW
Lives in...	Central Coast, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, German, French
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Student
Identification	Identifies publicly, but has few links with Indigenous community.

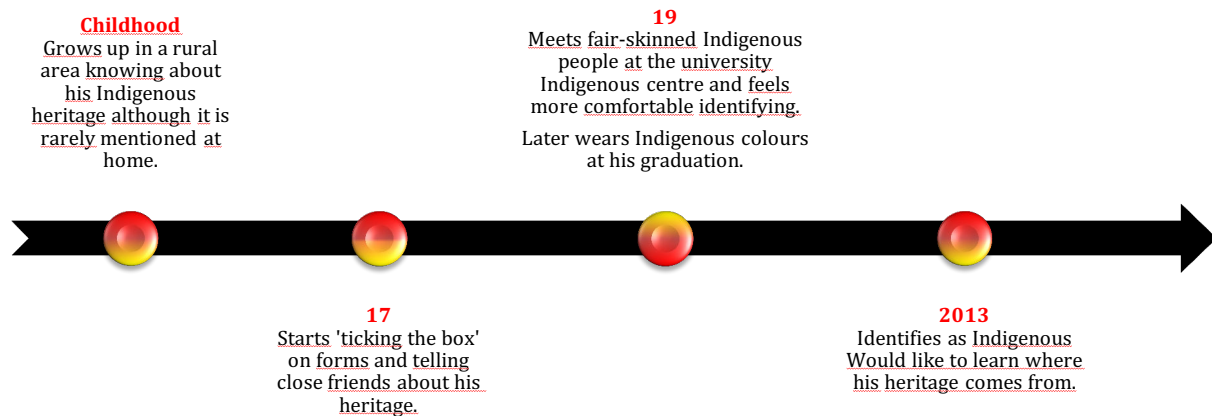
Timeline



Andrew

Date of the interview	January 2013
Age at the time of the interview	25
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Northern Beaches, Wauchope, NSW
Studied in...	Sydney (Macquarie University)
Lives in...	Woolloomooloo, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, English, Scottish, Irish, "Gypsy"
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Project manager
Identification	Identifies publicly, but few links with Indigenous community.

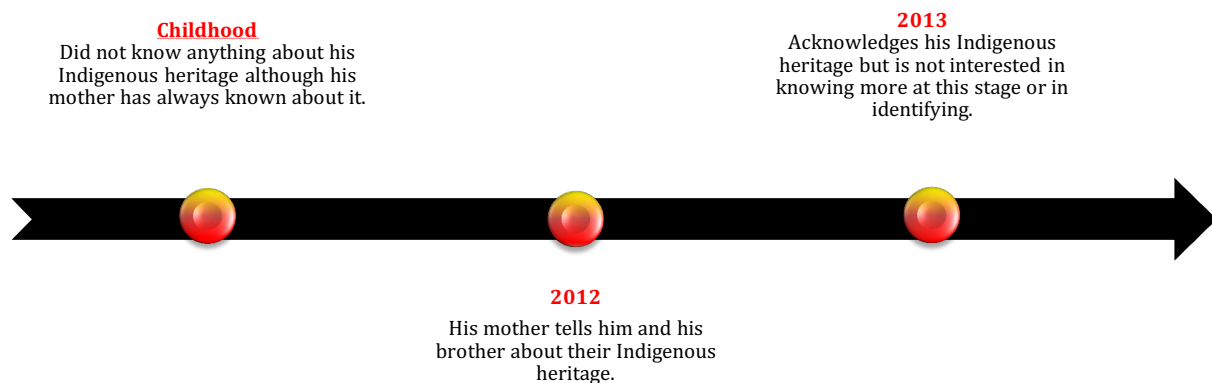
Timeline



Ben

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	30
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Hawkesbury region, NSW
Studied in...	Sydney (Sydney Institute of TAFE)
Lives in...	Sydney, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, "Anglo-Saxon"
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Property manager at a Local Council
Identification	Does not identify, little interest in Indigenous heritage.

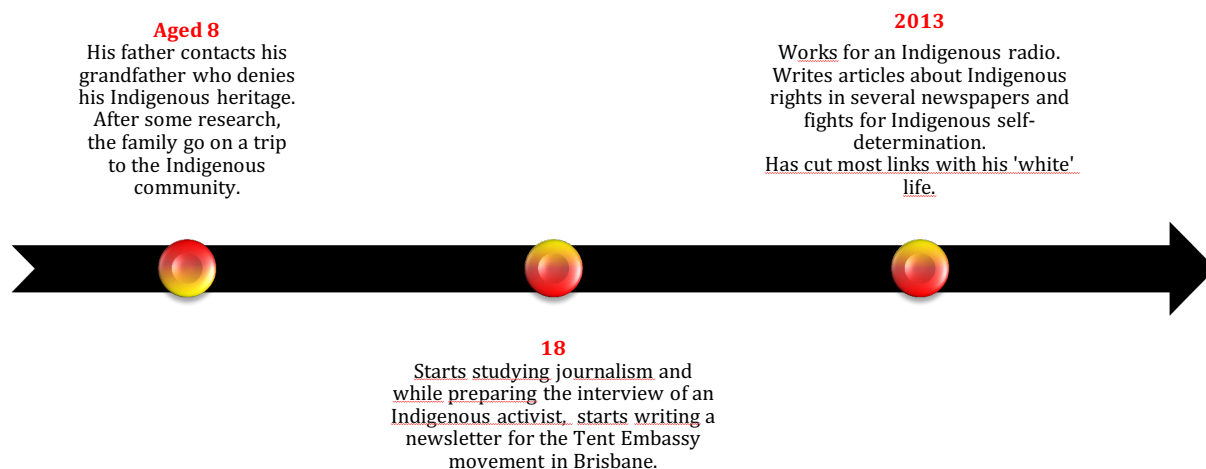
Timeline



Casey

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	19
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	New Zealand, Gold Coast, Queensland
Studied in...	Gold Coast (Bond University)
Lives in...	Gold Coast, Queensland
Heritages	Indigenous (Anaiwan), Pakeha ('white' New Zealander), British, German
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Student (Journalism)
Identification	Publicly identifies. Involved in Indigenous political activism.

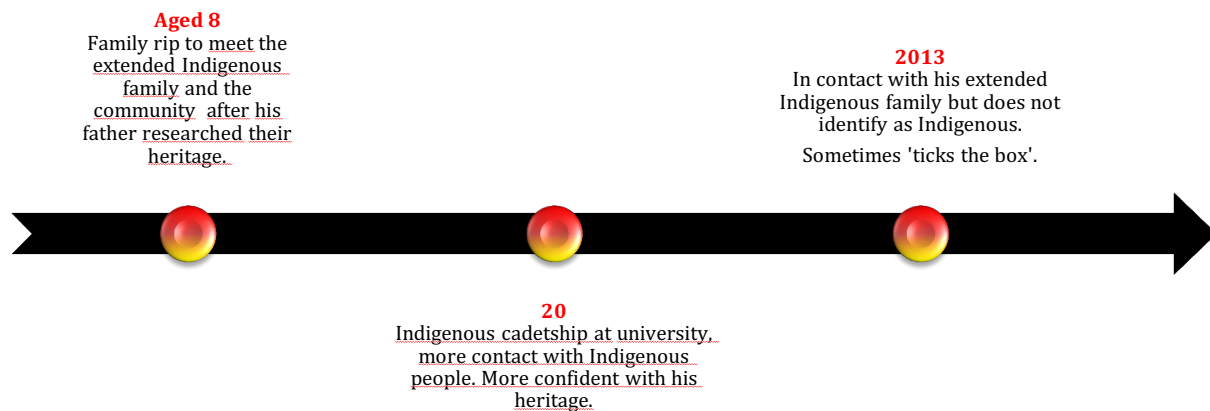
Timeline



Josh

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	26
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Canberra, ACT
Studied in...	Sydney (University of Sydney)
Lives in...	Toowoomba, Queensland
Heritages	Indigenous, Irish
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Farmer
Identification	Does not identify.

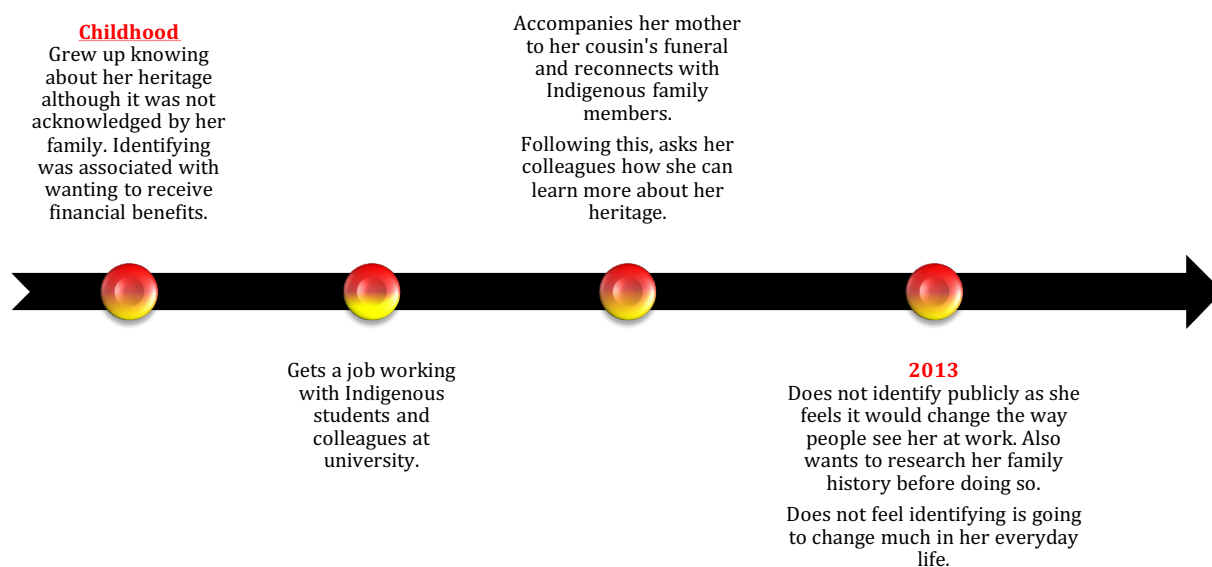
Timeline



Kate

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	27
Physical appearance	Olive-skinned, "Aboriginal hair"
Grew up in...	Baulkham Hill, NSW
Studied in...	Sydney (Macquarie University, University of Sydney)
Lives in...	Sydney, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, Lebanese
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Student Experience Coordinator in the Students' Support Services at university
Identification	Does not identify but would like to do so in the future.

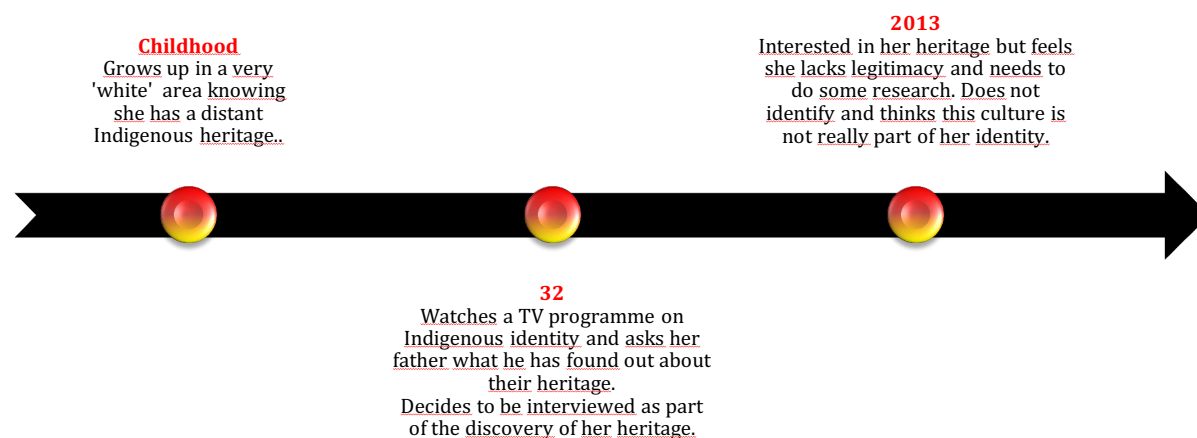
Timeline



Megan

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	33
Physical appearance	Olive-skinned
Grew up in...	Avalon and Newport, NSW
Studied in...	Sydney (University of Sydney)
Lives in...	Central Coast, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, Dutch, South African, English, Irish
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Education studies
Identification	Does not identify.

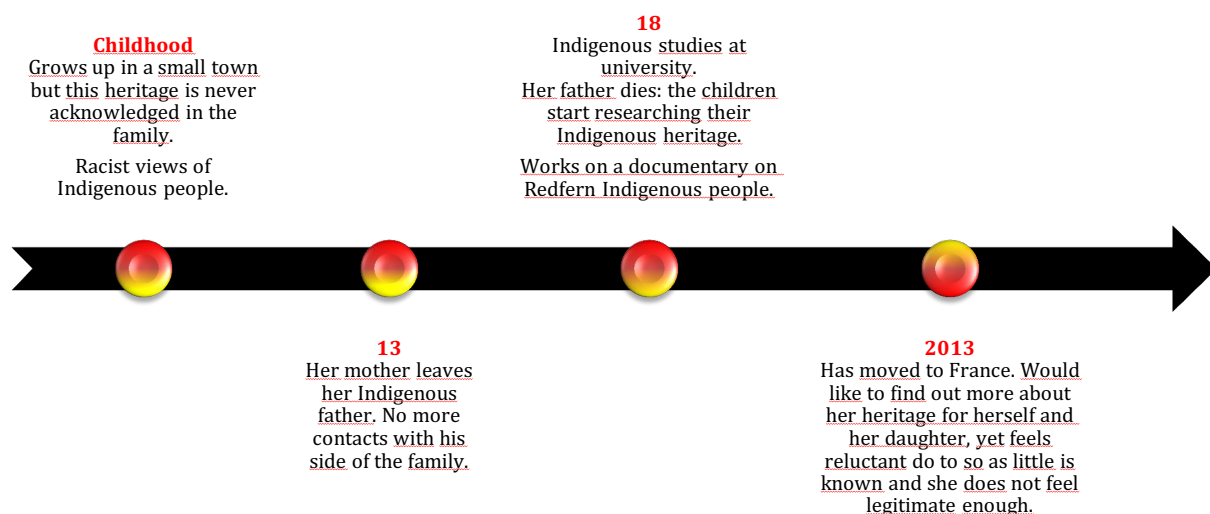
Timeline



Michelle

Date of the interview	May 2013
Age at the time of the interview	34
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Swan Hill, Victoria
Studied in...	Melbourne (Monash University)
Lives in...	Asnières, France
Heritages	Indigenous, Scottish
Indigenous classes or studies	Yes, in primary school
Profession	Civil servant at the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
Identification	Does not identify.

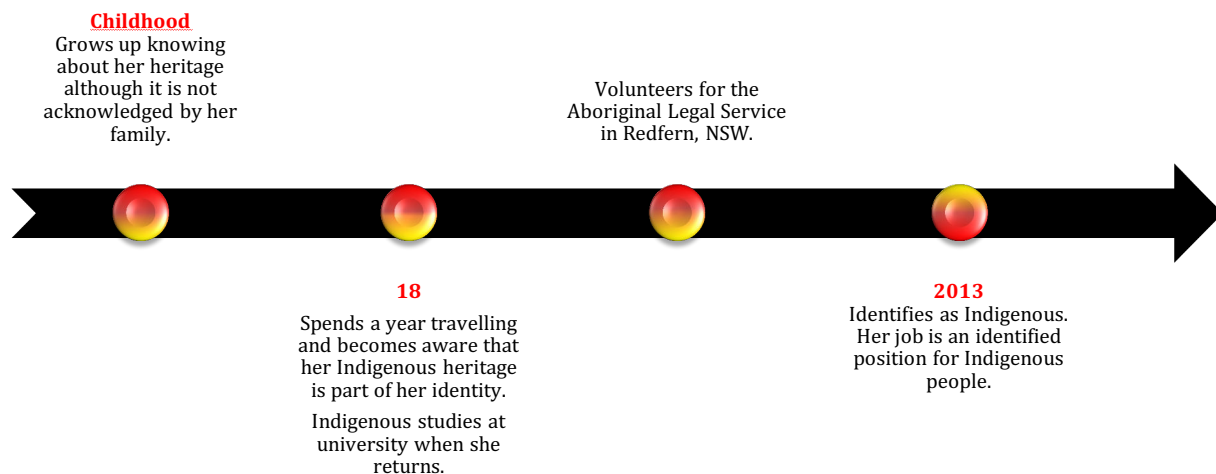
Timeline



Miriam

Date of the interview	July 2013
Age at the time of the interview	24
Physical appearance	Fair-skinned
Grew up in...	Forbes, NSW
Studied in...	Wollongong (Wollongong University) and Canberra (The Australian National University)
Lives in...	Padstow, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous, English
Indigenous classes or studies	Yes, at university
Profession	Lawyer, identified position
Identification	Identifies publicly.

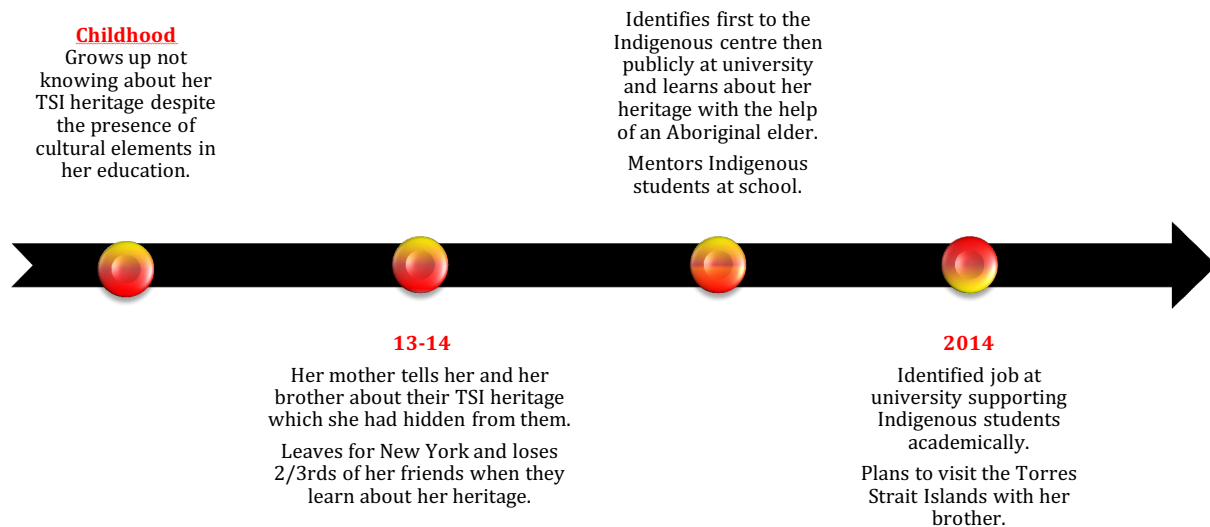
Timeline



Vanessa

Date of the interview	August 2013
Age at the time of the interview	25
Physical appearance	Olive-skinned
Grew up in...	Adelaide, South Australia
Studied in...	Adelaide (Flinders University)
Lives in...	Sydney, NSW
Heritages	Indigenous (Torres Strait Islander), Scottish
Indigenous classes or studies	No
Profession	Indigenous students' services at university
Identification	Does not identify.

Timeline



Appendix 4 : Résumé de la thèse en français

Introduction

Cette thèse s'attache à décrire les parcours identitaires de onze Australiens 'blancs' aux origines aborigènes. Ces Australiens ont grandi durant le mouvement de réconciliation mis en place par le gouvernement australien durant les années 1990, et visant à développer une meilleure compréhension de la culture aborigène, et de nouvelles relations entre Australiens aborigènes et non-aborigènes. A la fin du vingtième siècle, la place des Aborigènes en Australie évolue : grâce notamment au rapport sur les Générations volées publié en 1997, ainsi que celui dénonçant les décès en garde à vue d'un grand nombre de détenus aborigènes, le public australien est davantage informé du passé difficile de nombreux Aborigènes, ainsi que des difficultés actuelles rencontrées par cette minorité. A la même époque, la valeur de la culture aborigène au sein de l'identité nationale australienne est de plus en plus reconnue. Les années 1990 et 2000 voient donc une évolution positive de la vision des Aborigènes et de leur culture. Pour autant, ceux-ci ne sont que partiellement acceptés dans une société où la culture anglo-celte blanche des premiers colons reste la norme.

Cette étude analyse la manière dont les participants appréhendent leurs origines aborigènes tout en ayant grandi dans cette culture australienne 'blanche'. De par leurs liens avec cette culture – encore perçue par de nombreux Aborigènes comme celle des colons – et leurs origines aborigènes, ces participants se situent dans une position intermédiaire complexe. Leurs expériences permettent d'étudier non seulement la façon dont les

Aborigènes sont aujourd'hui perçus dans la société australienne, ainsi que la relation entre 'blancs' et Aborigènes quinze ans après la fin du mouvement de réconciliation, mais aussi le regard porté sur les Australiens aux origines métissées. Le métis aborigène et 'blanc' a une place à part dans l'histoire australienne, longtemps rejeté car n'appartenant à aucune des deux cultures dont il était issu. Cette étude s'intéresse aussi à l'évolution de la figure du métis en Australie et démontre que sa légitimité est toujours contestée, et que les relations entre Australiens 'blancs' et aborigènes restent marquées par l'ambivalence.

Partie I : Contextes

Chapitre 1 : Méthodes, méthodologies et théories

Le premier chapitre est dédié à la présentation des méthodes d'analyse et théories utilisées dans cette thèse.

Cette thèse est une étude qualitative des parcours identitaires de onze Australiens âgés de 19 à 34 ans au moment des interviews réalisées en 2013 et 2014. Ces participants ont été recrutés grâce à des forums sur internet, par petites annonces dans les journaux aborigènes, et surtout par bouche-à-oreille.

Il était demandé aux participants d'avoir grandi dans une culture australienne 'blanche' (ce terme fait l'objet d'une analyse dans le chapitre 3) et de n'avoir appris que tardivement qu'ils avaient des origines aborigènes, ou bien que celles-ci n'aient pas joué un rôle important dans leur enfance. Le choix de restreindre la tranche d'âge des participants était lié au souhait d'étudier l'évolution de la perception des Aborigènes suite à la décennie de réconciliation, et de comprendre quelles représentations des Aborigènes persistent ou ont changé. Le choix du terme 'blanc' plutôt que 'non-aborigène' était dicté par un intérêt pour les liens particuliers entre descendants des premiers colons appartenant aujourd'hui à une culture considérée comme représentative de l'identité australienne, et les Aborigènes, longtemps victimes tout d'abord de la colonisation, puis des politiques mises en place par les gouvernements successifs.

Six femmes et cinq hommes ont participé à cette étude. Ils ont tous effectué des études supérieures et vécu dans de grandes villes australiennes, ce qui conditionne en partie leurs opinions positives sur les Aborigènes et leur culture. Un participant (Ben) n'a appris que très récemment que sa grand-mère était en partie aborigène. Trois participants (Vanessa, Michelle et Adina) reconnaissent aujourd'hui la présence de certains signes d'Aboriginalité¹ dans leur éducation, mais ils n'ont pas grandi en sachant que c'était le cas. La majorité des participants (Josh, Casey, Andrew, Miriam) avaient connaissance de la présence d'ancêtres aborigènes dans leur famille, sans ce que cela n'ait de grande incidence sur leur éducation. Adam, enfin, est le seul participant dont la mère non-aborigène l'a initié à sa culture aborigène et emmené à des réunions de famille.

Aujourd'hui, les liens que les participants entretiennent avec leurs racines aborigènes sont aussi variables². Ben ne s'identifie pas comme Aborigène et n'est que peu intéressé par ces origines à l'heure actuelle. Certains participants s'intéressent à leurs origines, se sont identifiés comme Aborigènes par le passé et/ou possède un certificat d'Aboriginalité, mais ne sont pas prêts à s'identifier aujourd'hui pour différentes raisons (Josh, Michelle, Megan, Kate). Deux participants (Adina et Andrew) s'identifient aujourd'hui comme Aborigènes mais choisissent une définition qui me semble personnelle de l'Aboriginalité. Adam, Miriam et Vanessa s'identifient tous les trois officiellement comme Aborigènes et cette identité influence leur vie quotidienne de manières variables. Enfin, Casey s'identifie également comme Aborigène, mais plus fortement que les autres participants. Cette identité est pour lui la plus importante et sa vie est tournée vers les combats politiques pour les droits des Aborigènes. Ses fréquentations sont presque exclusivement aborigènes.

Les interviews durent en moyenne une heure et quarante-cinq minutes. Ce sont des interviews semi-structurées. Les participants sont donc guidés par des questions mais laissés libres de dévier des sujets abordés. Les interviews sont divisées en trois grandes parties. La première s'intéresse aux participants, à leurs origines, à leur vie actuelle. La seconde partie s'intéresse à la manière dont les participants percevaient la culture

¹ J'utilise ce terme pour traduire la notion d'Aboriginality' pour laquelle il n'y a pas de terme équivalent en français.

² Des schémas présentent en annexes la répartition des participants dans ces différents groupes.

aborigène dans leur enfance, et à l'évolution de cette perception en découvrant des origines aborigènes dans leur famille. La troisième partie demande aux participants de réfléchir à leur identité et à la façon dont leurs origines aborigènes s'y intègrent.

Les interviews ont été analysées grâce à la technique de l'analyse thématique définie par Victoria Clarke et Virginia Braun³. Il s'agit de classer le contenu des interviews par thèmes qui permettent ensuite de trouver les questions auxquelles la thèse s'efforce de répondre. Cette analyse doit s'appuyer sur un cadre théorique.

Le cadre théorique de cette thèse est éclectique car cette étude s'inscrit dans le champ des Etudes culturelles, caractérisé par une approche pluridisciplinaire. Par ailleurs, cette étude recoupe plusieurs champs théoriques qu'il est nécessaire de convoquer dans l'analyse des données collectées.

Cette thèse s'inscrit dans un paradigme constructiviste. Elle s'appuie sur les liens définis par Michel Foucault entre savoir, pouvoir et discours. Les représentations de l'Aboriginalité sur lesquelles les participants s'appuient sont des discours qui ont plus ou moins d'influence au sein de la société australienne actuelle, et qui déterminent donc la manière dont les participants comprennent l'identité aborigène et peuvent ou non s'y identifier. Cette étude ne cherche pas à donner une définition de ce qu'être Aborigène, 'blanc' ou Australien signifie aujourd'hui, mais à démontrer la manière dont différents discours sont construits, ainsi que les conséquences de ces discours sur l'identité des participants. Il n'y a donc pas de recherche de vérité, mais plutôt un point de départ qui consiste à dire que les représentations utilisées par les participants sont *leurs* vérités car elles ont un impact sur leur identité.

Au-delà du cadre général constructiviste, différentes théories sont mobilisées : la théorie coloniale, post-coloniale, ainsi que les études sur le concept de 'whiteness' (qui peut être traduit par 'blanchitude' ou 'blanchité') sont utilisées afin d'expliquer la position dominante de la culture australienne blanche ainsi que les représentations des Aborigènes

³ BRAUN, Virginia and CLARKE, Victoria, "Using Thematic Analysis", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006, pp. 71-101.

et de leur culture à travers l'histoire, depuis la colonisation. Pour analyser le parcours identitaire des participants, la théorie du métissage ainsi que la vision postmoderne de l'identité définie par Stuart Hall sont utilisées⁴. Sont aussi analysés les concepts de post-ethnicité et d'ethnicité symbolique.

Chapitre 2 : Une brève histoire des relations entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes en Australie et ses conséquences sur les participants

Le chapitre 2 présente une brève chronologie des relations entre Australiens aborigènes et non-aborigènes (en particulier 'blancs', descendants des immigrants britanniques, irlandais et européens) qui sert de repère pour l'analyse thématique effectuée dans le reste de la thèse. Dans un second temps, les conséquences de cette histoire sur les participants et leurs familles sont évoquées.

Lorsque James Cook prend possession pour la couronne britannique de la côte est australienne en 1770, le processus menant à la colonisation du continent est enclenché. L'Australie est déclarée *Terra Nullius*⁵ et ses habitants et leurs cultures sont ignorés, considérés comme primitifs et devant faire place à l'arrivée de 'blancs' et de leur civilisation perçue comme supérieure. En janvier 1788, l'arrivée des premiers bateaux chargés de bagnards marque le début de relations conflictuelles entre Aborigènes et colons.

Au cours du dix-neuvième siècle, la population aborigène décline, décimée par les guerres frontalières et par les maladies importées d'Europe. Les Aborigènes sont forcés de quitter leurs terres. Ils sont regroupés dans des missions ou réserves et leurs vies sont contrôlées par les Protectors des Aborigènes présents dans chaque état. On pense alors que les Aborigènes sont une race inférieure en voie d'extinction. Cependant, l'augmentation d'enfants métis préoccupe les gouvernements qui voient dans l'assimilation dans la société 'blanche' le salut de ces métis entre deux mondes. Cette vision est à l'origine d'une des

⁴ HALL, Stuart, "The Question of Cultural Identity" in HALL, Stuart, HELD, David, HUBERT, Don, THOMPSON, Kenneth (eds), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 595-634.

⁵ *Terra Nullius* signifie 'terre n'appartenant à personne' – et qu'il est donc possible de s'approprier.

politiques les plus décriées aujourd'hui qui consistait à enlever les enfants métis à leur famille aborigène afin de les éduquer dans une culture 'blanche.' La politique d'assimilation qui prévaut jusqu'au milieu de vingtième siècle implique que les Aborigènes – tout comme les immigrants – s'intègrent à la société australienne dont les valeurs et la culture sont celles héritées du Royaume-Uni et de l'Irlande⁶.

A partir des années 1960, le sort des Aborigènes évolue. En 1967, un référendum est très largement approuvé par les Australiens : il permet aux Aborigènes d'être désormais sous contrôle du gouvernement fédéral, enlevant ainsi aux états le pouvoir de les discriminer. Par ailleurs, les années 60 et 70 voient l'avènement d'un mouvement protestataire inspiré des Freedom Rides américaines et visant à la déségrégation du pays. Une identité pan-aborigène se développe en Australie. Elle transcende les différences des communautés aborigènes en prenant appui sur une expérience commune de dépossession due à la colonisation et aux politiques discriminatoires qui lui ont succédé. En 1972, l'érection d'une tente déclarée ambassade aborigène sur la pelouse du parlement australien à Canberra dénonce la place marginale des Aborigènes au sein de leur propre pays. La réponse du gouvernement est la politique d'auto-détermination aux succès mitigés, et qui prend fin dans les années 1990.

Comme nous l'avons vu en introduction, les années 1990 sont riches en événements et illustrent l'ambivalence au cœur des relations entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes. D'une part, la décennie de réconciliation permet au grand public d'exprimer son regret pour le passé et son désir d'inclure la minorité aborigène dans la nation australienne, d'autre part, ce désir est limité au niveau symbolique : la crainte de voir surgir des divisions au sein du pays, dues notamment aux revendications de droits à la terre suite au procès Mabo⁷, et la tendance à critiquer les Aborigènes perçus comme vivant aux crochets de l'état, sont des exemples des limites au processus de réconciliation. En 2008, le sentiment de

⁶ En Australie, on parle en effet de la culture 'anglo-celte' pour désigner l'héritage culturel des premiers migrants qui est toujours dominant dans l'Australie actuelle. Les Irlandais n'étaient pour autant pas considérés égaux aux Britanniques au moment de la colonisation. Par ailleurs, leur culture et religion étaient différentes.

⁷ En 1992, la Haute Cour d'Australie déclare que le principe de *Terra Nullius* est invalide et que les terres australiennes ont donc été volées aux Aborigènes qui sont en droit de les réclamer à l'état aujourd'hui.

réconciliation est ravivé par l'excuse officielle aux Générations volées que le premier ministre Kevin Rudd effectue. Cependant, les relations entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes restent marquées par l'ambivalence et l'absence de liens réels allant au-delà des représentations et symboles.

Les politiques mises en place par les gouvernements australiens et plus généralement l'histoire de la relation entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes expliquent pourquoi, aujourd'hui, les onze participants à ce projet n'ont souvent que peu de liens avec leurs culture et communauté aborigènes. Deux raisons principales expliquent l'absence d'information à laquelle les participants ont longtemps fait face. Dans plusieurs familles, des enfants ont été victimes des Générations volées et ont donc été enlevés à leur communauté aborigène. Par ailleurs, la peur d'être enlevé ou bien la simple honte d'être aborigène qui a prévalu jusqu'à récemment en Australie expliquent que de nombreux parents aient refusé de parler des origines aborigènes de leur famille à leurs enfants. Aujourd'hui encore, plusieurs participants mentionnent la gêne éprouvée par leurs parents face à ces origines longtemps perçues comme honteuses. Cet héritage explique en partie pourquoi il peut être difficile pour les participants non seulement de se renseigner sur leurs origines, mais aussi de les accepter et de s'identifier comme Aborigène aujourd'hui.

Partie II : Construire la blanchité⁸ et l'Aboriginalité

Chapitre 3 : Construire la blanchité

Les 'Whiteness studies' s'attachent à démontrer la position de supériorité des gens dont la peau est blanche dans un monde où cette couleur de peau est souvent la norme, et dont les privilèges qui y sont liés passent ainsi inaperçus aux yeux des 'blancs'. Ce chapitre explique comment le concept de blanchité fonctionne en Australie.

L'Australie s'est construite jusqu'à la moitié du vingtième siècle autour de l'idée de blancheur à la fois de peau et de culture. Lorsque les colonies se fédèrent en 1901, l'une des

⁸ 'Whiteness' est un concept reconnu aux Etats-Unis (où sont nées les *Critical Whiteness studies* dans les années 1960) ainsi qu'en Australie. En France, c'est un champ d'étude beaucoup moins développé et les termes de 'blanchité' ou de 'blanchitude' sont encore peu utilisés.

lois fondamentales adoptées est l'Immigration Restriction Act'. Avec le 'Pacific Island Labourers Act', elle forme ce qu'on appelle plus communément la 'White Australia policy'. Le nouveau pays souhaite en effet rester 'blanc', c'est-à-dire conserver sa culture anglo-celte et les valeurs qui lui sont attachées, et qui sont perçues comme liées à la couleur de peau blanche. Couleur de peau et valeurs étaient alors étroitement liées et la politique assimilationniste visait une assimilation à la fois culturelle et biologique⁹. Néanmoins, la définition de 'blanc' a évolué au fil des années. En effet, lorsqu'après la première guerre mondiale l'Australie cherche à attirer davantage d'immigrants, elle ouvre ses portes aux Européens du sud et de l'est.

La couleur de peau blanche associée à la culture anglo-celte est devenue représentative de l'identité australienne. Elle est toujours la norme aujourd'hui, et ce malgré l'adoption d'une politique multiculturelle dans les années 1970. Si les participants détachent aujourd'hui l'identité australienne de leurs origines anglo-celtes (leurs ancêtres se sentaient parfois plus britanniques qu'australiens), ils continuent d'associer la culture australienne dominante à ces origines. En effet, aujourd'hui, les Australiens descendants des premiers colons ou venant de Grande-Bretagne, d'Irlande et plus généralement d'Europe sont perçus comme simplement 'Australiens' alors que l'on précise les pays d'origine des autres Australiens que Jon Stratton appelle « hyphenated Australians »¹⁰.

L'avènement du multiculturalisme a eu un impact important sur la société australienne. Pour les participants, le multiculturalisme est au cœur de l'identité australienne. Pour ces jeunes Australiens vivant dans les grandes métropoles du pays, la diversité australienne est perçue comme un atout et comme naturelle. Pour certains, l'Australien 'blanc' autrefois quintessence de l'Australie est désormais associé à une Australie rurale et plus raciste que celle des villes. L'Australie d'aujourd'hui est souvent décrite par les participants comme accueillante. Une étude du discours des participants

⁹ Ainsi, A.O. Neville, Protecteur des Aborigènes en Australie Occidentale souhaitait la disparition de la couleur de peau noire grâce au métissage, et ainsi l'absorption des Aborigènes dans la société australienne blanche. Neville estimait que cette assimilation était le meilleur sort que l'on puisse réserver aux Aborigènes.

¹⁰ Des Australiens dont l'identité est décrite par deux termes séparés d'un tiret (hyphen) : 'Vietnamese-Australian' par exemple.

STRATTON, Jon, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998, p. 157.

révèle cependant que leur capacité à qualifier ainsi leur pays provient de leur statut privilégié en tant qu'Australiens à la peau claire. En effet, comme Ghassan Hage l'explique, la position des 'blancs' en Australie leur permet de porter un jugement sur qui a le droit d'appartenir ou non à la nation australienne. Hage appelle ainsi les 'blancs' « governors of the nation »¹¹. Sans s'en apercevoir, les participants se placent parfois dans cette position, n'ayant jamais été eux-mêmes confrontés à un questionnement de leur identité australienne. Etant 'blancs', ils ont la possibilité de définir leur identité plus librement que d'autres Australiens dont la couleur de peau ne renvoie pas à l'image du 'vrai' Australien à la peau blanche.

Chapitre 4 : Construire l'Aboriginalité - L'Autre rejeté

Les chapitres 4 et 5 expliquent comment la perception des Aborigènes par les non-Aborigènes s'est construite au cours de l'histoire, et l'impact des représentations passées dans l'Australie actuelle. Cette perception est fondée sur l'ambivalence : l'Autre est à la fois rejeté et désiré.

Le chapitre 4 explique que le concept d'Aboriginalité est le produit de la colonisation. Les Aborigènes et habitants des îles du détroit de Torres ne se considéraient pas comme Aborigènes avant l'arrivée des colons européens. Leur identité a été construite en opposition à celle des colons dont les représentations ont marqué et continuent de dominer la définition de l'Aboriginalité.

En effet, de nombreuses représentations et définitions des Aborigènes ont vu le jour depuis la fin du dix-huitième siècle. Différentes voix ont construit des représentations des Aborigènes : les explorateurs, les colons, les missionnaires, l'état, les médias, les anthropologues etc. Même si aujourd'hui la définition officielle d'un Aborigène ou habitant

¹¹ HAGE, Ghassan, *White Nations: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1998, p. 17.

des îles du détroit de Torres¹² laisse une part importante à l'auto-définition, la prédominance des représentations non-Aborigènes reste la norme. Ceci explique le choix fait dans cette thèse de se concentrer principalement sur ces représentations. Leur prévalence implique que ce sont elles – davantage que les définitions proposées par la communauté aborigène – qui ont principalement influencé les participants dans leurs constructions de l'Aboriginalité. Comme l'explique Marcia Langton : "The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists."¹³

Au cours de l'histoire, une opposition a été construite entre Aborigènes 'sauvages' et 'blancs civilisés'. Cette opposition est en partie due au contexte historique de la colonisation, un projet fondé sur la croyance en la supériorité des Européens 'blancs' et sur le droit, en conséquence, de s'appropriier les terres des indigènes perçus comme moins civilisés, voire intrinsèquement inférieurs. Ainsi, l'Australie est colonisée suivant le principe de *Terra Nullius* car les colons ne considèrent pas que les Aborigènes sont propriétaires de terres non cultivées. Les Aborigènes sont traités comme des enfants, incapables de prendre soin de leurs terres ou de leurs enfants (ce qui justifie qu'on leur enlève). Le traitement des Aborigènes par les gouvernements des colonies puis de l'état fédéral est défini par une attitude paternaliste.

La vision de l'Aborigène comme intrinsèquement inférieur se perpétue encore aujourd'hui alors même que l'histoire de la colonisation a été revisitée¹⁴ et qu'il est maintenant reconnu que les Aborigènes ont su préserver le continent et y survivre pendant

¹² La définition officielle a été adoptée en 1981. Elle précise qu'un Aborigène ou habitant des îles du détroit de Torres est une personne qui s'identifie comme telle, qui a une ascendance aborigène ou des îles du détroit de Torres, et qui est reconnue par la communauté dont il/elle est issu(e).

¹³ LANGTON, Marcia, *Well, I Heard it on the Radio Radio and I Saw it on the Television...": An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, op. cit., p. 33.

« La relation la plus importante n'est pas celle qui existe entre les gens dans la vraie vie, mais entre les Australiens blancs et les symboles créés par leurs prédécesseurs. Les Australiens ne connaissent pas et ne s'identifient pas aux Aborigènes. Ils s'appuient sur des histoires racontées par d'anciens colonisateurs. »

¹⁴ Dans les années 1980, plusieurs historiens s'attachent à raconter le point de vue aborigène sur la colonisation, point de vue longtemps ignoré : les Aborigènes auraient rapidement cédé leurs terres aux nouveaux arrivants sans résister.

plusieurs milliers d'années avant l'arrivée des colons. Les médias montrent souvent les problèmes actuels des Aborigènes comme la violence, l'alcoolisme, et il est sous-entendu que les Aborigènes sont fondamentalement incapables de trouver un travail, de s'adapter à la société. Cette vision perpétue l'idée d'une différence fondamentale entre Aborigènes et 'blancs'.

Le rejet après la seconde guerre mondiale du concept de race et sa disparition des discours officiels en Australie au profit du concept d'ethnicité (fondé sur des différences culturelles plutôt que biologiques) n'a pas effacé l'idée de l'infériorité aborigène. Le racisme anti-aborigène a simplement évolué. L'une des manières dont le racisme s'exprime en Australie est par l'intermédiaire de plaisanteries que certains participants décrivent comme naturelles si l'on est Australien. Le racisme au quotidien est donc difficile à décrier.

Une autre expression du rejet continu des Aborigènes dans l'Australie d'aujourd'hui est la tendance à associer cette minorité aux autres groupes ethniques composant l'Australie. Le statut unique des Aborigènes, premiers habitants du continent, est alors effacé et les Aborigènes rendus invisibles. Cette forme de discrimination est particulièrement difficile à critiquer puisqu'elle s'inscrit dans le discours égalitaire qui affirme que tous les Australiens font partie d'une seule société aux valeurs et directions communes. Ainsi, la société multiculturelle peut elle aussi perpétuer une forme de rejet des Aborigènes ou du moins une absence de reconnaissance de leur statut à part. Cet aspect du multiculturalisme n'était pas toujours perçu par les participants. Cependant, Casey, qui est très engagé politiquement pour la cause aborigène, rejette tout lien avec l'Australie dont l'identité est pour lui 'blanche' et coloniale.

Chapitre 5 : Construire l'Aboriginalité - L'Autre désiré

Le chapitre 5 décrit l'autre aspect de la perception ambivalente des Aborigènes par les non-Aborigènes. Les Aborigènes sont également désirés, particulièrement dans la société australienne actuelle où la place de la culture aborigène dans l'identité nationale est davantage reconnue. Par ailleurs, pour les participants – éduqués et vivant dans des villes

multiculturelles – l'identité 'blanche' australienne apparaît parfois vide de sens, contrairement à leurs origines aborigènes qui les placent du côté des premiers habitants du continent dont l'appartenance à celui-ci est plus forte et légitime que celle des descendants de colons ou d'immigrés. Même si la reconnaissance de la valeur de la culture aborigène est une avancée positive comparée à la manière dont elle a longtemps été dénigrée, elle peut aussi poser problème : négative ou positive, la vision des Aborigènes reste contrôlée par les 'blancs'. Par ailleurs, le risque que la culture aborigène soit appropriée par ces derniers sans le consentement des Aborigènes est présent.

Le désir ressenti pour l'Autre aborigène provient d'abord d'un désir d'appartenance. En effet, le lien unique qui unit les Aborigènes au continent australien est maintenant reconnu en Australie, et envié par certains pour qui l'identité australienne 'blanche' héritée de la colonisation n'est pas assez légitime. Par ailleurs, cette identité 'blanche' est fondée sur l'appropriation injustifiée des terres aborigènes, ainsi que sur un long processus de discrimination des Aborigènes. Pour certains Australiens, cette identité australienne qui reste dominante n'est donc pas positive. Plusieurs participants mentionnent le lien à la terre et lient leur sentiment d'appartenance à leurs origines aborigènes. Cependant, ils sont aussi prudents dans leurs affirmations. Les participants sont en effet conscients que l'appropriation de la culture aborigène est problématique. Beaucoup ne se sentent pas assez légitimes pour se placer sur le même plan que des Aborigènes qu'ils perçoivent comme plus authentiques.

Le désir d'appartenance à la terre australienne est un désir fondé sur la ressemblance. Les Australiens pour qui la culture aborigène est attractive souhaitent pouvoir être aussi authentiquement australiens que les Aborigènes. Un aspect problématique de ce désir est que l'Aborigène désiré pour sa culture millénaire et son lien à la terre australienne est un Aborigène idéalisé. La culture aborigène qui est valorisée en Australie est bien souvent celle d'une faible minorité, celle des Aborigènes vivant dans des endroits reculés du continent, et continuant à mener une vie traditionnelle. Ces Aborigènes sont perçus comme authentiques, au contraire de la majorité des Aborigènes qui vivent maintenant en ville,

comme la majorité des Australiens, et dont le mode de vie s'est adapté à la société moderne.

Il existe une autre forme de désir fondée sur la différence. Comme nous l'avons vu, certains Australiens souhaitent prendre de la distance vis-à-vis du passé colonial de leurs ancêtres qui est reflété dans les difficultés auxquelles les Aborigènes font face aujourd'hui. La culture australienne 'blanche' et anglo-celte est alors non plus perçue comme la quintessence de l'identité australienne, mais comme problématique. Qui plus est, étant devenue une norme, elle apparaît à certains dénuée de sens (ce qui n'est pas le cas des identités australiennes ethniques ou aborigènes). Cependant, encore une fois, c'est une culture idéalisée à laquelle on se réfère. La culture aborigène est désirée car elle est perçue comme étant à l'opposé d'une société occidentale aujourd'hui souvent décrite comme corrompue. Alors que durant la période assimilationniste, le désir de se fondre dans cette société prévalait, aujourd'hui, le désir de s'en démarquer prévaut. Ainsi, certains participants lient leur désir de revendiquer leurs origines aborigènes à un intérêt pour le multiculturalisme, les droits des homosexuels ou encore un style de vie 'écolo'. Encore une fois, la complexité et la diversité des modes de vie des Aborigènes au vingt-et-unième siècle sont gommées en faveur d'une représentation idyllique dont sont exclus de nombreux Aborigènes perçus comme peu authentiques.

Le processus de réconciliation même doit être questionné. On pourrait croire que l'élan de bonne volonté perçu durant la décennie 1990-2000 révèle une meilleure compréhension des Aborigènes par les non-Aborigènes. Cela est vrai mais doit être nuancé. S'il est vrai que les participants étaient mieux informés sur la diversité des cultures et modes de vie des Aborigènes que ne l'étaient les générations passées, ainsi que plus enclins à rejeter le passé colonial violent, beaucoup n'avaient pas pour autant plus de contacts avec des Aborigènes dans leur vie quotidienne. Le rapprochement des deux groupes était un des objectifs majeurs du processus de réconciliation. Or, si du rejet on est passé à un sentiment de culpabilité vis-à-vis du passé, les deux groupes restent pourtant séparés.

Le mouvement de réconciliation n'a eu qu'un impact mitigé sur les participants. Plusieurs ont mentionné le peu d'informations reçues à l'école sur les Aborigènes (leurs

connaissances plus poussées ont été acquises à l'université). Une représentation stéréotypée des Aborigènes persiste malgré la bonne volonté de nombreux Australiens de reconnaître la place des Aborigènes dans l'histoire et dans le présent. Par ailleurs, si un sentiment de culpabilité est présent, peu d'Australiens savent comment contribuer au processus de réconciliation¹⁵. La culpabilité, au lieu de rapprocher Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes, crée un fossé entre les deux groupes qu'il apparaît difficile de combler. Les deux groupes n'interagissent donc pas davantage malgré plus de bonne volonté. Ceci est peut-être également dû au fait qu'une véritable réconciliation qui irait au-delà de la dimension symbolique requiert davantage de concessions que nombre d'Australiens ne sont pas prêts à faire. La réconciliation apparaît alors comme un mouvement dont les termes sont décidés par les Australiens 'blancs' plutôt que par les Aborigènes. On peut alors se demander si l'on ne demande pas aux Aborigènes de se réconcilier avec le mode de vie australien 'blanc' plutôt que l'inverse.

Partie III : Authenticité et légitimité

Chapitre 6 : Authenticité et couleur

La partie III analyse trois discours sur l'identité aborigène ainsi que la manière dont les participants s'y réfèrent et l'influence qu'ils ont sur eux.

Le chapitre 6 s'intéresse aux liens entre couleur et culture, et à la vision des Aborigènes 'authentiques' comme noirs de peau. Tous les participants à cette étude ont été affecté par leur couleur de peau claire et par la façon dont celle-ci est perçue en lien avec leurs origines aborigènes. Souvent, le fait de ne pas correspondre au stéréotype de l'Aborigène noir a été un obstacle à l'identification.

Comme il a été expliqué dans le chapitre 3, les liens entre couleur et culture ont toujours été forts en Australie. La politique d'assimilation était fondée sur l'idée qu'une personne à la peau blanche pourrait assimiler les valeurs de la société australienne. La

¹⁵ 2014 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, Reconciliation Australia, 2014, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/RR7200-Barometer-Brochure_WEB.pdf

nécessité de garder une population blanche explique l'inquiétude face à la montée d'une population aborigène métisse et le besoin de la contrôler. En parallèle, l'étude des Aborigènes par les anthropologues s'est longtemps concentrée sur ceux perçus comme traditionnels et dont on croyait qu'ils disparaîtraient. Les Aborigènes métis vivant en ville n'étaient plus perçus comme d'authentiques Aborigènes. Un lien s'est donc établi entre Aboriginalité et peau noire. Ce lien a affecté les familles des participants dont certains membres ont été enlevés à leur communauté parce que leur peau était claire, ou qui ont gardé le silence sur leurs origines pour éviter ce sort. Il continue d'influencer les participants qui avaient des difficultés à prendre de la distance vis-à-vis de cette vision stéréotypée. Ayant appris à associer couleur et culture, il leur semblait difficile de se sentir aussi légitime en tant qu'Aborigène qu'une personne à la peau plus noire, et ce malgré le fait, connu de tous les participants, que les Aborigènes ne conçoivent que rarement l'identité en termes de couleur. Ce ressenti était accentué par le regard des autres, Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes. En effet, la plupart des participants se sont retrouvés face à des réactions d'incrédulité, voire de rejet lorsqu'ils mentionnent leurs origines aborigènes. Leur couleur de peau n'étant pas associée aux Aborigènes, elle est l'objet de plaisanteries ou de critiques ouvertes. Ceux qui s'identifient comme Aborigènes ont aussi été suspectés de le faire uniquement pour récolter les aides financières du gouvernement. Ces critiques proviennent aussi de la communauté aborigène, parfois suspicieuse des nouveaux venus, particulièrement si leur couleur de peau ne révèle pas leurs origines aborigènes, et s'ils mènent une vie perçue comme 'blanche'. La présence de ces aides financières est l'une des principales raisons expliquant pourquoi le besoin de définir l'identité aborigène persiste encore aujourd'hui. L'exemple récent des articles publiés par le journaliste Andrew Bolt et dans lesquels il reproche à des Aborigènes à la peau claire de voler l'argent des vrais Aborigènes dans le besoin en est une illustration¹⁶.

Comme nous l'avons vu, le discours liant Aboriginalité à une peau noire a un impact important sur les participants et sur leur légitimité. Leur réticence à s'identifier comme

¹⁶ BOLT, Andrew, "It's So Hip to Be Black", *The Herald Sun* 15 April 2009, http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1109_herladsun09.pdf
"White Fellas in the Black", *The Herald Sun*, 21 August 2009, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/white-fellas-in-the-black/story-e6frfifo-1225764532947>

Aborigènes vient aussi du fait que couleur et culture sont associées dans ce discours. Ainsi, plusieurs participants pensaient qu'un Aborigène noir serait plus susceptible d'avoir de forts liens avec sa culture et sa communauté. Par conséquent, avoir l'air Aborigène signifie être Aborigène pour plusieurs participants comme pour de nombreux Australiens non-aborigènes. Ceci rend difficile une identification en tant que tel pour des personnes comme les participants dont l'apparence physique ne signale pas une identité aborigène. Un autre élément diminuant leur sentiment de légitimité est l'absence d'expérience du racisme lié à une peau noire. Plusieurs participants ont expliqué se sentir moins aborigènes du fait de leur enfance privilégiée en tant qu'Australiens à la peau claire.

Un phénomène également étudié dans le chapitre 6 est celui de 'passing', c'est-à-dire se faire passer pour blanc lorsque l'on est Aborigène à la peau claire. C'était une pratique courante à l'époque où les Aborigènes étaient discriminés dans la société australienne. Les participants ont une expérience de ce phénomène puisqu'ils sont libres de révéler ou non leurs origines aborigènes. Ceci est perçu par les participants à la fois comme un avantage et un inconvénient. Certains participants dont la peau est mate mais dont les origines aborigènes ne sont pas détectables apprécient l'attention qu'ils attirent. D'autres expliquent que leur couleur de peau leur a permis non seulement d'éviter les remarques racistes, mais aussi de contrôler l'exploration de leurs origines aborigènes. Ils appréciaient pouvoir choisir les moments et groupes de gens au sein desquels ils jugent approprié de les révéler. Cependant, plusieurs participants ont aussi évoqué le sentiment de n'appartenir à aucun des deux groupes – aborigène ou non-aborigène – en étant blancs de peau. La position d'entre-deux n'étant pas reconnue en Australie, ces participants se sentent obligés de déclarer leur loyauté à l'un des deux groupes, et ainsi de renoncer à une partie de leur identité.

Chapitre 7 : Authenticité, temps et espace

Le chapitre 7 analyse un autre discours dominant sur l'identité aborigène. Les 'vrais' Aborigènes sont perçus comme menant une vie traditionnelle dans des endroits reculés du continent australien. Cette représentation voit le jour dans les écrits des anthropologues

qui ont longtemps délaissé les formes urbaines de la culture aborigène. Elle est aussi relayée par les médias, et par l'industrie du tourisme qui met en valeur la culture millénaire des aborigènes, survivant hors du temps et de la modernité, et le centre du pays, présenté comme le réceptacle de l'identité australienne. Une fois de plus, cette représentation occulte la réalité d'une majorité d'Aborigènes et rend l'identification en tant que tel difficile pour les participants influencés par ce discours et dont le mode de vie est urbain.

La plupart des participants associent Aboriginalité et mode de vie traditionnel. Les aspects traditionnels de la culture aborigène sont perçus comme des signes d'authenticité. Ils sont aussi l'objet d'une certaine fascination car ils représentent ce à quoi les participants n'ont pas accès. Dans une Australie où les formes de culture aborigène urbaine sont encore peu valorisées, la définition de l'identité aborigène se fait autour d'une image traditionnelle. Cette fascination est donc liée à la distance. Cette distance est géographique et temporelle. En effet, l'Aborigène traditionnel est perçu comme vivant dans le temps du Rêve, non corrompu par la modernité. Les distances spatiale et temporelle permettent d'idéaliser l'Aboriginalité, tandis que les Aborigènes urbains et à la peau plus claire sont souvent présentés dans les médias comme problématiques : la violence, l'alcoolisme et la dépendance aux aides de l'état sont mis en avant. Il est donc difficile de s'identifier à une telle vision de l'identité aborigène. Ainsi, lorsque les participants envisagent d'en apprendre davantage sur leurs origines aborigènes, ils mentionnent un retour à leur communauté ou la recherche de coutumes ou de la langue de leur groupe aborigène. S'investir dans la communauté urbaine est peu envisagé car cette culture est très peu valorisée, voire invisible aux yeux des Australiens non-aborigènes. Par ailleurs, le discours valorisant la culture traditionnelle apparaît aussi important pour certains Aborigènes influencés par cette représentation. Etre Aborigène mais vivre en ville et mener une vie perçue comme moderne (et 'blanche') peut donc susciter un sentiment d'illégitimité chez ceux concernés, sentiment renforcé par le regard des autres.

Le chapitre 7 s'attarde particulièrement sur l'importance du passé dans la construction de l'identité aborigène. Puisque les aspects traditionnels de l'identité aborigène sont présentés comme fondamentaux, la recherche d'une culture telle qu'elle était avant la

colonisation devient importante pour certains Aborigènes. L'un des participants, Casey, parlait ainsi du devoir qu'il avait de retrouver la langue de ses ancêtres. Ce retour à une vision pré-coloniale et souvent idéalisée de l'Aboriginalité provient d'une certaine désillusion face à la représentation des Aborigènes au vingt-et-unième siècle. Seul le passé pré-colonial permet alors de former une identité positive et qui plus est distincte de celle des Australiens 'blancs'. Pour les participants, le passé joue un rôle fondamental. En effet, n'ayant que peu de liens avec la communauté aborigène, les participants se tournent vers le passé pour appréhender leurs origines. Connaître leur histoire est donc pour tous la première étape vers l'identification. Il est intéressant de voir que le retour vers le passé implique souvent un retour vers un lieu différent. Trouver sa place dans l'arbre généalogique signifie aussi retourner à sa communauté d'origine. Il s'agit d'un voyage dans le temps et l'espace.

Bien qu'importante dans la reconstruction d'une identité forte dont les Aborigènes peuvent tirer un sentiment de fierté, la dépendance au passé et à une définition traditionnelle de l'identité aborigène pose problème. Elle ne reconnaît pas la diversité de la communauté aborigène actuelle, ni la différence des aspirations de ses membres. Elle met aussi en avant une vision statique de la culture aborigène qui implique que l'on ne peut que la conserver ou bien la perdre, mais non l'adapter – chose que les Aborigènes font depuis de nombreuses années. Ces nouvelles formes de culture ne sont pas perçues comme aussi authentiques et légitimes que celles présentes avant la colonisation. Les Aborigènes sont donc condamnés à finir assimilés à la société australienne 'blanche'. Pour les personnes comme les participants qui cherchent à appréhender leur identité aborigène, l'absence de savoir traditionnel peut être un obstacle important.

Chapitre 8 : Authenticité et désavantage

Le derniers discours étudié est celui présentant les Aborigènes comme nécessairement désavantagés. La représentation des Aborigènes comme désavantagés a évolué au cours de l'histoire. Initialement perçus comme essentiellement désavantagés, incapables de s'adapter à une culture vue comme supérieure, les Aborigènes sont aujourd'hui davantage

considérés comme des victimes de la colonisation et des politiques discriminatoires qui l'ont suivie. Ceci ne signifie pas, cependant, que les problèmes auxquels certains Aborigènes sont aujourd'hui confrontés (alcoolisme, violence, emprisonnement etc.) sont compris par la population australienne. Encore une fois, la vision de ces Aborigènes (qui est à l'opposé de la représentation de l'Aborigène traditionnel à la culture millénaire) est ambivalente. Ils sont à la fois perçus comme victimes mais aussi comme responsables de leurs problèmes et finalement réticents, voire toujours incapables de s'adapter à la société australienne. Du côté aborigène, l'image de l'Aborigène désavantagé a pu servir à la formation d'un mouvement pan-aborigène centré sur une dépossession commune. Cependant, cette identité aborigène est ancrée dans la protestation, en particulier contre le gouvernement australien, mais aussi contre la société australienne 'blanche', ce qui peut rendre les personnes qui ne souhaitent pas manifester leur opposition moins 'authentiquement' aborigènes que les autres. Ainsi, le discours liant désavantage et identité aborigène peut être un obstacle supplémentaire à l'identification pour des participants qui, d'une part, n'ont jamais grandi avec les désavantages de nombreux aborigènes, qu'ils soient le racisme ou le manque d'opportunités, et qui d'autre part s'identifient également comme 'blancs' et Australiens, identités souvent perçues comme incompatibles avec l'Aboriginalité.

Durant les dernières décennies, le gouvernement australien a fait de la lutte contre les injustices subies par les Aborigènes une priorité. L'un des effets de ce choix est que la notion de désavantage est devenue intrinsèquement liée à l'identité aborigène. La représentation de l'Aborigène comme désavantagé peut aider les participants à se sentir plus légitimes dans leur identité aborigène, ou bien le contraire selon la définition donnée au concept de désavantage.

Si la notion de désavantage est liée aux violences passées, alors elle peut aider les participants à s'identifier à leurs origines. Ainsi, plusieurs participants ont exprimé leur fierté d'appartenir à un groupe qui s'est battu au cours de l'histoire pour préserver sa culture et son statut de premiers habitants du continent. Bien que n'ayant pas personnellement connu le racisme, plusieurs participants s'identifient avec l'histoire complexe de leurs ancêtres et perçoivent leur identification comme Aborigènes au présent

comme une manière d'honorer la mémoire de ces ancêtres et parfois de continuer à lutter contre le désir assimilationniste de la société australienne 'blanche'. Ces participants se fondent sur le passé pour asseoir leur légitimité dans le présent. Cependant, de nombreux participants ont aussi évoqué le manque d'expérience personnelle de désavantage quelconque comme problématique. Ils ne possèdent pas ce vécu qui lie les populations aborigènes et les oppose à la société et à l'état. Or ce vécu est souvent décrit comme l'une des caractéristiques principales de l'identité aborigène aujourd'hui. Bien que conscients que tous les Aborigènes ne sont pas des victimes, les participants ont des difficultés à envisager l'identité aborigène sans cette composante. Par ailleurs, les participants peuvent hésiter à revendiquer leurs origines par peur d'être soupçonnés de vouloir toucher l'argent réservé aux Aborigènes par l'état. Il est en effet courant d'entendre, dans les communautés aborigène et non-aborigène, des accusations proférées contre de soi-disant 'faux' Aborigènes qui profitent du système.

Un autre aspect problématique du lien créé entre désavantage et identité aborigène est le rejet par certains Aborigènes de la notion de réussite dans la société australienne 'blanche'. Ainsi, avoir un bon travail, des possessions matérielles, peut être perçu comme une forme de renoncement à l'identité aborigène. Vanessa et Adam qui travaillent tous les deux dans le milieu universitaire dénoncent le système qui enferme les Aborigènes dans un cercle vicieux et ne leur permet ni de faire leurs preuves, ni de choisir individuellement leur identité et style de vie. Encore une fois, la pression sur les individus exercée par les représentations émanant des deux communautés ne permet pas que la diversité de la population aborigène soit représentée, ni même acceptée.

Un dernier aspect lié à la notion de désavantage est la pression exercée sur les Aborigènes qui réussissent dans la société australienne. Cette réussite est admise s'ils comptent en retour aider la communauté aborigène. La loyauté à cette communauté est demandée et l'on s'attend souvent, du côté aborigène mais aussi non-aborigène, à ce que le succès de certains Aborigènes rejaillisse sur la communauté toute entière. Si ce n'est pas une mauvaise chose en soi, en revanche, cela limite une fois encore les choix personnels. Ainsi, Adam explique la pression exercée sur lui à l'université pour qu'il choisisse des

études aborigènes alors que son intérêt se portait sur la sociologie. Pour certains participants, il paraît naturel de se tourner vers des professions leur permettant de travailler pour la communauté aborigène. Pour ceux qui ne le souhaitent pas, l'identification en tant qu'Aborigène peut être critiquée et difficile.

Partie IV : Identités partielles

Chapitre 9 : Entre-deux

La dernière partie s'intéresse aux conséquences des discours préalablement étudiés sur la capacité des participants à revendiquer leurs origines aborigènes.

Le chapitre 9 montre les difficultés rencontrées par les participants souvent pris dans un entre-deux qu'il est pourtant impossible de maintenir sur le long terme.

Les discours des participants ont révélé, pour la plupart d'entre eux, un sentiment d'entre-deux presque constant. Par exemple, de nombreux participants ont des difficultés à réconcilier leurs origines aborigènes (dont ils sont généralement fiers) avec la vision négative des Aborigènes souvent présentée par les médias. Comme le montre l'étude des discours effectuée dans la partie précédente, l'identité aborigène est présentée en termes d'authenticité et d'inauthenticité plutôt qu'en termes de diversité. Par conséquent, les participants, dont la connaissance de la culture aborigène est assez développée grâce à leurs études ou intérêt personnel, sont souvent contraints de juger les différentes représentations de l'identité aborigène à l'aune de ce critère d'authenticité. La multiplication des voix définissant l'identité aborigène rend parfois la tâche complexe. Le fait que de nombreux participants se sentent illégitimes en tant qu'Aborigènes malgré les diverses représentations de cette identité aujourd'hui disponibles révèle l'influence continue des discours dominants. Ces discours placent les individus dans des catégories et il apparaît donc très difficile de s'identifier comme Aborigène sans être jugé ou questionné. Ce n'est pas une identité neutre (si tant est qu'il en existe) ; elle suscite de nombreuses réactions et catégorisations que plusieurs participants souhaitent éviter. Ainsi, comme l'exprime Ghassan Hage, de nombreux Australiens s'octroient le droit de juger qui peut ou

ne peut pas être aborigène. Le degré de contrôle personnel sur cette identité est donc faible. Vanessa raconte ainsi comment plusieurs de ses amis l'ont accusée de mentir et de les avoir trahis lorsqu'elle leur a annoncé qu'elle avait découvert des origines aborigènes dans sa famille.

Un autre entre-deux dans lequel les participants se trouvent pris est la présentation de l'identité aborigène comme à la fois innée et acquise. L'idée que cette identité est présente dans le sang était utilisée par les colons qui définissaient les Aborigènes selon leurs pourcentages sanguins. Mais le discours du sang a été repris par la communauté aborigène et utilisé comme outil permettant de contrer les discours assimilationnistes. Il est par exemple commun d'entendre dire qu'une personne possédant une seule goutte de sang aborigène est aborigène à cent pour cent. Ceci va à l'encontre de l'idée longtemps répandue et toujours présente qu'un Aborigène à la peau claire et vivant en ville a perdu son identité aborigène. Les participants convoquent parfois cette vision pour évoquer des sentiments qu'ils relient à leurs origines aborigènes, tels que leur attachement à l'Australie. L'essentialisme peut en effet aider des personnes comme les participants à se sentir légitimes : si l'identité se transmet par le sang, alors il est possible de renouer avec ses origines. Par ailleurs, ce lien est souvent le seul auquel les participants peuvent se raccrocher au début de leur parcours identitaire. Pour autant, les participants ont aussi tendance à prendre de la distance vis-à-vis de cette vision essentialiste, bien conscients que l'identité aborigène est aussi définie par le vécu, l'acquis. La plupart perçoivent cette composante comme plus importante et se sentent donc souvent peu légitimes en tant qu'Aborigènes. Ceci est accentué par le fait que l'acquisition de l'identité aborigène est perçue comme quelque chose qui ne peut se faire que durant l'enfance. On apprend donc à devenir aborigène, mais cet apprentissage, pour être 'naturel', doit se faire dès le plus jeune âge. Plusieurs participants ont ainsi accentué le fait qu'ils ne pouvaient pas être aborigènes car ils n'avaient pas été élevés dans cette culture. Par conséquent, de nombreux participants préfèrent parler de leurs origines plutôt que de leur identité aborigène.

Le choix de ne pas s'identifier s'explique par le fait que la position d'entre-deux n'est pas acceptée aujourd'hui en Australie. Les origines aborigènes sont perçues par de

nombreux aborigènes comme supérieures aux autres (bien que le métissage soit très commun). Par conséquent, s'il est possible de reconnaître diverses origines, il est en revanche souvent mal perçu de s'identifier comme 'en partie' aborigène et de souligner ses autres racines. Ce rejet de l'entre-deux provient de la perception négative des Aborigènes métissés au cours de l'histoire. Ceux-ci étaient souvent rejetés comme n'appartenant à aucun groupe et n'ayant donc aucune culture ou identité propre. Aujourd'hui, les Aborigènes souhaitent mettre en avant la survie de leur culture et proclamer une identité aborigène forte, plutôt que métissée. Ce tout ou rien identitaire, ainsi que la séparation entre 'blancs' et 'noirs' rend complexe la position de nouveaux arrivants comme les participants, ancrés dans une culture 'blanche' mais désireux de connaître leur culture aborigène. Il leur est souvent demandé de faire un choix clair entre ces deux identités, ce qui pousse plusieurs participants à ce projet à rester du côté 'blanc', plus sécurisant.

Chapitre 10 : Identités fragmentées

Le chapitre 10 s'attache à montrer comment les participants tentent de surmonter cet impossible entre-deux les forçant à abandonner certaines parties de leurs identités. Afin d'analyser les réponses des participants, ce chapitre convoque deux théories : la vision postmoderne de l'identité qui la présente comme fragmentée et constamment en mouvement, ainsi que la théorie du métissage qui transforme l'entre-deux hybride et négatif en un espace créatif permettant de sortir du binarisme entre 'noirs' et 'blancs'. La notion d'identité fragmentée est étudiée dans l'espace et le temps. Cette vision de l'identité est ensuite questionnée dans le contexte australien actuel.

Afin d'appréhender leurs origines aborigènes en dehors des pressions créées par la société et les représentations qu'elle donne de l'identité aborigène, les participants ont souvent trouvé refuge dans des espaces protégés où leur identité métissée pouvait davantage s'exprimer. Dans ces espaces, les participants n'étaient pas obligés de sonder leur environnement avant de parler de leurs origines aborigènes. Trois espaces apparaissaient comme importants. Le premier est le centre universitaire aborigène. En Australie, la plupart des universités possèdent un centre aborigène où les étudiants

aborigènes peuvent venir se renseigner, participer à des activités, se détendre. Dans cet espace, aucun certificat d'Aboriginalité n'est demandé et de nombreux étudiants poussent les portes en souhaitant trouver des réponses aux questions qu'ils se posent sur leur identité aborigène. Au sein de ces centres se côtoient diverses Aboriginalités : certains étudiants ont grandi aborigènes, d'autres viennent de découvrir ces origines. Cette bulle sécurisée a permis à plusieurs participants de prendre un premier contact avec leurs origines, et de gagner en confiance et en légitimité car c'est endroit où leur choix identitaire est reconnu plutôt que mis en doute. Ces espaces reconnaissent que l'identité aborigène est un processus plutôt qu'un acquis. Cependant, certains de ces centres sont aussi réservés aux étudiants aborigènes uniquement. L'existence d'un espace d'où sont exclus les autres étudiants montre, d'une certaine manière, l'échec du mouvement de réconciliation visant à réunir les Australiens. Par ailleurs, on peut se demander si ces espaces ne contribuent pas à perpétuer une séparation plutôt qu'à créer des liens entre les Aborigènes et autres Australiens.

Le second espace sécurisant est la sphère familiale. En effet, pour certains participants, les liens familiaux priment sur la loyauté à la communauté aborigène ou bien les liens avec la culture australienne 'blanche'. Cependant, l'association de l'espace sécurisant familial avec une communauté aborigène au mode de vie différent a aussi été troublante pour certains participants. Voir des gens décrits comme des membres de la famille mais qui apparaissent pourtant très différents n'était pas toujours évident pour certains participants. Ceci est particulièrement vrai pour les participants ayant visité la communauté aborigène d'où leur famille est issue lorsqu'ils étaient enfants. Il apparaît ici que l'espace hybride peut être un espace complexe où la cohérence est parfois difficile à maintenir.

Le dernier espace sécurisant évoqué par les participants est l'espace officiel. Tout d'abord, la définition officielle de l'Aboriginalité permet à plusieurs participants de trouver une légitimité dans cette identité. En effet, cette définition met en avant le choix personnel de s'identifier comme aborigène plutôt que l'appartenance à une 'race' comme le faisaient les anciennes définitions. De même, les certificats d'Aboriginalité reconnus par les

employeurs et autres permettent aux participants d'être officiellement reconnus comme Aborigènes, et ce malgré leur apparence 'non-traditionnelle'. Cependant, comme dans les autres espaces, certaines limites apparaissent. L'une d'elle est que si l'identité aborigène des participants doit être acceptée sur présentation d'un certificat, ce dernier ne convainc pas forcément les gens de la légitimité en tant qu'Aborigènes de leurs porteurs. Plusieurs participants ont ainsi eu l'impression de n'être reconnus que partiellement. Le doute visible sur les visages de leurs interlocuteurs provoque de nouveaux sentiments d'incertitude chez les participants. Par ailleurs, la reconnaissance officielle est rejetée par certains participants – et certains Aborigènes – qui refusent que l'état continue à définir l'identité aborigène. Les certificats peuvent donc être des outils à double-tranchant, permettant d'être reconnus auprès de certains, et indiquant à d'autres que les personnes le possédant ne sont pas forcément très intégrées à leur communauté (ceux qui y ont grandi n'ont pas toujours besoin de preuve de leur identité, et donc de certificat).

Les identités des participants ne sont pas seulement fragmentées dans l'espace, mais aussi dans le temps. Plusieurs participants ont ainsi expliqué que leur identité et en particulier la perception de leurs origines aborigènes ne sont pas fixes mais en évolution. Le fait que l'identité se construit grâce aux rapports aux autres est souvent masqué par la description de l'identité aborigène comme innée, comme nous l'avons vu auparavant. Cependant, un point intéressant est que si les participants perçoivent leur identité comme un processus, c'est un processus qui doit à terme les mener à être Aborigène, une identité fixe. Ainsi, l'identité aborigène en soi n'est pas vue comme étant en évolution. Il est donc toujours difficile de penser une – et surtout des – identités aborigènes en mouvement. Ceci fait écho à la vision de l'Aboriginalité comme existant dans une bulle temporelle hors de la modernité.

Le désir de s'identifier ou non comme Aborigène dépend, pour la majorité des participants, de la pertinence de cette identité dans leur vie de tous les jours. Certains participants se sont identifiés dans le passé à un moment de leur vie où cette identité avait une plus grande importance (Josh à l'université lorsqu'il a reçu une bourse aborigène ou Adam aujourd'hui afin de se présenter à ses étudiants comme aborigène et ainsi servir de

modèle pour les jeunes générations). Certains ne s'identifient plus aujourd'hui, d'autres au contraire se ré-identifient. Les parcours complexes de certains participants tendent à prouver que l'identité est toujours en construction.

La dernière partie de ce chapitre examine l'idée d'une identité postmoderne dans le contexte australien actuel. Si l'idée que l'identité est plurielle et en mouvement est ce que défendent la plupart des participants (dont plusieurs qui admirent le pluralisme culturel australien), elle est pourtant en conflit avec la représentation de l'identité aborigène comme fixe et dominant les autres identités d'une personne. Plusieurs participants rejettent l'imposition d'une identité unique et défendent le droit de déclarer une identité aborigène mais aussi une identité 'blanche', australienne ou autre. Certains Aborigènes réclament aussi ce droit qui n'est encore que peu reconnu. Cette vision de l'identité place l'individu plutôt que la communauté au centre. Elle permet de reconnaître l'existence d'une pluralité de manières d'être aborigène au vingt-et-unième siècle et de revaloriser le métissage. Cependant, on peut remarquer certaines limites à cette vision ouverte de l'identité aborigène. Comme nous l'avons expliqué, le désir de présenter une identité aborigène 'pure' réside dans le besoin de présenter une vision unie et forte de cette identité face aux pressions assimilationnistes de la société australienne. Qui plus est, choisir une pluralité d'identités est un privilège que les participants à la peau claire ont, mais que d'autres Aborigènes que l'on catégorise automatiquement comme tels n'ont pas. Ainsi on pourrait voir dans le désir de certains participants de revendiquer l'identité aborigène une forme de ce que Herbert Gans et Mary C. Waters appellent « symbolic ethnicity »¹⁷. Une telle relation aux origines ethniques permet de s'approprier des aspects symboliques d'une culture – ici le lien à la terre ou la culture millénaire aborigènes – sans pour autant s'investir vraiment dans la vie communautaire et donc accepter certaines contraintes. Ceci peut s'avérer problématique dans le cas de la culture aborigène, longtemps reniée mais aujourd'hui appropriée sans l'accord des Aborigènes. Si les participants sont libres de faire

¹⁷ Ethnicité symbolique.

GANS, Herbert, J., "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1979, pp. 1-20.

WATERS, Mary C., *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990.

des choix identitaires sans que cela ne porte réellement à conséquence, en revanche, dans le cas de nombreux Aborigènes, il ne s'agit pas seulement d'un choix identitaire personnel, mais d'une nécessité de protéger une identité que la culture dominante continue à étouffer. Ainsi, de nombreux Aborigènes craignent que l'acceptation de nouveaux arrivants et d'identités multiples ne dilue leur culture et qu'elle ne finisse par disparaître ou par perdre tout sens. Ces considérations sont à prendre en compte, et pourtant, se conformer à l'essentialisme et imposer certaines définitions de l'identité aborigène est aussi problématique puisqu'alors les voix dissonantes sont elles aussi étouffées, tout comme la pluralité des identités aborigènes aujourd'hui.

Conclusion

Le but de ce projet de recherche était d'analyser comment onze jeunes Australiens à la peau claire et ayant grandi durant la période de réconciliation avec des origines aborigènes construisent aujourd'hui leur identité. L'analyse de leurs parcours identitaires devait aussi permettre de comprendre la manière dont les Aborigènes sont perçus dans l'Australie actuelle ainsi que l'état de la relation entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes.

Le concept au centre de cette étude est celui d'identité. Afin de comprendre comment les identités 'blanches', anglo-celtes, australiennes mais surtout aborigènes, sont construites, des discours dominants dans la société australienne actuelle sont analysés.

Il apparaît que la vision des Aborigènes a été et continue d'être dominée par les représentations non-aborigènes, au détriment des représentations aborigènes. Malgré un intérêt croissant pour la culture aborigène dans les années 1990, de nombreux stéréotypes sur les Aborigènes persistent, aussi bien positifs que négatifs puisque la vision des Aborigènes est caractérisée par l'ambivalence.

Les participants à cette étude sont largement influencés par cette vision ambivalente, à la fois attirés par leurs origines aborigènes mais aussi conscients des représentations négatives persistantes de cette minorité. Du fait de leurs liens ténus avec la communauté

aborigène, les participants sont particulièrement influencés par les discours dominants. En s'appuyant sur ces discours, les participants perpétuent une relation aux images plutôt qu'aux personnes dénoncée par Marcia Langton. La relation que beaucoup de non-Aborigènes entretiennent avec les Aborigènes se résume aux symboles. Malgré le mouvement de réconciliation, un fossé persiste entre les Aborigènes et le reste de la société australienne, en particulier les descendants des colons britanniques et les descendants d'Européens.

Ce fossé est parfois volontairement maintenu, en particulier par certains Aborigènes qui souhaitent ainsi protéger leur identité. Ils ont ainsi recours à une essentialisation de leur identité qui rejette la pluralité. Ceci résulte en un refus de l'entre-deux qui est précisément l'endroit où se situent la plupart des participants. Ces représentations strictes de l'identité aborigène ne leur permettent souvent pas – ou difficilement – de s'identifier comme Aborigènes en se sentant assez légitimes. Ainsi, à une époque où le métissage est de plus en plus fréquent et où l'identité aborigène est désormais valorisée, de nombreuses personnes ne peuvent retrouver leurs origines car l'opposition entre 'blancs' et 'noirs' est de nouveau réaffirmée. Cette opposition nie l'histoire coloniale qui a séparé de nombreux Aborigènes de leur communauté – on empêche aujourd'hui ces derniers de la retrouver – ainsi que les liens noués entre Aborigènes et non-Aborigènes au cours de l'histoire. Surtout, elle nie l'évolution de la culture aborigène, la diversité de sa population dans l'Australie d'aujourd'hui ainsi que le droit des individus de décider de leur identité librement.

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