

*Kim Scott's Fiction within Western Australian Life-Writing:
Voicing the Violence of Removal and Displacement*

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Abstract. It is nowadays evident that the West's civilising, eugenic zeal have had a devastating impact on all aspects of the Indigenous-Australian community tissue, not least the lasting trauma of the Stolen Generations. The latter was the result of the institutionalisation, adoption, fostering, virtual slavery and sexual abuse of thousands of mixed-descent children, who were separated at great physical and emotional distances from their Indigenous kin, often never to see them again. The object of State and Federal policies of removal and mainstream absorption and assimilation between 1930 and 1970, these lost children only saw their plight officially recognised in 1997, when the Bringing Them Home report was published by the Federal government. The victims of forced separation and migration, they have suffered serious trans-generational problems of adaptation and alienation in Australian society, which have been not only documented from the outside in the aforementioned report but also given shape from the inside of and to Indigenous-Australian literature over the last three decades. The following addresses four Indigenous Western-Australian writers within the context of the Stolen Generations, and deals particularly with the semi-biographical fiction by the Nyoongar author Kim Scott, which shows how a very liminal hybrid identity can be firmly written in place yet. Un-writing past policies of physical and 'epistemic' violence on the Indigenous Australian population, his fiction addresses a way of approaching Australianness from an Indigenous perspective as inclusive, embracing transculturality within the nation-space.

Key words: Stolen Generations; absorption; assimilation; eugenics; Indigenous literature; life-writing; Kim Scott; trauma; displacement; identity formation.

1. The Stolen Generations

Aboriginal child removal has played a crucial role in the mainstream management of Australian Indigeneity, taking the Indigenous diaspora to its furthest extremes. It formalised the frontier practice of Indigenous child abduction for exploitative purposes into the

cornerstone of genocidal practices against the Aboriginal 'race'. The direct and cross-generational trauma caused by dispossession and dislocation, resulting in a drastic reduction of absolute Aboriginal numbers, loss of kinship structures and detribalisation is emblematically reflected in the plight of the Stolen Generations, laid bare in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report. This large population of mixed descent formed the core of governmental action in the institutional effort to exterminate the Aboriginal community by their biological absorption and social assimilation into the white mainstream between 1930 and 1970 (Haebich 2000: 272). Absorption into the white race through removal, fostering, adoption and interracial marriage revealed itself as a breeding-out policy in which mission reserves, children's homes and white families all played their role.

Up until the 1970s, Australian states had the exclusive power to legislate in Aboriginal affairs. Western Australia applied policies of biological absorption, social assimilation and segregation to manage its Aboriginal population, nominally but not proportionally one of the largest of all states—a total of 24,000 so-called 'full-bloods' and a 1,000 'half-castes' only made up only 1% of the state's overall population in the early 20th century (Haebich 2000: 161-2). As of 1905 (Aborigines Act 1905), Western Australian legislation gave the state almost absolute powers in child removal, these the notorious Western-Australian Chief Protector of the Aborigines, A. O. Neville, active between 1915 and 1940, used to implant a system of institutional child removal to special reserve locations at great distances from children's families. After WWII, the new policy of social assimilation failed to produce the Westernised Aboriginal family unit due to continued under-funding and lack of political commitment. Ongoing administrative control curbed Indigenous initiative, unemployment soared, race barriers were kept in place, and the destruction of kinship and cultural networks through child removal etc. continued (Haebich 2000: 420) and arguably still inform mainstream policy. While much restrictive and punitive Western-Australian legislation was repealed in the third quarter of the 20th century (Native Welfare Act 1954 and 1963), the state powers to intervene families considered of Aboriginal descent were retained (Haebich 2000: 523-7).

2. Western-Australian life-writing

Indigenous Australian literature has both reflected on and evolved from the trauma of separation and removal, describing an acute sense of physical and emotional displacement, but also resilience in giving voice to this experience. An important means of articulating the silenced life experience of the Stolen Generations, it voices an ongoing struggle against assimilative policies and their effect on identity formation. As Michelle Grossman writes, it re-interprets the western autobiography as Indigenous life-writing: "a genre more willing to engage with representational *métissage* across cultural and language traditions and communities than conventional literary Western paradigms [for] those ... formerly excluded or marginalised" (Grossman 2006). Yet, life-writing has also been for a presumed lack of historical exactness and Indigenous 'authenticity' (Kurtzer 2003: 183). Thus, more recent Indigenous writing, such as Kim Scott's, has resorted to creative fiction as a freer means to approximate Indigenous reality and identity with a picture "more true than the truth" (Kim Scott in Kunhikrishnan 2003).

This trend is salient in life-writing by part-Indigenous Western-Australians, which engages with the local context of absorption, assimilation and multicultural integration in various modes. The next four sub-sections address the novelistic work of Doris Pilkington, Glenyse Ward, Sally Morgan and Kim Scott. Figuring as representative Indigenous authors in the new Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature (Heiss & Minter 2008), these four authors are dealt with in order of their work's narrative complexity, which also overlaps with a generational issue. Other Western-Australian writers listed in the PEN publication are not considered here, either because their Indigenous status is dubious (Mudrooroo, Archie Weller¹) or their writing takes place in other literary fields (Jack Davies, Alf Taylor, Jimmy Chi, Pat Torres, Jimmy Pike). Kim Scott is awarded special attention for having obtained the prestigious Miles Franklin Literary Award for *Benang* in 2000 and *That Deadman Dance* in 2010, two monumental novels that, though clearly standing out as complex fictional constructs, are indebted to, and engage in a dialogue with the Indigenous genre of life-writing.

2.1. Glenyse Ward

A short, straightforward example of Indigenous life-writing is provided by Glenyse Ward, who was born in Perth on the watershed of the absorptionist and assimilationist period, 1949. In simple prose she gives account of her life after removal in her best-known autobiographical volume *Wandering Girl*, first published in 1987. Still a baby, she was taken from her Nyoongar parents to St. John of God's orphanage in Rivervale, Perth. At the age of three she was moved to Wandering, short for St Francis Xavier Native Mission at Wandering Brook, a Catholic institution eighty miles south-east of Perth, where she starts her testimony. After basic formal education, she was employed as a domestic at the mission and, once sixteen, farmed out to a wealthy white family. Tired of their exploitative, racist attitude, she soon absconded to start working in a hospital kitchen in Busselton, 150 km south of Perth. In this sense the book's title, *Wandering Girl*, deserves a double reading honouring her favourite song "I love to go a 'wandering, along the mountain track" (Ward 1995: 96), but the prose does not go into further complexities than this, delivering a humble, straightforward description of Indigenous resilience and survival during her time working for the white Bigelow family, who captain the local town of Ridgeway and its ingrained racism.

Thus, while the I-persona of this Aboriginal bildungsroman is forgiving towards the "earnest" though "misguided" settler Australians that severely affected her life, the text works up to the act of Indigenous resilience in Glenyse's elopement; it addresses her upbringing and survival outside her cultural environment up to the moment she is old and experienced enough to take life in her own hands. While she does not recover the link with her Aboriginal parents, her father having died and her mother being refused contact with her (126), Glenyse's autobiography finishes on an optimistic note as she runs away from the white family that exploits her: she was "thrilled ... There was no looking back for me" (157). The epilogue's poem and biographical note follow this up by explaining she made a career as a nursing assistant, joined the Community Health Service, got married to "the private barber for the Governor of Western Australia" in 1975 and continues writing, publishing *Unna You Fullas*,

about her mission life, in 1991 (169-71). Despite this account of Indigenous resilience, there is an arguable element of accommodation in her autobiography in that it speaks out to understanding and reconciliation with the mainstream, thus projecting a “non-threatening” image of Aboriginality (Kurtzer 2003: 184-7); this is especially so in the epilogue, which expresses a hope for future equality and equal opportunities that still has not materialised.

2.2. Doris Pilkington Garimara

Belonging to the Western-Desert tribe of the Mardu, Doris Pilkington was born in 1937 as Nugi Garimara on Balfour Down Station forty km northwest of Jigalong, in the East Pilbara region of north-west Western Australia. At the age of three, she was removed together with her ‘half-caste’ mother and younger sister to Moore River Native Settlement just north of Perth, an institution for part-Aboriginal children with white fathers. Her ‘half-caste’ mother Molly had already spent some time there ten years earlier but escaped and managed to return home. At eighteen Doris was released from Roelands Mission just south of Perth and to become the first ex-mission ward to enter and complete a nursing aide training programme at Royal Perth’s Hospital. After raising a large family, she completed a journalism degree at Perth’s Curtin University and became involved in film and video production, and writing.

Her first novel, *Caprice: A Stockman’s Daughter* (1991), won the 1990 David Unaipon National Award for unpublished Indigenous writers. Using first and third person narrative and straightforward prose, it is a dramatic account of cross-generational displacement and trauma told from the perspective of an Indigenous granddaughter. After spending her youth in an orphanage and being confronted with the subaltern role laid out for her by a deeply racist society, Kate undertakes a healing journey into traditional land to recover her lost Indigenous heritage. *Caprice*, necessarily a fictional account reflecting the fragmentary initial stages of Garimara’s search for her origins, prepares the ground for the auto/biographical *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Pilkington 2002: 206). First published in 1996, this text was turned into an internationally successful film by the mainstream director Philip Noyce. Garimara’s second novel recounts her mother’s remarkable two-month journey from Moore River Native Settlement which started in August 1931 and took the fourteen-year-old Molly and her two younger kin sisters (cousins) Gracie and Daisy home to Jigalong by walking 1,600 km north along the so-called rabbit-proof fence.

Successfully coping with unfamiliar landscapes, climatic conditions and pursuing Indigenous trackers and police officers, they outwitted the Chief Protector of the Western-Australian Aborigines, A.O. Neville, who ardently sought their re-institutionalisation. Confiding in nothing more than her quick wits and bush skills, Molly managed to complete “what was, without a doubt, one of the longest walks in the history of the Australian outback” (129) and lead her cousin Daisy back to Jigalong—her cousin Gracie separated from them to go and meet her mother at Wiluna, but was caught and returned to Moore River and never saw her cousins again. Not surprisingly, the girls’ 1,600 km journey on foot has become a symbol for the diaspora and mistreatment of the Stolen Generations and a remarkable homage to their resilience and resistance to policies of absorption and assimilation. Its successful completion

also brings into relief the systematic under-funding of Neville's Department of Native Affairs, which eventually backfires on his efforts to retrieve Molly and Daisy and blemishes his prestige. Neville signs his defeat in the official correspondence retrieved by Garimara: "It's a pity that those youngsters have gone 'native' ... but it cannot be helped" (129).

Nugi Garimara completes the trilogy with her autobiography *Under the Wintamarra Tree* (2002). This starts out with a brief history of Mardu dispossession and dispersal as they trek from the Western Desert to the white cattle stations, pushed south by the diminution of their natural resources. The text then narrows its focus to Nugi's own life at Balfour Downs Station, her early removal to Moore River, institutional life, and training and work as a nurse in Perth. Her married life in the 1960s moves from dire circumstances of exploitation at a farm in arid Mukinbudin to the suburban pleasures of Geraldton, 400 km north of Perth. Yet, this idyllic picture is broken by the Aboriginal "rape of the soul" (Gilbert 1984 [1978]: 3) as entrenched racism and male chauvinism take their toll from unsuspected corners: her 'octoroon' Aboriginal husband's family are exempt from the 1936 Act—in eugenics, an 'octoroon' is of 'one-eighth' Aboriginal descent—and therefore reject Nugi as Gerry Pilkington's wife (Pilkington 2002: 163-4); meanwhile Gerry resorts to alcohol, verbal and physical abuse to cope with the 'humiliation' of being "dependent on a woman's income for financial support" (198).

The latter prompts her decision to locate her parents after 20 years and recover her Indigenous heritage. In 1962 Nugi undertakes her first trip to Meekatharra, a reserve of "stony, treeless, government-allocated land" 700 km north of Perth (182), where she re-establishes contact with kin and culture and recovers her sense of home. As if to mark the emotional distance between the text's protagonist and the reborn author, in the epigraph Garimara switches from third-person to first-person narrative to criticise the policies of removal, dispersal and mainstream conditioning in settlements, missions etc. which affected the Stolen Generations:

So you can imagine the trauma I went through as an adult meeting my mother and dad. It took me ten years to actually sit down and start my journey of healing, which was necessary for me to reconnect to my land and to reclaim my language and culture. It took ten years, because the conditioning was so strong that I had to metaphorically go through it all again, undo all that conditioning and come back (206).

Garimara deeply deplores the loss of her younger sister Anna, who was removed to Sister Kate's Children's Home in Perth and never re-established contact with her Indigenous family: "I've met her once ... there was no embrace, nothing. We were miles apart, her attitude was different to mine, I suppose because of the environment she grew up in. She was given an altered vision of her history and I think she prefers that" (207).

2.3. Sally Morgan

The visual artist and writer Sally Morgan, born in 1951 in Perth, produced a landmark text in Aboriginal literature one year before the Bicentenary of 1988. Her novel found a niche in this official celebration of two centuries of white colonisation due to the budding feelings of guilt over the dispossession, loss and destruction this process had wreaked upon the Indigenous Australians. Morgan's instance of Indigenous life-writing spoke out to a nation which was becoming increasingly aware of the fatal implication of the mainstream in their destruction and their survivors' deplorable state of living conditions, due to growing Aboriginal and international protest and vindications. While a much more complex and sophisticated literary artefact, *My Place* subscribes to *Wandering Girl's* textual politics in that it takes a mild, almost forgiving stance towards the mainstream for the wrongs committed in the past, and arguably works towards the 1990s mainstream effort to recognise the destructive impact of the colonial past on the Aborigines and their special place in (the definition of) the nation, known as 'Reconciliation'. The supposedly reconciliatory drift of the text has made it the object of mainstream praise (Brett 1987; Gare 1987) as well as the target of Aboriginal criticism (Huggins 2003; Langton 2003).

Morgan addresses the process of finding this repressed identity in a complex, communal way, and the recovery of her Aboriginal heritage takes the shape of a bildungsroman, psychodrama, detective story, mystery and choral novel. Whereas the first section of the auto/biography arguably reads as a white middle-class woman's story (Huggins 2003: 62), the acceptance of her own Indigeneity is the sign for her voice to fade out and introduce her direct forebears' in the oral tradition's way: her uncle's, her mother's, and most importantly, her grandmother's. These voices trace a critical path back into a past that should never be forgotten and needs to be addressed if Australia is to come to terms with itself as the democratic nation of the 'fair go'. They tell a story of traumatic removal and displacement fed by racial policies with additional gender and class connotations. Her 'half-caste' uncle's life is the Australian battler's but compounded by his blackness, which makes it virtually impossible for him to make a fair living in rural Australia, although/because he is the unacknowledged son of a wealthy white station owner. Sally's mother's life is conditioned by the early separation from her grandmother and placement into Parkerville's Children's Home near Perth under the 1936 Act, by their troubles to re-unite, and by the fear that they will be separated once again by official policy. Her grandmother's life is severely affected by the sexual abuse committed by the wealthy white station owner Alfred Howden Brockman, who is also her and Arthur's father. Working as a domestic for him after she is separated from her Indigenous family, she is the object of repeated incest, giving rise to multiple offspring which is later removed (Laurie 1999). This incest secret is arduously guarded, indicating the amount of racial-sexual trauma involved in Sally's origins (Pulitano 2007: 43; Kennedy 1997: 235-60).

Despite its ambiguous nature and inevitable failure to forge Morgan's recovered Indigeneity beyond textual inscription and mere biological roots (Newman 1992: 73-4), in recovering her family's past her contrived instance of life-writing remains a powerful statement of cultural resilience in the face of genocidal policy and an unveiled critique of the sexual politics that accompany it. Morgan later published *Wanamuraganya*, the story of her mixed-descent uncle Jack McPhee (1989) and co-edited the compilation of Indigenous testimonies *Speaking from the Heart* (2007). Her involvement in Aboriginal Studies, theatre, writing and painting have

only reinforced her commitment with the Indigenous cause after the publication of *My Place*, and nowadays inscribe her Indigeneity as lived experience as well as genetic heritage.

2.4. Kim Scott

The poet and novelist Kim Scott was born of mixed European-Nyoongar descent in Perth in 1957. His writing analyses his own marginal position in Australian Indigeneity as an assimilated urban Aborigine and the consequences this has for identity formation. Thus, he advocates for a pluralistic, inclusive sense of Indigeneity catering for marginal cases as his own. Kim Scott boasts and boosts an uncanny fringe Indigenous-Australian identity encroaching upon whiteness. He vaunts his own idiosyncratic case to break down static, engrained definitions of Indigeneity and whiteness, putting his identity on the line to confront the mainstream in a 'patriotic' act as the Indigenous writer Philip McLaren told me, in which Indigeneity and Australianness hook up and reinforce each other. His writing is instrumental in playing out the latter discursive tension.

Scott's first two novels, *True Country* 1993 and *Benang* 1999 (shared Miles Franklin 2000), are semi-autobiographical; then follows a non-fictional biographical incursion, *Kayang and Me* (2005), and his third novel *That Deadman Dance* 2010 (sole Miles Franklin 2011), is set in the post-contact past and moves out of the autobiographical. Scott employs fiction as a space where an Indigenous truth can be told that Official History denies or questions, as well as a space of reflection and Indigenous recovery. It aims to accommodate a vast array of Australians who would not easily be considered Aboriginal on the authenticity count, himself emphatically included:

I make myself vulnerable and open to rejection. I'm not a traditional man, I'm disconnected from all sorts of traditional practices, I don't live on my traditional country—and there are lots of people like that ... I believe that politically, we need to promote pluralities and diverse ways of being Aboriginal. Like—what about the man who writes literary novels? You're an anomaly, because of our damaged history, but that's who you are (Scott 2000, my emphasis).

His own "damaged history" ambivalently locates him as a "quite White" suburban professional, whose life experience is not typically Indigenous. As he says, "as an individual I don't share the immediate experience of oppression and racism that the majority of Nyoongars do, and which is therefore probably an important part of their sense of identity" (Kunhikrishnan 2003b). This notwithstanding, he has managed to firmly anchor himself to an Aboriginal identity through his literary work and personal commitment with the Aboriginal cause from a liminal location which defies binary understandings of Indigeneity, most notably and crucially addressed in his second novel, *Benang*. On the one hand, this recovery of Indigeneity is made possible by the modesty and humility with which he envisages his literary project, which is never conceived of as normative; Scott does not "like the idea of speaking for anyone else" (Guy 1996: 14) and emphasises that such authority is seated in his Nyoongar community (Kunhikrishnan 2003b).

On the other hand, while his Aboriginal ancestry is not spelt out on his body, turning him into a 'white' Aborigine of sorts, Scott comments in an interview on *Benang* that he is reluctant "of being niched in the mainstream ... and it seemed to me to start off as 'here I am, the first white man born in the family line' was to avoid that pigeonhole, and to be very provocative" (Scott 2000). As well as to physical appearance, being the first white man refers to the legal definition of Indigeneity under eugenic policy—halfcast, quadroon, octoroon etc.—and the point or moment the 'dilution of the blood' changes into whiteness under the law, which is where the battle for Indigenous empowerment has been arguably fought out (Native Title etc.). Scott addresses this problem, experienced by his own father, in *Benang* through the figure of Harley Scott's father, who falls outside the eugenic definition of Indigeneity due to changes in legislation in 1934, which amplify its reach. Yet, the Nyoongar line through Scott's paternal grandmother was never hidden to him by his father but rather highlighted as something to be proud of (Buck 2001), which propelled Scott's search for an Indigenous identity 'hidden' under a European appearance and lifestyle. Thus, the protagonist of *Benang's* struggle with his inscription as the 'first White man born' in the family is modelled on Scott's personal experience but proffered as a fictional model within which the author investigates his hybrid identity, by "[p]romoting a sense of diversity and escaping the constraints that so many of us have been put into because of the oppression of our history ... Offer[ing] some more space into which people can move" (Buck 2001).

Kim Scott's carefully self-reflexive art configures an embracing sense of subjectivity within the possibilities of a strategic employment of identity—Scott's "own position is that once that Aboriginality is expressed you can be inclusive" (Scott 2000). To use Homi Bhabha's words, Scott's work may be seen to circulate publicly as a token of "strange cultural survival" (Bhabha 1990: 320) within the historical, linguistic, racial and gendered margins of the Australian land and text-scape; as such, it is instrumental in addressing Australians with a silenced past of oppression but also forges a notion of solidarity. Scott explains this postcolonial agenda of reconciliation-through-confrontation as follows:

... I think what's required is non-Aboriginal Australia looking to itself[,] what its relationship to Aboriginal Australia tells it about itself[:] ... a sort of psychosis ... [T]he business of being protector of Aboriginal people, that notion, and the falsity and the self-deception in that is part of it. So ... thinking, reflecting ... upon the nature of mainstream Australia's psyche in terms of its relationship with Aboriginal Australia is an important part of reconciliation. That gets shied away from a lot (Buck 2001).

Yet, he also insists on the Indigenous communities using what he calls their "compassion, spiritual generosity, bravery and inclusiveness" while being confrontational (Buck 2001). Not surprisingly, in such a project he understands "the return and consolidation to the Nyoongar community of what should be our cultural heritage as a priority" (Kunhikrishnan 2003a).

In line with such a recovery, Scott has managed to trace his Indigenous origins to the land on Western Australia's south coast, and has been accepted into its local Nyoongar mob. This is reflected in and given shape through his writing, which is autobiographical in tone, focus and localisation; it fastens itself onto the area of his wider family's homeland while maintaining a notable, groundbreaking effort in experimentation with content, style and genre. Thus, his

first novel, *True Country* (1993), is a “semi-autobiographical work” (Rai 2007: 43) of fiction loosely inspired in his teaching experience in the Kimberley; it addresses the politics of identity formation by using a polyphonic narrative perspective which interrogates the genre of Aboriginal life-writing, Western auto/biography and the realist novel. His second novel, *Benang* (1999), investigates, fictionalises and re-assesses his family history by critically reworking “the hostile nature” of archival material from the assimilationist period and “[u]s[ing] it[s language] back on itself” (Scott quoted in Fielder 2006). *Benang* also works with multiple shifts of perspective and polyphony, but adds fragmentary and nonlinear storytelling techniques as narrative devices as well, equally breaking away from realist formulations of the autobiography and novel.

His third publication, *Kayang and Me* (2005), situates itself in the realm of non-fiction and represents an important parenthesis in his novelistic production which put his projected third novel *Naatj/That Deadman Dance*, “on the backburner” (Fielder 2006: 8). The reason for this excursion into non-fiction is easily understood as the ongoing need for Scott to “explor[e his own] sense of place, more specifically, of the South-West of Western Australia—Noongar country,” to which his extended family belongs (Fielder 2006: 8). Thus, Scott’s third longer prose project, a joint narrative with a Native elder/aunt of his, veers away from fiction to bear critically on local fact as recorded by the Indigenous oral tradition as well as Western written sources. It poises the family stories and personal recollections of his Aboriginal relative and elder, Hazel Brown, against a larger framework of reflections within a socio-political and historic context elaborated from personal memories and archival material by Scott himself. As such, it plots a productive dialogue revising mainstream’s renderings of local history from an Aboriginal perspective, and constitutes a local micro-narrative that unmasks the uncanny gaps and silences in Western “grand narrative” of benign settlement (Lyotard 1984: xxiii-iv), which lays the basis for his third novel which has now won the Miles Franklin, no doubt to the subtle ways it addresses the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface in a first-contact context.

Scott “recognises” that he wrote *Benang* “at a time when authors were having their Indigenous identities challenged—Colin ‘Mudrooroo’ Johnson, Archie Weller, ‘Wanda Koolmatrie’” (Scott 2007: 5). He also addresses Mudrooroo’s plight in *Kayang and Me*, pointing out that his Aboriginal identity is still a matter of debate amongst Nyoongars. Scott understands Indigenous writers who “advocate ... exclud[ing non-Natives] back—to show them how it feels” and thus create an exclusionary sense of Indigenous solidarity; yet, he does not sympathise with this stance in view of his own experience as an “anomalous”, White-skinned, urban professional Aborigine (Scott & Brown 2005: 204-5).

Intent upon creating inclusive forms of Aboriginality—which, all must be said, are needed to accommodate his own identity—Scott rather believes that an exclusionary politics of the Indigenous body would be counterproductive in the face of the inevitability of hybridisation and the redefinition of Australianness at large. As he is aware that he writes “for a predominantly white, educated audience” (Midalia 2005), *Benang* participates in a kind of national corroboree, “a meeting place ... in which Australians can begin to rearticulate the country and themselves, in ... a dialogic style of writing” (Slater 2005: 157), in which his third novel, *That Deadman Dance*, can be placed. Naturally, Scott wants “to acknowledge

and celebrate [his] non-Indigenous family and, by extension, all aspects of Australian heritage.” However, he does not:

... see how this can be justly done without the primacy of Indigenous culture and society being properly established ... Unfortunately our shared history has demonstrated that the alternative—accommodating Noongar society within ‘white’ society—has proved impossible, to the detriment of what we all might be. As I see it, this is reason enough to offer those who insist on asking why a small amount of Noongar blood can make you a Noongar, while any amount of white blood needn’t make you white. It’s considered a political position, intended to foreground inequalities in our society, and particularly in our history (Scott & Brown 2005: 207, my emphasis).

3. Indigenous and Indigenised Australianness

The Indigenous-Australian plight has been the result of the massive invasive thrust of a large group of new settlers which disowned the original owners of, and expelled them from their land in a process that has been both diasporic and genocidal. The Indigenous-Australian case strongly appeals for the universal application of human rights inasmuch this acknowledges the existence of, and right to cultural difference within the nation-space on the basis of respect for, and acceptance of the host culture. In Australia, European settlers have long ignored these basic rules of conduct, and the long Indigenous history of ethnic displacement, destruction and yet, survival and resilience as uncovered and recorded in recent reports, essays, articles and budding Indigenous arts and literature forward the message that (the will to impose) unilateral definitions of identity do little good in a world where cultures are bound to meet and share across difference.

While embedded in a wider, engaged literary tradition which also embraces the work of Glenyse ward, Doris Pilkington and Sally Morgan, Kim Scott forges a uniquely liminal but firm sense of Indigenous-Australianness in his fiction, making him probably the best example of a transcultural, inclusionary sense of self in contemporary Indigenous Australian literature. Scott’s words on inclusiveness are tantamount to saying that any adherence to the blood question is not a biological but political issue embedded within a context of unequal access to Australia’s physical and moral economy, regulated by politics and legislation—but has this ever been otherwise? Thus, the fiction of authenticity may be strategically employed to recover the Indigenous heritage for the greater good of the Australian nation. Therefore, the uncanny turbulences of, and ripples in the authenticity debate, which determine whether Australians can partake of Indigeneity or not, should be taken as discursive rather than essentialist stages in the performative unfolding of the script that endlessly re/writes identity into place.

As a local story about “place, and what has grown from it,” *Benang*’s life-writing refuses to acknowledge an overarching White patriarchal narrative that organises kinship relations according to the hierarchical rigidities and sequencing of oedipal conflict; instead, it simultaneously speaks to the past, present and future of Aboriginality from a hybrid site that

is meant to be enabling, inclusive, nurturing and regenerative, in ways that *True Country* already rehearsed some years earlier. Scott has now moved from semi-autobiography in *True Country* and *Benang* to full-fledged fiction in his last, award-winning novel, *That Deadman Dance*, after a strategic stopover in tribal community to address local history in *Kayang and Me*. His last novel is an account set in the 'friendly frontier' of the early 1800s, a piece of Australia where, significantly, interracial relationships are positively inscribed and do not lead to war and bloodshed. It marks a significant move in the completion of his process of self-definition as an Indigenous person, but also in the formulation of his fiction as an aesthetic as well as political expression of an Indigenous and Indigenised Australianness open to all.

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ⁱ Archie Weller and Mudrooroo have also used an Indigenous Australian paradigm in writing but, while having had an Aboriginal life experience, their Indigeneity has been questioned on genetic grounds, so they are generally not considered Aboriginal (writers).