Chapter 3

Divided Self:

Positioning Kim Scott through his works

Our knowledge is profound and comes from living in one place for untold generations. It comes from watching the sun rise in the east and set in the west from the same place over great sections of time. We are as familiar with the lands, rivers and great seas that surround us as we are with the faces of our mothers. Indeed, we call the earth Etenoha, our mother from whence all life springs.

(Mankiller Onondaga Faith Keeper Oren Lyons quoted in Mankiller n.pg)

I reckon the people, the government and the bureaucrats, the white mums and dads.....all the wide world want to see the Aboriginal people like this....wanting to be helped, wanting to better themselves. Able to be helped even.

I’m thinking. People been talking to me. There’s Aboriginal people everywhere you know. Even like you, paler. We are all different, but the same. Something the same in us all, that what they say.....we like the forgotten tribe of chosen ones, eh?

Trouble is, even if I want it, I don’t feel like all them others, not just because we are Aboriginal ...
But what do we share, or have in common? Is it a something, a spirituality or a creativity, a propensity to.....

But. But maybe we gotta be the same so we can make people remember that we belong here, and we something to tell. Here first. For a long time. This whole big Australia land binds us. And we fragments of a great.....

A Dreamt time. A maybe rented time. A time the fabric of which is torn and rent and now not holding together, like a torn flag fluttering.

Like a magic carpet calling. But we never had. (K. Scott, *True Country* 166-167)

The Aboriginal relation with the land is governed by their way of life, ceremonies and a holistic worldview, which considers conservation and protection of their surroundings to be a ‘sacred duty.’ But the single most important trait which joins them all together is the experience of having been ‘discovered’ by white explorers and been subjected to colonization, a process which had brought about disruption in their traditional way of life and accounted for lives of innumerable and loss of their sacred lands. Colonialism brought with it oppression and subjugation, a denial of rights, loss of land and ultimately, attempts of assimilation into colonial society and culture. Hence, in the modern day, the aftereffects of such policies like abject poverty, widespread unemployment, substance abuse and high mortality rates, are visible everywhere. Ironically the stories are similar everywhere, for while one learns from Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*) about the methodical destruction of tribal Africa’s social, cultural and economic foundations with the taking away of land, discrediting leaders and sending off children to distant schools, one also learns from a Sally Morgan or a Doris Pilkington or
a Scott about the Stolen Generations in Australia and continent wide terror and oppression that struck at the very roots of Aboriginal existence. Thus it is without doubt that all modern day problems of such peoples stem from overt and infamous colonial policies and rules but times are changing. Modern day indigenous peoples are increasing becoming aware that it high time that the world should know, for it does not feel nice to be always typecast as the stereotyped vile savage or innocent child of nature, in various modes of public exhibition like films, literature and even popular culture. For there is realization that public perception dominates public policies and hence, voicing their own opinions, fight for their rights and rightful place in society. And with passage of time, “as more indigenous people become filmmakers, writers, historians, museum curators and journalists, they will be able to use a dazzling array of technological tolls to tell their own stories, in their own voice, in their own way.” (Mankiller n.pg)

At last estimates, there are more than three hundred million Aboriginal peoples inhabiting almost every corner of the world, be it the Sámi peoples in Scandinavia or the Maya in Guatemala, the numerous tribal groups in the Amazonian rainforest or the Dalits in India, the San and Kwei in Southern Africa or the Aboriginal peoples in Australia along with hundreds of indigenous peoples in Mexico, Central, South and North America. Interestingly, though living very far apart from each other, and having great diversity in cultures, languages, history and ways of life, all indigenous communities of the world share the common trait and understanding that their lives are an integral part and inseparable from the natural world.
Like other parts of continental Australia Aboriginals arrived on the north-west coast somewhere between forty to sixty thousand years ago, with lower sea levels and the Kimberly coast only ninety kilometers away from Timor. And by the time, European settlers started appearing, they were very well entrenched all across Western Australia. While Dirk Hartog was the first to land at Cape Inscription, Englishman William Dampier, who sailed down the west coast around 7 August 1699, expressed his frustration in his A Voyage to New Holland and about the absence of water. After several other landings, the first formal claim of possession of Aboriginal land came from Commander George Vancouver on 29 September 1791 and by 1826 a settlement had been established at King George Sound. The British named the settlement on the Swan river the Swan River Colony in 1829 and with the passage of time, the colony developed into the port city Freemantle and the Western Australian capital city of Perth. Even though the land beyond the settlement was inappropriate for agriculture, pockets of fertile land was identified and slowly the colony expanded all over Western Australia. Such intrusion into Aboriginal lands obviously generated conflict with the settlers, with the famous warrior Yagan being killed in such violence around 1833. The most brutal of massacres took place in Pinjara in 1834 but still growth for the British settlers was slow. It received a boost with the arrival of the pastoralists and sheep farming became quite productive in the Avon valley, moving onwards to Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne by the 1870s. till about the same period, the economy of the place was driven by wool, meat and wheat, but the discovery of gold in 1880s changed everything with the arrival of hordes of prospectors. There was a mad rush and innumerable gold towns were established all over the land, but the bubble burst with the exhaustion of the same within a short
period. Interestingly, in 1901, when the Federation of Australia was formed, Western Australia was initially reluctant to join, preferring to stay separate, but was later on convinced with the promise of a railway line joining the east coast with the west coast. Also, after the busting of the gold rush and disappearance of all the wealth, the economy of Western Australia once again fell back on wool and meat. The economy collapsed and it was not until the end of the World War II and implementation of a new Immigration Policy that it recovered, with the influx of innumerable immigrants.

One of the well known residents of the Western Australia were the Noongars (also spelt as Nyoongar, Nyungar, etc) who were Aboriginal people settled in the south west corner. Their country was a large one, stretching from Jurien Bay in the north to Esperance in the south coast, Geraldton on the west coast to Ravensthorpe and Southern Cross in the east. Also the name of their common language, the word Noongar also is also believed to mean ‘people.’ Before the advent of colonization and settlement, the Noongars numbered tens of thousands and were composed of thirteen dialectical groups, who, between them, shared the common language and cultural practices. According to practices, they can also be sub-divided into the Perth type, the Nyakinyaki type, the Bibelmen type, the Wudjari type and the Nyunga type. But with colonization and development of Western Australia, there had been a gradual erosion of such divisions and decay of Noongar people and culture. Colonization also brought disease and violence and there was a gradual decline in the numbers, so much so that in the modern day, it is the region of thirty thousand only (according to community claims). Noongars had a similar hunter-gatherer lifestyle like other Aboriginals and even knew the use of quartz. Considering themselves superior to the white race, they
branded the settlers 'djanga' or white devils later on, though at the very advent of colonization, they believed the whites to be their Dreamtime ancestral spirits who had returned from the land of the dead, and showed then reverence and subservience. Seizure of land and spread of sheep affected Noongars like other Aboriginals and between 1890 and 1958, they came under direct control of the government with the enactment of the Native Welfare Act. Later, the situation became so bad that two infamous government 'concentration camps', the Moore River Native Settlement and Carrolup or Marribank became the abode of more than one thirds of the entire Noongar population. And a minimum of 25% of Noongar children were herded and 'adopted' by the government during this period at these camps, to be later part of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal history.

One of most famous of Australian bureaucrats and the most instrumental in denying of Aboriginal human rights was the Chief Protector of Rights, A.O. Neville. His influence is evident in his biography entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography:

Born on 20 October 1875 at Ford, Northumberland, England. ... It was as chief protector of Aboriginals [in Western Australia] that he came to the public eye. He shaped official policy towards Aboriginals during much of the period from 1915 until his retirement in 1940. ... As chief protector (1915-36) and commissioner for native affairs (1936-40), his strategy was to extend the department's legal authority, particularly over people of part descent, his main interest. At his instigation, regulations were issued under the 1905 Aboriginals Act, and the Act itself was amended, to give the department more power, particularly over children. ... The ostensible
purpose was to bring about permanent segregation of Aboriginals of full
descent, who were believed to be near extinction; and temporary
segregation and training of those of part descent who would re-enter
society as domestics and farm-workers, eventually blending with the white
population through intermarriage. (5)

From 1910 to 1970, the Australian government forcibly removed and transported
half-caste children – those born of Aboriginal and white parents – from their parents and
to training camps where they were taught British mores and manners, forget Aboriginal
practices and culture and most importantly, learn to serve white Australia. Ironically,
such a racist and inhuman policy was considered by the government to be munificent
and apparently enacted for the benefit of such half-castes. Thus ‘history’ reveals that
there were thousands, if not innumerable, of such ‘forced displacements’ perpetrated
under the patronage of Western Australia’s Aboriginals Act of 1905. (Green and
Tilbrook 192-201) It should be noted that Western Australia, like most other states, had,
between 1869 and 1911, brought about quite a number of varied laws to form a Board
for the Protection of Aboriginals. The chief aim of such a board was to regulate and
control every facet of Aboriginal life, with each state appointing a “Chief Protector” and a
number of other “Protectors” to supervise and manage. The situation was such, and the
powers of the so called Protectors were so sweeping, that they had the authority to
decide the dwelling place of Aboriginals under them, make their own rules to determine
and govern Aboriginal conduct, be in total control of their assets and belongings; decide
who Aboriginals could or couldn’t marry and also, who among the Aboriginals had the
right to work, and if so, in which place. Additionally, the Chief Protector was nominated
the legal guardian of all the Aboriginal children which vested him with the power to
determine which children would be ‘stolen’ from their parents and their destination
camp. They also were able to authorize their adoption. (Mcgregor 283-286)

A.O. Neville, whom the Aboriginals also referred to as 'Mr. Devil,’ ruled Western
Australia for a long determining twenty five years and is today regarded, by many, to be
the Australian Hitler, who represented the heartlessness and callousness of White
Australia’s forced and unnatural incorporation procedures. (Ronald and Berndt 502-524)
Notably, Neville justified his policies in *Australia’s Coloured Minority* and till his last
breath, remained a rigid advocate of forced assimilation, believing it to be the god
bestowed duty and responsibility of all whites to “save the natives from themselves”. His
contention and validation for the elimination of “mixed blood” children rested on the Euro
centric conviction that the native people of the colonized countries were “dying races”
and that Aboriginality should be “bred out” through forced assimilation into the racially
superior white community. (Dean and Hindess 177-186) Also the predominant white
opinion regarding the education of Aboriginals made him write: “It would almost seem
as though we were willing to accept Hitler’s advice where he says in 'Mein Kampf,' that
it would be an offence against God and man to educate the native for any of the higher
places in civilized life.” (Neville 152) Regarding assimilation, it was the general belief
that it would enable “identity reorientation,” resulting from their speaking only English,
having no or little contact with “full bloods” (including members of their own family) and
Aboriginal mores, and schooling in European beliefs and customs such as Christianity,
and in domestic and labouring duties. Figures indicate that between 1940 and 1969
anywhere around an estimated 5600 children were detached in New South Wales area
alone, while in Queensland it is an estimated 30% or 40% of all Aboriginal children. And ironically, for such free education and being given the chance to become “just like white people”, the Aboriginals were expected to be indebted and subservient to white Australia. In the most notorious cases, the Aboriginal children were transported to the infamous Moore River Native Settlement for schooling to become “domestics.” (80-95) While Moore River was depicted by the government authorities as a “model” settlement, at least one staff member did not agree, stating “there should be a sign over the entrance: ‘Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here’”, an echo of the signboard in front of Dante’s Hell in Divine Comedy. The settlement was little more than a prison camp. It had bars over windows, locked doors and reprimand for noncompliance and escape attempts. The food served was awful, often consisting of bread, fat and black tea, infrequently supplemented by porridge and soup. There was no fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs or milk in the diet. (Dean and Hindess 80-95) While most staff at Moore River were not essentially cruel (although some were), they were apathetic to the troubles of the children. As Susan Maushart points out in her 1993 book on Moore River “most of the evil committed at Moore River was committed in the name of . .. bureaucratic expedience”. (Maushart n.pg) Children and single women were locked in dormitories for 12 hours a day, having to hang about in silence with nothing to do or read, as this saved the White administrators labour and money. Contrasted to the boys, girls suffered the worst as they were given more responsibilities and duties, while there were greater limitations on their movement and fewer gratifications. Consequently, girls ran away more often than boys did. Corrective regulation took the form of floggings and solitary detention in the “boob” – a structure the size of an outside toilet with just enough room
to sit down. It was a virtual oven during summer being made of galvanized iron. Captured runaways, in particular, were subject to imprisonment in the “boob”, often having their heads shaved and receiving only bread and water during the three or four days they were imprisoned. (Maushart n.pg)

In 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Conference, Neville presented his belief that it would take only a hundred years to make the pure black extinct, but contrary to expectations, the half-caste problem was escalating every year. The new design was to keep the pure blacks isolated insulated in reserved and absorb all half-castes into the white population. He believed that it was for the benefit of all that pure bloods be made extinct as then, problems of race would be eliminated. Also,

since there was no “racial” difference, there could be no opposition to miscegenation between Whites and Aboriginal people. . . . “Half-castes” could simply and rapidly be bred out of existence by marriage into the White population, a process made easier by the fact that there was a rough parallel between being a “half-caste” and already being partly assimilated into Anglo-Australian culture. (Dean and Hindess 80-95)

In the eyes of the Chief Protector, the Aboriginals were not racially distinct, and hence Neville thought he was maximizing the well being of the whole nation by an agenda of eugenics that most successfully absorbed the disadvantaged sector into the advantaged. “Half castes” would benefit from biological (colour) and cultural assimilation, and their children even more so. The “full bloods” on the reserves would simply die out – as eventually they must have done – but at least free of exploitation by
rapacious Whites. To solve the Aboriginal problem, he wanted to use the dual methods of child removal and marriage control among whites:

I once had rather an amusing experience with the mother of a neglected child. ... I had found a quadroon baby in a native camp, neglected and abandoned by its mother, and had the infant removed and placed in a home for white children where it grew up to become a well-mannered, educated girl. The mother, who had visited the child occasionally against the wishes of the management of the institution, managed to abduct the girl now eighteen years of age, with the object of marrying her to a native lad she herself had selected. Naturally, after all the years of effort spent in winning this three-parts while away from native life, I had to take a hand and restore the girl to the institution. The mother repeated the offence. ... We had many talks about the matter, she and I, and after the last episode she turned to me and said, "Well you took her from me twice, and I took her from you as often, so I reckon it’s square and that’s all right, you can keep her now." (Neville 171)

The Chief Protector in the Northern Territory, Dr Cecil Cook had also similar viewpoints about absorbing Aboriginal people and breeding out colour. He wanted to marry off the half-caste children, who had been removed to government homes, to Whites so that by either the fifth or the sixth generations, all native characteristics of the Aboriginals would be erased. According to him, the problem of the half-castes will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of their progeny in the Whites. And as already discussed, after the World
War II, the course of action changed from biological absorption to cultural absorption - assimilation. But the aim ultimately remained the same.

The stature of A.O. Neville towered over all others in the government and it is very interesting to note that the figure of Neville is "omnipresent" in a majority of contemporary Aboriginal writing attempting a reimagining of the nation and renegotiation of the past, proving one's need "to [aim to] understand how past constructions and understandings of difference impinge on the politics of the present." (Schaffer 19) What is interesting is to note the diverse ways in which the character of Neville started being represented in Aboriginal writings, beginning as early as the 1970s with Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972), Jack Davis' plays *Kullark* (1982) and *No Sugar* (1986), Pat Jacobs' biography *Mister Neville* (1990), Alice Nannup's autobiography with Lauren Marsh and Stephen Kinnane *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), Pamela Rajkowsk'i's biographical work *Linden Girl: A Story of Outlawed Lives* (1995), Doris Pilkington's biographical *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996), Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), Philip McLaren's *Sweet Water... Stolen Land* (2001), poetry by Geoff Page (2002), and the autobiographical / biographical *Shadow Lines* by Stephen Kinnane (2003). Also, the manner in which Neville is constructed, through focus in archival material and even Neville's own writing, places importance on the role and relationship between history and fiction, for "[t]o write history—or historical fiction—is equally to narrate, to reconstruct by means of selection and interpretation. History (like realist fiction) is made by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves." (Hutcheon 231-32) And hence the presentation of any historical figure necessitates commitment to truth and history:
In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth. ... Only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that “otherness” which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity.” (H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 96)

Another aspect of the repeated presentation of Neville in such works is that in a way, he can be “taken as a synecdochic representation of Australia’s bureaucratic past in relation to the treatment and attempted control of the Indigenous population” (Dorgelo n.pg) leading on to Bhabha’s belief that it is ultimately “the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light.” (H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 14-15) Thus, in such writings, “the figure of Neville is both revelation and reinscription.... as *unheimlich* revelation—a bureaucratic, governmental figure from the past who continually returns to disrupt the present, articulating notions of state control, eugenics, and children stolen by a paternalist bureaucracy—bringing to light images that some that advocate the imagining of Australia as a just, fair, nation with a past that requires no apologies might prefer to remain hidden.” (Dorgelo n.pg) The figure of Neville is one who spans both the personal and the public and acts uncannily on both the nation and the individual and his impact on both the political sphere and one’s personal history is such that “[t]he unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence.” (H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 195)
The positioning of both Kim Scott the individual and Kim Scott the writer is problematic because of his ‘mixed heritance’ – of straddling two worlds, the white and the black. Being born in Western Australian city of Perth in the year 1957, his is a curios amalgamation of both Aboriginal and colonial, Noongar and English elements. The eldest of four siblings, he was born of a white mother and an Aboriginal father, a member of the Wirlomin clan, which was a part of the Noongar community of Western Australian. The name of his extended Noongar family is ‘Roberts’ – a name thrust upon one of his ancestors by a policeman named Roberts, who titled the former “Robert’s Boy” which according to Scott, was not a pleasing way to be given a British identity. In the 1960s, he moved with his family to southern coastal town of Albany and later, while studying in a school in the inland town of Narrogin, did he have his first brush with racism and its impact on his community. Thus, being positioned by birth, between two disparate worlds, Scott encountered cultural dislocation at a very young age and was aware of a crisis – he could not find a place for himself in either of the two cultures. In the very first page of his second novel Benang Scott is described as:

a descendant of people who have always lived along the south-east coast of Western Australia and is glad to be living in times when it is possible to explore the significance of the fact and can be one among those who call themselves Noongar. (K. Scott, Benang 1)

As Scott’s second novel Benang reveals, all his problems of identity and dislocation and inheritance stem from the policies and ‘scientific’ efforts of his grandfather towards producing or breeding a white man in the family:
It was Ern’s ambition to have the first White man in the family line. And he was almost quickly successful, because Topsy gave birth on 30 January 1936 to a child, Ellen. Unfortunately, from Ern’s point of view, Ellen – though legally White, was not a male. Consequently, Ern, - a stickler for detail, and a very rigorous man – felt somewhat cheated. And to Ern’s mind, my father, born a couple of years later, would never have the unequivocal legal status of a White man, even if Ern could control how he was raised, who he associated with, what he thought and what might become . . . ” (K. Scott, Benang 131)

Growing up in Perth in a white Australian community with a white mother and an Aboriginal father, Scott was taught to be proud to his lineage and respect his Aboriginal heritage – a fact which confused him totally – in the face of white prejudice and derision against his community. Being taught to be proud conflicted with the loss of pride encountered in the white community and raised questions about his identity, which was further complicated by his own light-coloured skin – he was a light-skinned Aboriginal who was mixture of indigenous and colonial heritages of the country. Perhaps it was because of these experiences while growing up that he saw his Aboriginality in ambiguous terms: “My own sense of Aboriginality was a strange mix of pride, shame and isolation. A private thing. A thing at the heart of me, albeit a thing I could not put into words.” (K. Scott, ‘Disputed Territory,’ Those Who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal 164)

In an Alfred Deakin Lecture delivered in Melbourne in 2001, Scott traces problems faced by him surrounding his mixed inheritance:
True Country: "...Kim Scott... of Aboriginal and British ancestry..."

Benang: "...Kim Scott... one among those who call themselves Noongar...Noongars being the indigenous people of south-west Western Australia."

There's a shift in a sense of self. It indicates a journey, I think. Or is it the shiftiness of a charlatan? Are you worried that I am going to have an identity crisis in front of you, to bleed in public as Australia seems to expect of its Aboriginal people. In the interests of Reconciliation, you understand. Of sharing the history... .

But please notice the dependency implied in my biographical note: 'One among those who call themselves Noongar.'

It's true that I have knocked on the doors of people who don't know me, and the doors have not been opened. 'Wadjila' (a white person), 'Wadjila,' the voices on the other side of the door say. And you can't trust wadjilas. The experience, both sides of that door, tell me something about the damage that has been done.

An elder, Aunty Hazel Brown said to me 'You let people know you're Noongar. Be proud of yourself. We're proud of you.'

I've been in shops where people keep their eyes on us. Had police pull up our car. I've heard what people say, I know most of the lines; that people claim an Aboriginal identity to get on the gravy train leading to all the
supposedly massive financial benefits of being Aboriginal. It's a fashion.

And just how much Aboriginal have you got in you anyway?

Some people sneer at black armband history. Yet here I am wearing my little black heart on my sleeve... It makes me feel very vulnerable.

(K. Scott, *Australia's Continuing Neurosis: Identity, Race and History* n.pg)

Scott spent some of his early earlier years in a variety of job positions, but it was only after a stint in remote school in an Aboriginal community in north of Western Australia that he felt the voice within him rise and egg him on to research his own family history. While his experiences in Karnama provided him the material for his first novel *True Country*, his research of whatever he could lay his hand on, resulted in his magnum opus, *Benang* which traced his own and family's history and helped him deal with his problems of self-identity. In his third book *Kayang and Me*, he took recourse of his aunt Hazel Brown to not only trace his family history, but also re-negotiate Aboriginal identity in the face of white Australia's oppressive assimilationist policies. Thus being a teacher by profession, he decided to express very personal issues like his Aboriginal identity and search for family history through literature – a thing fermented by his time spent in the Aboriginal community in Karnama, where he slowly started negotiating and renegotiating his identity. By even such a decision, to pen his thoughts and experiences, was fraught with vacillation and indecision for he was very unsure of what signal it might send and how it would be interpreted by his fellow Aboriginals. He dad many questions and doubts:
Was my writing revealing my Aboriginality, or revealing the absence of it? Who was I writing for? What purposes could my writing serve? This is a recurring problem – particularly now that I have been published – and partly arises from my own insecurity, but also – I believe – from restrictive and limiting definitions of what it is to be Aboriginal, and what is allowed of an Aboriginal writer. (K. Scott, ‘Disputed Territory,’ Those Who Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal 168)

Thus, he is not very sure of a lot of things, including the place he would be assigned in Aboriginal literature and his acceptability. Though there was initial hesitation, it also dawned upon him that his act of giving voice to Aboriginal issues would also make him the voice of his clan, community and black Australia. But at the same time, Scott, who writes ‘from the heart’ is wary of ways in which Aboriginal writings are politicized for he says that he is “not very comfortable with this [politicisation] because I don’t like the idea of speaking for anyone else.” (K. Scott, Kim Scott in Conversation with Elizabeth Guy 9-14) Such a statement presents his attitude for he is a person who uses the public domain to deal with his personal issues and problems and though it is understandable that in all his works, he speaks for himself, inextricably he also focuses on and renegotiates experiences of all Aboriginal people.

*Benang*, Scott’s second novel is the result of his problems of identity generated from his mixed inheritance and desire to reveal the truth. Being culturally dislocated and being unable to find a place for himself in either of the two cultures, he set about unraveling his past and blending fact and fiction, history and emotion, revealed his heart to the world. Rummaging archives and reports and government files, he set about to
inform the world of the ‘lie’ and the shocking history of white treatment of Aboriginal in Western Australia and more importantly, in his own Noongar community. The book’s subtitle is *From the Heart* and rarely does Scott digress, revealing through a merger of fact and fiction, the nightmarish side of relations between white and black Australia. The very first page of the novel describes Scott to be “a descendant of people who have always lived along the south-east coast of Western Australia and is glad to be living in times when it is possible to explore the significance of the fact and can be one among those who call themselves Nyoongar” (K. Scott, *Benang* 1) – underlying at the very outset, the novelist’s intentions.

Scott’s technique is simple but elaborate as he set about negotiating his own and community’s past in the face of legal dispossession, oppressive governance, white prejudice, apathy and paternalism. Rummaging extensive archival material, in the form of letters, Inquiry evidences and Protector’s reports, and even biographical writings, he sets about resurrecting the past, at the same time relying also on oral recollections and his own imagination. And the substance he gathers is ingeniously woven into a chronicle of estrangement and isolation, brutality and cruelty, indifference and apathy, loss and failure, unscrupulousness and deceit, ignorance and unawareness, death and renewal. He lends voice to his close relatives Jack Chatalong, Sandy Two Mason, Will and Aunty Kathleen Coolman who narrate their stories, in concert with a number of other ‘aunts’, one of whom is his natural mother, and carriers. On other side of the divide, he re-negotiates and vilifies people like Ernest Solomon Scat, his grandfather; and Auber Neville, The Chief Protector of Aboriginals and a certain Constable Hall. The narrative moves with Harley, Scott’s persona, and his grandfather Ernest Solomon Scat
who was a Scottish immigrant and employee of the Auber Neville and who is the person solely responsible for his loss of identity and the past, as well personal frustrations and moral and sexual impasse. Thus as the novel opens, there is revealing of the cultural demise of Harley and his grandfather and, recounting of the court case where he is absolved of murdering his father Tommy Scat. Using his grandfather’s records as his beacon, he understands the motivations behind his grandfather engaging in Eugenics or racial improvements and his desire to have the first white man in the family. The delusion of the grandfather is created by Neville’s treatment of his family, for even though they are of mixed descent, they are totally free of any oppressive pressures of the Protector. The inconsistency lies in the fact that all those who are designated with governing protection policies – the protectors, the police and the ‘mixed-descent’ relatives – are all deceived into believing that Harley’s family members are not Aboriginal but in the same vein, Harley is resolute to expose the truth of his own identity. Hence, apart from his authorial impositions, wherein he expresses his detestation and derision for Ern Scat, he allows his three uncles to be the spokespersons in the narrative.

The entire novel is based on the accounts of Harley’s attempts at tracing his past. He goes through a lot of archival material and public records, and even his grandfather’s notebooks to trace what happened in the years before he was born. And in revealing the past and making correct the present, he sees himself as a torchbearer, path revealer for his family:

I looked to my children, and – oh, this was sudden, not at all a gradual or patient uplift – I was the one poised, balanced, hovering on shifting
currents and — looking down upon my family approaching from across the vast distances my vision could cover — I was the one to show them where and who we are. (K. Scott, Benang 456)

During his efforts, he had to face a lot of public scrutiny, but he used his special ability to hover above others like a bird, to good effect. It helped have a bird’s eye view of everything and put right all the wrongs:

Sometimes Uncle Jack Chatalong brought guests to our campfire as we moved along the coast in those years after I had first attempted reading and rewriting, and then burnt my grandfather’s work. The survivors. Only a few, because not only was there the passing awkwardness of my fair skin, the searching for family names, but there was also the fact that I usually hovered in the air just above everyone’s head. (K. Scott, Benang 249)

He accepts that the process had not been very easy for "the birth of even an unsuccessfully first-white-man-born-in-the-family-line has required a lot of death, a lot of space, a lot of emptiness." (K. Scott, Benang 496) And in time, all the sacrifices, all the sufferings bore fruit. He realized who he was — “Uncle jack said to me, ‘To start with, what you are is a Nyoongar’.” (K. Scott, Benang 496) That is what he understood when he started out. But the world would also have to understand that and hence his efforts. He is sure that “Sandy One was no White man. Just as I am no White man, despite the look of me.” (K. Scott, Benang 496) The point which he wants to drive home into all onlookers is that looks and skin colour does not matter. What matters is what the heart says. And the heart says that he was not a White man but a Noongar. He accepts that he caused some embarrassment and may have made people uncomfortable, that “I am
something of curiosity – even for my own people.” (K. Scott, Benang 497) But he does not care. What he cares for is the way people look at him and understand him. That has to change and towards that he says “I have written this story wanting to embrace all of you, and it is the best I can do in this language we share. Of course, there is an older tongue which also tells it.” (K. Scott, Benang 493) He wants others to understand that it not for himself only that he is doing this, it is for the general good of all, and the all must understand that and appreciate his efforts and change themselves to their new identity. He wants all to understand that whatever he is saying is coming straight from the heart. The strength to continue, be themselves comes “from the heart of all of us.” (K. Scott, Benang 497) Any reversal is bound to cause a lot of heartburn and even burns of the fire kind and he feels it all in himself: “There is smoke and ash in my skin, and in my heart too.” (K. Scott, Benang 497) But whatever has to be sacrificed has to be, and in the end he triumphantly extorts both his identity and their presence: “We are still here, Benang.” (K. Scott, Benang 497)

The narrative is stark and vivid and Scott unabashedly presents the policies and efforts of Harley’s grandfather Ernest Scat aimed at breeding the first White man in his family:

It was Ern’s ambition to have the first White man in the family line. And he was almost quickly successful, because Topsy gave birth on 30 January 1936 to a child, Ellen. Unfortunately, from Ern’s point of view, Ellen – though legally White, was not a male. Consequently, Ern, - a stickler for detail, and a very rigorous man – felt somewhat cheated. And to Ern’s mind, my father, born a couple of years later, would never have the
unequivocal legal status of a White man, even if Ern could control how he was raised, who he associated with, what he thought and what might become . . . (K. Scott, Benang 131)

He had married, against the law, a Nyoongar woman to give fruition to his aims and aspirations:

My grandfather first married a Nyoongar woman, despite the law. Why was it Kathleen? Because she was there. Because he was advantaged. Because of greed. Because it was the challenge of a long term plan, spanning the generations. Because of the power it would give him over her. (K. Scott, Benang 100)

Such a mercenary attitude dwelt in him; his main desire was power, total control and triumph at his success. To this effect, he even trained Topsy, whom he took as his wife, and his son Tom, on the essence of being a White:

He took her on a long drive, and parked where they could look over . . . Ern pointed to various things below them, informing and educating Topsy about such things as native reserves, settlements and missions. (K. Scott, Benang 137)

And when he got a child from her, he was exultant, for he felt that he was successful. His time under the sun had come, for he had remembered all the insults he had faced and felt that they would disappear with his success:

Sandy One had these moments when he wanted to sing, but he had no song left, just plans, and faith.
He thought of the clubs that didn’t want him, and would not take his son. The Australian Natives Association, the oddfellows . . . Against all that and theirs, he had his own, admittedly frail, exultation of which he wanted to bray and boast. (K. Scott, *Benang* 253)

But he was wrong, he miscalculated somewhere, for when the authorities came inspecting they found his son ‘black’ and to him “It was awkward, this reluctance to acknowledge that the boy was a black, like any other black.” (K. Scott, *Benang* 198)

Even then, his unsuccessful attempt did not deter him, and hence he decided to try again and went for the neck of Harley:

> And then Granddad came to get me, and I went to boarding school, and in the holidays to live with him in the boarding house he owned. My grandfather was perfecting a process. He must’ve suspected that he failed with my father, and that this was a last chance to get it right. (K. Scott, *Benang* 369)

Unfortunately, his aiming to grab the last chance available with both hands, resulted in failure too, for now he encountered resistance from within. His own grandson Harley resisted all his attempts as he felt that there was no difference – a thing he clarified with the help of a family photograph:

> There’s a photo of us. Mother, father, my brothers and sisters – a bunch of us – and me indistinguishable from them, save if you care to look for such things, if you are of self, then perhaps I am an nth darker, there may be something rounder in my features. But we are the same people, surely. How could you differentiate us at such an age? (K. Scott, *Benang* 409)
Lines revelatory of the heart of Harley – he considers himself not at all different from the rest of his family, which makes him desire to set the record straight and nullify the plans of Ern from a sense of injustice:

You can imagine; castrated, absorbed buggered-up, striving to be more than a full stop, to sabotage my grandfather’s social experiment, to repopulate his family history. (K. Scott, Benang 451)

And he quotes his Uncle Jack to highlight the improbability of the situation and the anomaly involved: “Well as Uncle Jack put it, ‘White seed in black ground, black seed in white ground.’” (K. Scott, Benang 451) Thus, he agrees with Jack’s views that the very theory is wrong and the twain cannot meet. And once he is successful and his grandfather is not, he is a free spirit. His status in his own eyes is that of an elevated spirit. It won’t be wrong to even say that he deemed himself a Messiah, the liberator of his family:

I looked to my children, and – oh, this was sudden, not at all a gradual or patient uplift – I was the one poised, balanced, hovering on shifting currents and – looking down upon my family approaching across the vast distances my vision could cover – I was the one to show them where and who we are. (K. Scott, Benang 456)

In Benang, Scott has a simple message to give while negotiating the past, something which runs through the length and width of the novel – that day in and day out, always, white Australia oppresses and subverts black Australia. The torture is unrelenting, in the heaping of abuses and slurs, in the single minded persecution of the Aboriginals. They are always creating and formulating new rules and regulations to
keep the Aboriginals out of the mainstream and any attempt to be a part of them, is viciously stubbed at the butt with laws, sometimes totally unreasonable. Any attempt to progress is similarly dealt with.

So what do the Whites want? They want servants. And to that effect, they set up the Department for the Aboriginals. And while a Department dedicated to a certain weaker section of society would naturally try to uplift and make better the lives of those who fall under its auspices, the Aboriginals Department of the Australian government does the entire opposite. It has its own views on how to uplift – by separating young children (read infants) from their mothers and rearing them in missions (read prison camps) where the accent is on British mores and manners. It's rules makes it keep a hawk like eye on the movement of the Aboriginals and where they settle, so much so that if they come too close to White settlement, they are driven out like flocks of sheep. Everywhere they are avoided like the plague. (Sen 3-7) And if the Aboriginals Department was not enough, the appointment of a Mr. A.O. Neville to the post of Chief Protector of Aboriginals further compounded and made life miserable for the Aboriginals. Neville's policies as mentioned earlier are unique and seem hell bent upon severing any Aboriginal existence from the very roots.

Scott narrates how his grandfather caught on the Travelling Inspector of Aboriginals, a Mr. James Segal. His opinions on Aboriginals and the role of Settlements can be used a foreword to what Whites think about the natives:

*The Settlements give the natives a chance. They're a Child Race. It's our duty to train them for Useful Work, and keep them from harm, from causing harm. They can be an embarrassment. An ideal camp, he*
continued, is near enough to town to allow the natives to call for rations when they are indigent, to come under the surveillance by police and other local protectors, and to provide a ready labour force when necessary. However it must always be far enough from White inhabitations to avoid complaints and to discourage unwelcome visits by White men. (K. Scott, *Benang* 47)

His words sum it all. The Settlement was the perfect place for Aboriginals according to him. Its utilities would be manifold, like keeping them at arm’s length but still within reach when needed as bonded labour, keeping them out like garbage but within limits so that the local guardians like protectors and police are able to keep track. However, most hurting is the reason why they are there. The White mentality, from the very beginning, is that they are superior and being so, it is their God bestowed duty to help the Aboriginals by giving them props. What is appalling is that they consider the natives to be a Child’s Race, synonymous to a tabula rasa. And just like a newborn baby is reared and cultivated by its guardians, so want the Whites. They want to train them to be useful. But what type of usefulness would it be? Obviously useful enough to serve as servants of the White populace. And it is embarrassing to think that the Aboriginals might give them embarrassment, for historically and ethnically, the Aboriginals stretch far further than their colonial guardians and are far more ‘modern’, in the Western concept of the term. This opinion is echoed throughout the book. Elsewhere Sergeant Hall, the policeman whenever in self-doubt reminds himself that “He was a policeman. He was the Local Protector. . . . these people needed his help.” (K. Scott, *Benang* 87)
The constable is always pregnant with ideas as to how to uplift, and his brow is upbeat with possible outcomes:

Once again the constable found himself thinking it showed what the blacks could be. Might be able to do. It depends, he’d wait and see. Careful breeding might . . . but they could still regress. These women, the children. Perhaps it was true, he thought, that British blood was enough — even from men such as these. (K. Scott, *Benang* 212)

What is unmistakable is his great hope that there was light in the end of the tunnel and his solid trust on the wonderful effects of British blood, even of the coarsest variety. Thus to uplift, to elevate, to humanize, to make worthy, to create the perfect slave, the Whites passed a lot of rules and regulations and Acts in Parliament. The most oppressive and dehumanizing of all of them was obviously the Aboriginals Act of 1905. As Uncle Will explained to Harley, “It made such a difference . . . that legislation.” (K. Scott, *Benang* 217). As he clarified, it was ruthless and brutal. “You could be moved anywhere, told who to marry, where to live, had to get a permit to work, not allowed to drink or vote.” (K. Scott, *Benang* 218) And it was successful in its main purpose — it separated, a blatant violation of Human Rights. As Scott somewhere hints, its aim was not to uplift but to suppress. Or else how can one justify curbing the right of whom to marry or even where to live. And a further amendment of the Act was made in 1936 to make it even more all encompassing. Following Scott’s quote from Haebich one understands that:

The central clause in the 1936 Act was the definition of persons to be deemed ‘natives’ within the meaning of the Act. It embraced a wide range
of Aboriginals of part descent in the south who had been exempt from the 1905 Act. Briefly, it included all persons of the full and part decent, regardless of their lifestyle, with the following exceptions: all ‘quadroons’ over the age of twenty-one unless classified as ‘native’ by special magisterial order . . and persons of less than “quadroon” descent, born before 31 January 1936. They were prohibited by law from associating with ‘natives’ regardless of the nature of their relationship. (Haebich 349)

Besides the main Aboriginal Act, a lot of other written and unwritten rules floated about for the Aboriginals, the most horrific and barbaric being one in which women were used as white blood/child carriers with egotistical intention of expanding the White community. Thus, A.O. Neville writes:

Our policy is to send them out into the White community, and if the girl comes back pregnant our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus these children grow up as Whites, knowing nothing of their environment. At the expiration of the period of two years the mother goes back into the service. So that it really doesn’t matter if she has half a dozen children. (K. Scott, Benang 159)

No wonder such methods are considered racist and inhuman, for the women were just treated as prostitutes, with the intention of getting them pregnant and give birth to a child carrying a ‘white gene’.

Laws were also at place to restrict Aboriginal practices of camping and gathering/hunting. There were reserves for blacks and even those teamsters who were
still employed, had their restrictions as to where they could camp. Similarly, laws restricted all means of earning livelihood. Trade in possum skin was a rewarding profession and the natives had been involved in that for a long time. But such freedom was snatched away from them by making it mandatory to have a license, which usually got assigned in the names of the whites, and ultimately, the original traders were forced out of the trade. There are even laws to stop natives from drinking in the bars, the basis being that the spirits would bring out the devil in the black devils. An event has been presented from the life of Harry Cuddles, who had an exemption to give the reader an idea of both the bar ban and the common man's perception of the blacks:

Harry scanned the bar. Faces turned to him, then away. No words.

Mr. Starr sat around the elbow of the bar, facing the door. His face registered a little surprise, and then he nodded – once, sharply – at Harry Cuddles.

The barman would not serve Harry.

"It's the law."

"I got an exemption." Dog tag he thought.

Dawg.

There was a pause.

"Oh," a man said from within his glass.

"Listen mate, you might have some bit of paper but we know what you are. You don't belong here. Not with us." (K. Scott, Benang 316)
The unknown man’s words say it all. And all rules of the government are shams. First they frame laws stopping them from drinking, then they give exemptions but it has no value at all in the eyes of the common man on the street – his views have been formed long time back and they would not change based on a piece of paper.

But while one goes to the bar willfully and to enjoy, one usually goes to a hospital when forced and out of need. And just like the bar, even the hospital is out of reach of the Aboriginals. In fact laws are in place preventing Aboriginals from entering and getting treatment in hospitals and even Ern had to face it when he took Topsy for treatment:

‘No. I can’t allow her in here. It’s against the law.’

The doctor’s surgery was in the hotel. No one knew Ern, he was just this White bloke with a gin, a darkly, a boong coon native with him and they weren’t allowed in the pubs. Shouldn’t even be with a White man like this, at all, anyway, not here.

‘There’s the hospital. There’s a section for natives. You’ll have to go to the Native Welfare.’

Ernest argued. A White woman, the same as. My wife. My.

‘We’ll let the doctor know. Leave your address, yes I know the house.’ The woman was polite, cool. Ice, again, ice in the blood which had not thawed.

(K. Scott, Benang 373)

Thus, the hatred was still apparent in the mind of the White nurse. Even the doctor, who called later, ‘despite his training, wrinkled at the smell’ (K. Scott, Benang 373) revealing the depth into which the hatred had percolated.
The law even did not allow Aboriginals to enter a Court of law during a trial. Thus when Uncle Harry was tried in a court of law for improper behaviour, his family could not attend the proceedings. Laws were also in place, which prohibited the natives from fishing in the seas, as that would be damaging to the interest of the white fishermen. The ranger maintained a continuous vigil, thereby barring Aboriginals from one of their primal practices. Also, the consequences in getting caught seem very harsh, as evident during an incident in which Harley and his father were at their nifty best, after almost being caught while committing the act.

Similarly, the Aboriginals need licenses to carry and possess firearms, narrated in the incident where Constable Hall is ruthless in disallowing Sandy Two from entering a rifle match. All Hall said was that: “you need a license – and if you already got one, I'll revoke it.” (K. Scott, Benang 255)

In fact the whites were always ready to find fault in every act of the Aboriginals, for an employer, even a father, needed a permit to employ dark skinned people. And people like Sandy One needed to be careful as to whom they lived with and whom they employed. As apparent, all this is done to keep the non-Whites at arms length. Sandy One’s peculiar dilemma is presented in his conversation with Sergeant Hall, the writer of Occurrence Books:

‘You got a permit to employ these men?

Asked Hall of the teamster . . . . These two, Sandy Mason and Harry Cuddles, you got as permit for them?

Sandy Two called across to the policeman.
‘I’m helping my father. You know that. I just come over to lend this fellas a hand, all this sand.’

The policeman turned his back on Sandy Two.

‘Don’t be bloody ridiculous,’ said Sandy One. ‘Don’t you know your own laws?’

‘The law’s changed,’ said the constable.

‘Whoever employs him needs a permit.’ He continued, ‘No drinking’.

‘He’s not of age.’

‘Well, even when he is. If he looks under sixteen, then he’s an Aboriginal. He looks it to me. You want to keep him away from the camp if he’s not, Sandy. He’s got a woman there, I hear, better be careful – associating with them, you know. Might pick up something. Course, if he’s a White then it’s an offence to cohabit.’

‘Trouble for being there, trouble for not being there! Well, me and Fanny, we are married. Got the paper to prove it. And the boy’s birth certificate too, so that’ll prove his age.’

‘I’m not talking about your wife. I’m talking about that boy of yours, he’s caused me trouble, you both know it. I can put him on a reserve, I can send him away. If you don’t, and I am keeping an eye on those younger ones of your too.’

‘We’ve all got rights. They have all been brought up as good as anyone. They’re not savages, they are my kids. They’re people.’
'Yeah, well, you don’t want them associating with darkies then, and you want to tell your missus that too. Tell her to keep her visitors.' (K. Scott, *Benang* 267)

Thus as the above interlude reveals, the constable keeps a steady watch on the lives of these people. He also has great control over what they do and can even send someone to reserves, if he thinks so. And why all the limitations, all the restrictions imposed on this family? Simply because the constable wants that they don’t mingle with the dark skinned. Thus through the novel, Scott highlights very effectively, using suitable incidents the fact that there are rules affecting almost every aspect of the Aboriginals lives and they are not rules which uplift, but rules which suppress. In fact every law, prohibits them from doing a certain activity – something ignominious and demeaning.

One of the greatest acts of oppression concerning the Aboriginals was in the setting up of camps to house them. It was government policy that there be separate camps for the Aboriginals, to be set up far away from White settlement and the children be transported to the missions. (Macintyre 36-53) The treatment meted out is terrible, for as Scott’s narration suggests, they were just herded off like sheep and cattle:

In the morning you saw a series of unconnected carriages which had been released of their human cargo. Not just your family’s. You were rounded up by a few fellas in half uniforms; a jacket, a whip, a spear upped with glass, and waddies.

‘This way,’ they indicated. ‘This way.’ You were driven to the settlement like animals, really, but of course it was not for slaughtering. For training?
Yes, perhaps. Certainly it was for breeding, according to the strict principles of animal husbandry. (K. Scott, *Benang* 93)

The sarcasm, when Scott tongue in cheek says, not for slaughtering, is very much evident. So what is their aim – to have total control over the process of birth and death. And even about their children, Aboriginals did not have total right and freedom -- the parents did not have the right to move their children from one place to another. This was because “legally they are wards of the state and deserve equal opportunity.” (K. Scott, *Benang* 237)

But to come to the main point of discussion – it not without reason that Scott has termed white Australia to be a perennial oppressor, for Scott narrates vividly, that besides the laws and the rules and the forced movements of the Aboriginals, day in and day out, in very small things the Whites made their dislike apparent and maltreated the natives. And Scott has narrated all these incidents, true to his credo, intensely, the most heart rending and gruesome in this respect being the actions of the pastoralists, when they took up firearms:

They crept to the natives camp deep in the night, gently raised their weapons and fired an earth-shattering volley over the heads of the sleeping natives. The natives rose as one man, and as one demented man they screamed and fled through the bush with more frightful roars following them. Their bewildered pet dingoes yelped and ran in a wide circle – one of them was shot dead to show what these noisome weapons could do. Some of the terrified natives in the rear saw the incident and,
screaming again, they left their weapons and ran as facts and far as their slender legs could carry them.

After the shooting, and chuckling like naughty schoolboys, they wandered about the deserted camp and chose the best of the native weapons for their collections! The rest were put on the smoldering fires and left to burn. Thus all attempts at uprisings were frustrated in such a way as to leave no bitterness but just a quiet sense of mastery on the part of the White man, and a good lesson to the primitive mind. (K. Scott, *Benang* 185)

The tortures and oppressions had at its bottom, the mercenary attitude of Whites, revealed in the torture meted out to the servants or slaves and the enjoyment derived from it:

Through the doorway, Sandy saw what I only read about much later. He saw Mrs. Mustle, with one of her sisters-in-law, beckon one of her old and crippled slaves to the door. She had the old man tilt his head back, and she tipped the tea dregs from her fine china pot down his throat. The women leaned together on the close door, weak with laughter. (K. Scott, *Benang* 493)

Thus in *Benang*, Scott negotiates his personal and communal trials and tribulations in the face of society-wide government approved terror and apathy. His narration and recounting is vivid and candid, bringing to the forefront almost all and every act of cruelty perpetrated on his fellow people.

One of the central figures of the novel is undoubtedly A.O. Neville and "*Benang* is a multi-layered, self-reflexive work that explicitly engages with, and frequently rewrites
or reconstructs, the archival material surrounding Neville and his policies.” (Dorgelo 49)

For John Donnelly, the timing and content of *Benang* was perfect: “Scott’s story could not be more timely, in the aftermath of the Stolen Generations report and the national anxiety and political cynicism surrounding the proposed constitutional preamble acknowledging indigenous occupation of Australia” (Donelly 29-30)

Hutcheon’s ‘historiographic metafiction’ concept is very relevant in Scott’s *Benang* because not only is there an interaction between past history and historical expectation of readers, there is also continual play between fact and fiction. Thus, “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages.” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* n.pg) In the novel, Scott repeatedly refers or quotes from Neville’s *Australia’s Coloured Minority* thereby enabling the unraveling of the past to be critiqued and addressing duality of the settler society, according to Bhabha, in its being both the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, Scott’s aim is to subvert for:

*Benang* is an act of rewriting: an unsettling, destabilizing portrayal of Neville’s eugenicist project. Scott’s formulation of Neville and his administration, particularly through the use of blended fictional and non-fiction correspondence, can be seen as a subversive form of representation. *Benang*’s staging of Neville, his policies, and his bureaucratic artifacts is subtly different to Neville’s self-representation, and as such it changes and undermines Neville’s established construction of himself. Scott cunningly appropriates and alters Neville’s works,
reanimating in order to deconstruct. It is the uncanny resemblance to Neville's project and bureaucratic machinations that enables *Benang*'s destabilization of Neville, rewriting his benign “civilizing mission” as cruel. *Benang* emphatically disrupts, and discloses the ambivalence of, Neville’s colonial discourse and authority through its rewriting and appropriation, making the uncertainty and incoherence of his colonial project more apparent. (Dorgelo 51)

Lisa Slater acknowledges a similar intention on the part of Scott, finding Neville to be a very significant character:

“[b]y inserting A.O. Neville into his novel, Scott is not only introducing readers to a key historical figure in the abuse of Nyoongar people, he is also mimicking Neville’s colonial discursive strategy of catching and containing Indigenous people” (Slater 51-68)

During an interview for Radio National in 2001 with Jill Kitson, Scott had spelled the reason behind the introduction of Neville and the sarcasm he generates:

[t]he archives are the written language of our shared history. In W.A. the voice of one A.O. Neville dominates ... he wrote a book called *Australia’s Coloured Minority: Their Place in Our Community* [sic]. The title is instructive, isn’t it? Their place, our community. (K. Scott, Stolen, Removed—or Robbed n.pg)

As already mentioned Scat undertakes his own breeding project, inspired by Neville and hence the two characters can be seen to intertwined, going to such an extent that each stands for the other: “‘It depends on the genes, you see,’ said ... Auber. At another time
it might even have been Ern, ‘Theirs is recessive’” (K. Scott, Benang 49) Thus Scott presents the two in such a manner that he mocks their claims at superiority, subverting the fact the English were not always masters of their own language and an Aboriginal could be better. Also, narrating the role of grandfather in his life, he writes: “Whatever the confusions of my genealogy, there seems little doubt that my grandfather intended to be my creator. It was he who, if not indeed forming the idea, applied it as Mr. Neville was unable to do” (K. Scott, Benang 34) And for Scat, Neville was very important for he was the main inspiration: “Ern found himself needing advice, reassurance, further security. He returned to the city, for a few short weeks, and did a little work for that good friend of the family, Auber Neville.” (K. Scott, Benang 120) He was almost like a catalyst figure in Scat’s life and as John Fielder notes, Neville’s conflation with Scat is a device used by Scott to rewrite the reality – his policies were not at all righteous, they were in every sense morally corrupt and degraded. Commenting on the representation of Neville, Dorgelo writes:

Slater claims Neville as a eugenicist first and foremost, constructing his work as “A.O. Neville’s eugenicist manifesto, Australia’s Coloured Minority” (“Most Local” 52). That Neville’s work functions as an “eugenicist manifesto” may be correct, though such a simple definition of the work closes down its other possibilities, and potentially (and somewhat ironically) gives the work more power, constructing it as a coherent, focused document. Scott, through Benang, lingers more on the absurdities and human frailty of Neville’s role, work and character, positioning
Australia’s Coloured Minority with its flaws and farce foremost and amplified for all to appreciate. (Dorgelo 55-56)

A potent method in which Scott undermines the authority of Neville is in the stripping of his preferred nomenclature and using his first name Auber. Such an act immediately removes the power and control in the figure and makes him human and susceptible, allowing Scott to re-negotiate, for he would not accept Neville in the latter’s conditions:

Ern was a shrewd man, see. Newly arrived, and he had already contacted his cousin Auber, found employment with him in construction and information storage, and become acquainted with—if not yet enthusiastic about—Auber’s expert opinions on the need for both social and biological absorption of the Native Race. (K. Scott, Benang 45)

Thus he becomes what he really is, the cousin of Scat and in no way the infamous A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aboriginals. (Dorgelo 57) Slater also speaks of the assimilation of Neville and his texts in the novel, for his own purposes, evident in his transferring photographs supporting eugenicist solution in Australia’s Coloured Minority to Scat: “[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power.” (Sontag 4) The use of Harley’s ability to elevate has also been wonderfully used to subvert Neville and his theories. Scott’s speaks of such a re-negotiation thus: “I wanted to take on Neville and defuse the potency of all the written stuff and that [emphasis on] uplift and elevation, I thought, I’ll just do that. I’ll take it literally. That helped me get out of the straightjacket of staying within his terms … it allows me just in
writing to get out of some of the limitations of Neville’s sort of language.” (K. Scott, *Ramona Koval Interviews Kim Scott, Co-Winner of Miles Franklin Award for Benang* 48-49)

Neville and Scat are also undermined with Scott’s “Scott’s continual conflation of Neville’s and Scat’s eugenic fervour with sexuality and desire” (Dorgelo 66) leaving them devoid of any esteem or poise whatsoever and confining them to sleaze and baseness:

Ern, if he considered it at all, would say his interest had been aroused by Auber Neville and the words of the Travelling Inspector. He would never admit to the way his thoughts curled back to the memory of his first night off the ship, and—stiff and obstinate—returned to his present loneliness.

(K. Scott, *Benang* 81)

The passage is highly revealing, for it makes one confused between physical desires and desire for eugenics and leaves them with no scientific basis whatsoever. To present the sleazy nature of the endeavour, Scott has time and again referred to Scat’s first night off the ship, to generate the imagery of rape: “Someone asked Ern, ‘Have you seen the camps?’ ‘No,’ Ern said, quickly, remembering the first night. The dirt on his bare knees, and how she turned her head away as her body took his thrusts” (K. Scott, *Benang* 52) Thus Dorgelo interprets such quotations in *Benang* to highlight Scat’s (and by association Neville’s) base motives for pursuing an interest in eugenics, and show his longing for power and possession as enacted through his rape of the unknown Indigenous woman. That Scat recalls this incident when thinking about eugenics
explicitly reinforces this link. Desire and lust intertwine with the pseudo-science of eugenics more overtly, with Scat's characterization strategically linked to that of Neville:

Although he took no notes, Ern was—discreetly—observing Topsy, and—doubtless—did so as dispassionately as the scientist of whom Mr. Neville wrote: with his trained mind and keen desire to exert his efforts in the field investigating native culture and in studying the life history of the species, supplies an aid to administration. Little Topsy, he noted, was no longer so little; breasts budding, hips altering the way she walked. (132)

Almost invariably, when science and desire are intermingled in Benang, Neville and Scat too are represented together, connected discursively to the point that when one is mentioned the other is invoked, and both are inextricably linked to their eugenicist projects.” (Dorgelo 66-67) Thus, repeating Neville, Scott tries to point out that he desire for the native woman was perhaps more than the desire for science and eugenics: ““His [Scat’s] interest in genetics. Perhaps it was this sort of detached interest; that of the scientist, with his trained mind and keen desire ...” (K. Scott, Benang 415) Even Scat's viewing of Topsy, whom he later marries is mingled with lust and desire: ““She looked exotic, her hair sometimes seemed almost golden, and she spoke and moved with a remarkable elegance given the limited tutoring he had given her. She seemed, my grandfather-as-scientist told himself, almost a new species” (K. Scott, Benang 135) Thus the moral is clear: "For Ernest, it [eugenics] was a rationalization of his desire" (K. Scott, Benang 34) When Scat moves for the throat of Harley, the personal nature of his scheme becomes that much more evident:
My mother ... was another of Ern’s domestics. Young, only a few years younger than Tommy. [Her name was] Ellen. Her voice was soft, and—who knows?—perhaps it was she Mr. Neville had in mind when he wrote; the young half-blood maiden is a pleasant, placid, complacent person as a rule, while the quadroon girl is often strikingly attractive with her ofttimes auburn hair, rosy freckled colouring, and good figure, or maybe blue eyes and fair hair. (K. Scott, Benang 401)

Thus besides being a sex abuser throughout the novel, Scat also targets his abuse at his grandson, enabling Scott to highlight their atrocities in the name of science: “My grandfather was observing me in such a way—scientific he would have said; lecherous, say I—that it was impossible for me to feel at ease” (K. Scott, Benang 25)

Then again, Scott uses the image latent in the use of the mirror of Scat by all members of the family, a mirror is not only a metaphor for assimilation but also contrarily, the very object which reverts back and highlights the sightlessness and myopic nature of racial breeding:

Topsy used Ern’s mirror, just as Kathleen had. It was patchy, and so their faces were incomplete. There were flecks and spots, and there were pieces of themselves missing ... There were increasing areas of blackness, more pieces missing and making her invisible.....Jack Chatalong and Kathleen Scat would face their gloomy and distorted reflections. They considered their noses, lips, skin, wondered at the lesser brain capacity—according to what they read—allowed by their skulls (K. Scott, Benang 140-163)
Thus, as Dorgelo points out, it “also highlights assimilation’s blindness: not its comprehensive surveillance but the surface missing from the mirror, preventing an all-seeing gaze. Successive members of the family use Scat’s mirror to examine themselves, utilizing the colonial apparatus to survey themselves, as well as being surveyed by it.” (Dorgelo 70) Also, when Harley uses Scat’s mirror to search for his ancestors and his past, he generates connections with the past which Scat tries to erase. Such revelation suitably enables Scott to re-negotiate his identity, differing in his interpretations of all things and generate “an audience identification with the colonized, over the colonizer. The ways in which Benang negotiates the relationship between, and the representation of, Neville and the central Indigenous characters can be read as an articulation of problematic settler identity.” (Dorgelo 71) Consequently, Harley’s journey at the end of the novel with his children, to very same places he had previously visited with his father and uncles, indicates a passing of the baton, as also the removal of his previous ability to elevate, which was a product of Scat and Neville’s policies. While walking he found out that “I was still a lightweight, but as I walked hand-in-hand with my young children, I noticed that my footprints in the sand were almost as deep as theirs” (K. Scott, Benang 454) – pointers to his being successful in shedding the baggage and the burden. Thus, “the colonizer / colonized tension is managed through a recognition of the presence of Neville (colonizer), and through an affirmation of community and family (colonized) in opposition to individual assimilation. Harley is walking forward despite the best efforts of Scat and Neville.” (Dorgelo 72)

Are the Aboriginals mute spectators in the face of such oppression? Do they take everything lying down? The answer is a vehement no. More often than not they resist
but unfortunately, very few of these cases shape out into an open show of resistance. After every oppression, every act of brutality, the oppressed dream of what could be compared to what is. They are always mentally aspiring for better lives, but in most cases are unable to come out into the open with their aspirations. Their needs and demands are very simple – they just seek better handling from the Whites, which would bring about a sea change in their lives.

In *Benang*, Scott attempts such re-negotiations, albeit ones which more often than not, remain deep inside and unrealized. Scott charts the attempts of the Aboriginals to get out of the Aboriginal Act. The most active in this regard was Harley’s Uncle Jack. His efforts to come out of it all has been described symbolically:

> It was not a deep shaft, but still coming up, he saw the entrance as a fissure in the darkness. He saw a wound bleeding light, and imagined inserting his fingers in the opening. The back of his fingers would be together, and then, opening his arms slowly, in an arc, as if they were wings about to launch him, he would thrust them down. He would pull the world inside out. It would be another world. (K. Scott, *Benang* 84)

Scott narrates his epistolary efforts towards getting himself a Certificate of Exemption. The letters follow one after another to A.O. Neville, The Chief Protector of Aboriginals but to no effect. And after a long drawn process of correspondence through letters, the Chief Protector offers a few unacceptable reasons to Jack for not granting him Exemption. His rejection stirred up a hornet’s nest in his head:

> Chatalong was reluctant to talk, didn’t want to say what kept running through his head but at the same time he wanted to speak it, release it,
not hear it again. His own humiliation. This continuing betrayal. (K. Scott,  

*Benang* 73)

Thus Jack Chatalong’s dismissal left a deep and indelible scar on his psyche and increased his antagonism towards the whites which would be apparent in his behaviour throughout his life. And he was not alone in his desire to be liberated, to escape the clutches of the Whites – his brother Will had similar intentions.

Will, a half-caste, too wanted the White rules concerning their lives to go. He felt that to improve his present state, he himself would be best, and that the interference only led to mistrust and further degradation of his condition:

‘What happened, see, is that I have always tried to keep away from Aboriginals because I knew the people would try to bring me under the Aboriginals Act. And they took your children, hunted you down, moved you for no reason.

‘I didn’t want any “assistance” from them. All I wanted was them to leave me alone, and to be free of them.

‘It has made me very lonely, all my life.’ (K. Scott, *Benang* 146)

Thus, Will’s case is a pathetic one. Being a half-caste, he does all the things required by law to stay out of the Act, including staying away from the natives. But the result is not to his liking, for he is not treated as he wants to be. He yearns for total freedom, wants state control over his family affairs to stop. And his moves boomerang on him, for he has no chance to mix with either the Whites or the Aboriginals, thus making him a very lonely creature.
Even Harry faces the same dilemma. The law does not allow him to get a loan from a bank, to further his prospects and he is unceremoniously made to fall under the Protection Act, much to his dislike. And he airs his grievances at that:

‘Protection Act? I don’t need it. I don’t need that. Just fair treatment same as anyone. That’s what I want from a law, any law, new one or old one just the same.’ (K. Scott, Benang 315)

Thus he is vehement in his desire to escape the clutches of the humiliating law but has no one to hear And so what does this constant oppression and subjugation do to the psyche of the natives. It leaves them scarred, for life, repudiating and rebutting all things White. The scarred psyche makes them believe that they would be free from this oppression only when dead. And after death would they take their revenge seeking divine intervention: “One of the native boys who, sick and tormented lay in bed, swore that after he died he would ask God to come down and burn them all up. (K. Scott, Benang 329) And looking at the torture meted out, most probably even God would accede to such a request. In this, Scott may have made a subtle suggestion for the use of ‘dues ex machina’ of Greek theatre. Yes such a deplorable state of affairs would surely make God come down and turn right all the wrongs. For Scott, the irony of the entire situation is evident in the photograph of his father, his family, similar to one found in Neville’s book:

‘Yeah, I remember your father, Tommy,’ said Olive, after a time......

‘Yeah, he was a Nyoongar all right.......

Ah yes, my father. The few words it must’ve taken a lifetime to find, and which he gave me just before......
You recall the photo sequence, again? The one which were are nonsensically asked to read from left to right --- and which shows my father as perhaps the first white man born. But new legislation, referring to the day before his birth, prevented Tommy being our first white man born, and put him in danger of understanding himself in ways that would only deform and oppress him. His grandmother gave him pride, and a sense of his spirit, and then Ern and Aunty Kate conspired to keep him ashamed and on the run.

It was only when he was grown – when he was an adult, with children – that he began to listen again, and to try to put words to how he felt, to who he was.

I have so very few photos of him, and the one above – the family photo -- makes nostalgic, secure viewing very difficult. Thus my desire for alteration. After all, what does it matter what my father looked like, save that he was among those who:

….are almost white and some of them are so fair that, after a good wash, they would probably pass unnoticed in any band of whites…

And that he was one of a:

…family quite white enough to walk down Hay Street and attract no particular attention.

What does it matter, save that he could pass, that we could be anyone, and from anywhere? (K. Scott, Benang 366-367)
In *Benang*, Kim Scott reworks on and reanimates the assimilation process of white Australia and the absorptionist way of thinking. For John Fielder, even though Scott employs a discourse which pits the colonizer against himself and makes him, in the vein of Bhabha, both the colonizer and the colonized, in the sense that he colonizes himself; such a proposition of unearthing absorptionist policies is fraught with a myriad of pitfalls and is risky business. This is because "he plays with the way he, and many others, are the historical products of such policies, practices, ideologies" (Fielder 5) and would be certainly prone to opinions both for and against his views. While a section would be uncomfortable with the manner in which Scott reanimates the discussion and unearths past skeletons, which they would prefer to be left untouched; there would be others who would question his attitude towards both the colonizers and colonized. For some, his treatment and presentation of white Australia would be too simplistic and they would accuse him of being too lenient and letting off the white 'barbarians' too lightly. And on the other side of spectrum would obviously be those who would be uncomfortable with his re-presentation of black Australia, similarly believing that he has been too indulgent and used kid gloves to handle 'precarious' and 'delicate' Aboriginals. A similar text would be *Bulmurn* by Richard Wilkes, which too attempts a similar risky construction or re-construction of the 'frontier' and power relations between the colonizers and the colonized. (Fielder 5) It is easy for anyone to understand that such texts first negotiate colonial authority and discrimination and later, through resistance and determination try to reinvent themselves, thereby also renegotiating their identities. As Scott has repeatedly said, his aim has never to sensationalize past oppression and atrocities, to show respect to the pain and anguish of Aboriginal people;
and he also does not want any politicizing. From such a standpoint of the writer, it is very difficult how to gauge such writing, "how to celebrate Aboriginal resistance without concocting shallow triumphalism; how to represent colonialist oppression without portraying Aboriginal people as helpless victims, or without erasing the tensions and divisions within the colonizers." (Fielder 5)

First and foremost, the novel reveals very clearly his intentions – to incorporate discourse from the past dealing with assimilation and racism. He should be credited for his pluck and fortitude, for he attempts to use the realm of fiction to investigate race and power relations – both significant and life-altering issues between white and black Australia. At the same time, he is also aware, that the prevalent anxiety in the social setup is undoubtedly between intransigent Social Darwinist inclinations to crave for Aboriginal culture’s collapse and disciplining, and the Aboriginal negotiation of and resistance to the same: "One also needs to engage in polemics and everything because that’s a political struggle. But it seems that there’s been an effort to fit, to assimilate, to squeeze Aboriginal Australia into this white, non-Aboriginal paradigm... And it means a reduction, a diminishing into “this little box that we give to you”.... (Buck 6)

Scott feels that it is high time that the Aboriginals engaged in thinking out of the box and not only engage in discourses with the colonizers, but also find new and abler methods of representation of themselves in literature and society and politics. Thus in an interview with Barker he feels that “Our Indigenous world has been narrowed down for us and put into a tiny box, and there is all this other Indigenous reality around us but we’ve got to work with what’s in the little box.” (Barker 7) Aiming and aspiring to move away from the Eurocentric form of storytelling, which is highly limited and is basically
“drab social realis[m]....” (Buck 5) -- a presentation of ‘truth’ which is too restricting and though revealing the ‘truth’ of Aboriginality, is unable to capture “the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal people’s lived experiences.” (Fielder 6) He believes that Aboriginality and the experiences of people are too diverse, too throbbing and too ‘lived’ to be captured by a structured Western form of storytelling, which tends to confine and restrain while narrating the ‘truth’. As such, finding such modes of representation entirely unsuitable for his endeavour, Scott takes recourse to, a la Rushdie, magic realist elements and biting wit and satire, to re-negotiate the past and erase all social-realist reading and representation limitations and restrictions.

As already discussed, Scott makes a mockery of Neville and his concept of assimilation, by introducing him as a character, but Scott’s purpose and objective is something far greater and overreaching. The direct target of his satire and attack is the white man’s raison d’être behind colonization and subversive entrepreneurship and leading on, of cultural superciliousness. For Scott, the effects of colonialism and assimilation are everywhere to see. He wants to highlight that all colonial and assimilationist activities are in essence barbaric, savage and mean, and they have only one effect on Aboriginals, total collapse and degradation. And the irony of the such a situation is that while traditionally Aboriginals have been people who “have historically, demonstrated greater social and communal skills of sophistication, generosity and acceptance,” (Fielder 6) the advent of colonization with the arrival of the whites has resulted in the total collapse of what it meant to be an Aboriginal. Thus Scott says, in a tone of despair and hopelessness: “When I look at our shared history, particularly in the areas that I am from, this Noongar country, there is a lot of generosity and inclusiveness
by Noongar people in the early days” (Buck 6), a generosity which was not reciprocated and appreciated by white Australia which was only interested in monetary profit. However, such a simplification of an overtly complex narrative like Benang is fraught with troubles for:

The novel’s complexity forces the reader to work hard to trace fragmented characterization, fantastical images/metaphors and metafictional narration. Aboriginal identity is not laid out in an accessible, trite or romanticized manner. In this sense, the reader replicates something of the role of the researcher sifting through historical documents, or the family member tracing his or her past. The uncertainty, the incompleteness, the frustration, the messiness – amidst the discoveries, the resolutions, the epiphanies, the order – this is all part of the process of dealing with the abhorrent destruction and scrambling of a culture that cultivated continuity and belonging. (Fielder 6)

The complexity is also evident in wonderfully amusing and ironic reference to Harley’s power to ‘elevate.’ Such has been the ‘uplifting’ through systematic oppression and degradation that Harley reaches a stage where he finds difficult to remain grounded.

The language of Benang should also come in for special mention for in it, the readers become aware of a marked development – both political and technical. As Scott mentions, he wrote in such a manner that it took “on the very language . . . [he] encounter[s] in . . . [his] research – as offensive and painful as that often is to read – and through various “literary” and imaginative means trying to “defuse” it.” (K. Scott, ‘Disputed Territory,’ Those Who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of
Thus as Scott poured through documents in the archives and did intricate research, he found in the language of the colonizer, the language to write back, the language to mean more than words and lines could say: “Again, sometimes, in writing and rewriting the language of the archives, it seems possible not only to defuse, but also to hint at what that language can’t say; as if something existed behind and between the lines” (K. Scott, ‘Disputed Territory,’ Those Who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal 12) Thus his style and technique is highly evolved and his critical and intellectual acumen is evident in his ability to make not only the words and phrases but also the gaps and silences and pauses, speak:

*Benang* is distinguished in the first instance by its language: rather than self-conscious ‘beautiful writing’, Scott uses plain English, in a form determined by the complexity of the issues he deals with. The fineness of Scott’s writing is the guarantor of his integrity as a storyteller... As a post-contact Aboriginal Genesis, *Benang* considers Aboriginal and settler relationships over an extended time frame, taking into account individual and communal histories, personal psychology, social change and discursive forms. In doing so, it complements Aboriginal life narratives but starts where those texts end: Scott embeds personal experience in an historical and epistemological framework where it takes on its most complete meaning. (Morrissey 199)

Using a lot of satire and sarcasm, Scott dismantles colonial formations, especially in his family, erected by his grandfather and Neville. As already discussed, using Neville as a primary mover in his narrative serves manifold purposes for Scott, for his re-negotiation
is also an attempt to make the colonizers have a taste of their own medicine. For Scott, the colonial ‘lie’ of the Aboriginals being a dying race and the metaphor of the white Australia being godsend to ‘smooth the dying pillow’ are the ideas which he wants to subvert and use, to unsettle “the historical pattern of colonial power relations” (Fielder 7). While for white Australia, eugenics and assimilation provided an opportunity to make Australia a continent-wide laboratory for experimentation with human guinea pigs, Ern used his own family to be his personal lab:

I understood that much effort had gone into arriving at me. At someone like me. I was intended as the product of a long and considered process which my grandfather had brought to a conclusion.

Ahem.

The whole process – my family history, as it turns out --- appealed to Granddad’s sense of himself as a scientist who with his trained mind and keen desire to exert his efforts in the field investigating native culture and studying the life history of the species, supplies an aid to administration. He just got lost along the way.

It was the selective separation from antecedents which seemed most important, and with which Grandfather was a little lax. It was one of the areas where head erred with my father.

........

Of course it is impossible to completely retrace the process. A hundred years is a hundred tears is a hundred years...... (K. Scott, Benang 30)

Later Harley, the failure, inverts the power relations with his grandfather:
I had not wanted to write a book. It was Grandfather’s idea. The pleasure I first gained from it was through my efforts of reading it to him, sharing intimacies. And although disabled by his stroke, his eyes could still bulge, his face turn red. I would wipe spittle from his chin and, after putting him to bed and smoothing his pillow down, re-read the sections that had elicited the most satisfying - for me - response. (K. Scott, Benang 31)

He totally inverts the concept of the “smoothing the dying pillow” literally, by making his grandfather suffer both psychologically and psychically. As he says, he wiped his grandfather’s foaming face and smoothed his pillow, the physical responses and acts outlining the mental torment inside the old man – the colonizer being converted into the colonized. And such an inversion, both satirical and appropriate, generates pleasure for Harley for “really, I wanted to prove myself his failure.” (K. Scott, Benang 31) Notably, his problems of identity stemmed from his grandfather’s failure, a mistake which would probably take generations to rectify for was one “without a history, plucked from the possibility of a sinister third race” (K. Scott, Benang 31), but as much as Scott does not want to politicize or sensationalize it, he also admits that “I am not proud of my behaviour” (K. Scott, Benang 31). But he was “very angry” (K. Scott, Benang 31) at both Neville and Scat and believed that their actions can never be, as interpreted by white Australia as “cheap grace”, benevolent and munificent for black Australia. And proper re-negotiation can only be achieved after there is genuine efforts on the part of white Australia to reconcile, through erasure of such terms as Australia ‘black history’ and working towards social welfare initiatives and policies aimed at Aboriginal welfare and social equality. Thus Benang both negotiates and re-negotiates the hegemonic
formations between white and black Australia, as well addresses issues of identity to assert survival and hope --- for Benang means tomorrow – for the today in which the tomorrow is hidden.

As is Benang, Scott’s first novel True Country is also a merger of fact and fiction, the autobiographical elements predominating. The main protagonist Billy is the voice of Scott himself and their journeys – searching for what constitutes white and black relations -- are similar. As Fielder writes, Scott has the ability to brutally self-reflect and deal with both personal and communal issues within the canvass of racial relations. (Fielder 1-2) Having been drawn from Scott’s own personal experiences as a teacher with the community, True Country can be labeled as a wonderful “novel of social concern that calls attention to problems besetting outback Aboriginal Australia: entrenched poverty, racism, deracination, drug use, and domestic violence, among others.” (Pascal 4) Thus the novel is symbolic journey, of both the writer and the teacher, a journey which begins with his inability to locate his coordinates and a journey in which he traverses difficult terrain involving Aboriginal and white relations and societal decay, to find his roots, his true identity, to re-negotiate his identity: “[...] a young schoolteacher from Perth who, although genetically part Aboriginal, is sufficiently light skinned to have passed as white throughout his life, and whose upbringing and cultural orientation have in most respects been Euroaustralian” (Pascal 3) So when Gabriella asks Billy, why he was at Karnama, he replies:

Because I wanted to. I think I wanted. I’m of .....my grandmother ....My
great grandmother must have been Aboriginal, like you, dark. My
grandmother is part...my father told me, but no one....so, maybe that's a part. But I don't feel Aboriginal. I can't say that, I don't understand. Does it mean that you feel lost, displaced? But doesn't everyone? And I just wanted to come to a place like this, where some things that happened a long time ago, where I come from, that I have only heard of read of, are still happening here, maybe. (K. Scott, *True Country* 82)

Thus his quest is not only a search for his roots and that of the roots of his Aboriginal people, but also his personal spiritual journey, a journey into the heart of a throbbing community of people where things still remained as it was long time back, a journey into the land of historical colonial relations and oppression. For Billy, the white labeling of Aboriginals as men painted with tar brush was haunting, a fact which he could not find in himself. But that did not necessarily prove that he was not an Aboriginal and hence his journey to Karnama was also to re-negotiate: "Ha! Ah Well, What else can I do? I like that sort of thing. And I'm Aboriginal, of Aboriginal descent. A bit of tarbrush in me.....so I am interested. That must be part of the reason I asked to come here. Most chalkies only come here if they've got no choice, I dunno....." (K. Scott, *True Country* 103) That was his intent that was his wish – to go to and serve in a part of the country where no teacher wanted to – to be able to self apply the tarbrush to his white skin and identify himself to be an Aboriginal.

The first thing that strikes the mind is that *True Country* is a poignant picture sketched by Scott of a culture literally breathing its last. It was a community which had been scarred and scathed by its interactions with white Australia, with is missionaries and with its policies of assimilation. The decay is in the Aboriginal way of life, for
everywhere there is evidence of a movement away from the rich Aboriginal cultural heritage and practices, towards a white settler determined mode of living. Moving away from traditional practices the community is at a flux, being tethered with problems of immorality, adoption of Western practices, alcoholism, wife beating and desertion, stealing and the like. The white treatment of the Aboriginals is also abysmal and is determined by a desire to uproot and alienate: "Father Pujol screams that the school must not conduct traditional handicrafts or do anything that will encourage native ways." (K. Scott, True Country 81) For the white missionaries and principals of schools run in such type of community areas, the Aboriginal camps were something to be denounced, for "those camps were places of disease, filth, and full of uncivilized people. It is obvious to me that for the good of the children’s education, they must not associate with the old people," (K. Scott, True Country 81) as one indignant principal wrote. The principal’s opinions were formed from the low moral values evident in the activities of the community members, the principal being a moral guardian in a way writing:

of an eight-year-old girl ‘sexually involved with several old men in the old people’s camp on the other side of the river where they stay because otherwise the mission shoot their dogs and because of their lack of dress. She apparently enjoys the pastime and many of the children watch their actions.” (K. Scott, True Country 81)

As the description highlights, first and foremost, there has been complete and total decay of morality and ethics among members of the community, who live only to obtain pleasures of the flesh. What is also evident is the white treatment of such people who cannot live with others or near the mission or are in fact not permitted to live, with the
threat of dog shooting looming large. Unfortunately, their lack of dress, most probably, a heritage and way of living handed down by their ancestors is something unworthy for presentation in the white paternalized 'civilized' world.

Alcohol abuse remained one of the main and perennial problems of the Aboriginal community, as Scott describes:

Billy and Liz were over at the school on Sunday. From there they watched a fight take place among the houses near the school gate. Two women were pushing and sparring at each other like buck kangaroos. A group of men and women jeered and cheered them, and swore and cursed one another. The distance and the window glass meant that the shouts carried thinly to Billy and Liz, and the dominating silence made it strangely theatrical. It was pathetic of course, but also, somewhat brave; to be making an effort of any sort in all this vastness. The stood at the edge of the window, so that they could not be seen watching, and the frame made the scene almost staged. They were intrigued.

Next day at school the senior students were sullen and subdued. One girl wrote this in her journal:

Someone brought grog to Karnama and all the people get drunk and they start having fights with one other that drinking business makes the older people like Fatima Walanguh Sebastian Samson very upset so when all the people are better the next day the old people talk out loud to all the people who was drunk and tell them what they think of them when they were drunk and of course they feel shame. (K. Scott, True Country 113)
The drunken fight between the two Aboriginal women enables Scott to highlight the extent to which the decay has percolated. Interestingly, Scott presents Billy to be the viewer and chronicler, to be both the negotiator and renegotiator. Bitingly satirical, Scott narrates the human drama as it unfolds but what haunts is the writing of the girl in her journal. She blames 'someone' for bringing alcohol to the community at Karnama and terms it the root of all evil – proving once and for all that Western culture and its practices are the root cause behind such a decay. She also notes the attempts of the elders, who have memories of the golden past, at recovering old practices and rejecting newer ones. But most importantly, such incidents are traumatic and leave a scar on the psyche of not only the young students, who were 'sullen and subdued' the next day, but also the entire community at Karnama.

Everywhere, the white 'missionary' treatment of Aboriginals are pathetic – bordering on racism and savagery. And interconnected with it is the newer problem of alcoholism. Narrating another incident involving Raphael, Billy highlights the hopelessness of the situation. Raphael is direct, bitter and sarcastic, and complaining when he tells Murray, one of the missionary officials, :"you gardiya hole. You don't trust us Aboriginal? You don't wanna help black people? One day I make you sting. I lift you proper." (K. Scott, True Country 112) Raphael also brings out the irony of the situation, for though the white missionaries self proclaim their intent of upliftment of Aboriginals based on love and trust, their actions tell another story – a story of convenience and appropriation. And hence for him, such whites, are a nuisance and an obstruction in the Aboriginal way of life, making him desire revenge, an act which would sting and tell the power of an Aboriginal and ultimately remove them from Aboriginal lands. Thus while in
Benang, the solutions and revenge aspired for, on the whites, were to an extent mental, here Raphael is more forthright and directly re-negotiates with white terror and practices. But the white response to such acts of retribution from the Aboriginals is inhumane and dictatorial, as Brother Tom tells Murray: “Don’t let it happen in the first place. Use a shotgun. Shoot them below the knees.” (K. Scott, True Country 113) Thus when the tables are turned and the colonizer becomes his own victim, his response is swift and sharp – to shoot and kill.

The situation gets worse by the day, though the response of the little girls allow a ray of hope, through sense of detachment at adult practices engineered by white Australia:

Look at it. A clever little girl doesn’t even bother. Alphonse and Araselli not bothering with things. People not believing, people not trusting, people not caring. All falling down, all asking to fall down. That’s all we need to say for now.

Beatrice, she knew nothing. Raphael, her silly bugger father, was one of those whose eyes saw the shadow but didn’t know. That man is empty and has nothing inside him now, except when he drinks from a bottle or spurts into a woman or has money in his hands. So. A modern man maybe. That’s all we say for now. (K. Scott, True Country 148)

Here Scott sums up the entire situation and highlights the bad influence of white Australia. The little girls realize, the clever girl realizes that modern day Aboriginal society is a mere shadow of the past. Negotiating Western practices, Scott finds prehistoric Aboriginal clan relationships being replaced by lack of faith and trust and
care among members. There is no love lost and none seem to care, even though symbolically they have ‘fallen, from a pristine unspoilt state to a present condition of animosity and bitterness. The simplicity of yore, the living of the land, does not dominate Aboriginal practices and ways of life anymore for the evil Western influence has introduced money or materialism, alcohol and immorality. Ironically, that might be the definition of the ‘modern man’ in European thoughts but where does it place the modern day Aboriginal? That is the question put forward by Scott:

Tell us, we learned anything from white man yet? Nowadays people make a mistake. Maybe tired. Little by little Aboriginal going down. Drinking and dying. Making circles, little and more little. We don’t like looking, and seeing it that way. We want to fly up again. (K. Scott, True Country 124)

The white man is never a good influence and Scott negotiates his impact. White Australia can never have a positive influence on black Australia and there is no way that the rot can be stemmed. And that is why there is scope and desire for re-negotiation, to fly away, from it all. But, maybe the missionary stance was different, maybe the whites wanted to do good, wanting the men not ‘fall’. Thus Scott ironically reveals Father Paul’s dilemma:

He’s a disappointment to me...the trouble with Alphonse, with a lot of the people here, is that he doesn’t want to push himself. It’s no good for him here, it’s too easy to just slip back. ...but it’s too easy to, to fall.

.........
Yeah. But see, I'm being paternalistic again. I'll be glad to go on sabbatical ....Look what we wanted to give these people, and now.... What can you do, eh? I don't like what I do, have to do. We have just taken things away.

The empty can is crushed in a powerful hand. (K. Scott, *True Country* 183)

Indeed the white hand is a powerful iron hand and the Aboriginal stands no chance in the face of such paternalism, such undue and unjust intrusion into the lives of a people far superior culturally. Thus, the white missionaries are doing more harm than good in Karnama, for in the camp, the people also remain ill fed and deprived. As Billy narrates, Milton and Murray, take in the kangaroos killed by their car for their camp. And “next day, Milton told Liz and Annette that Murray had given the camp a feed....someone’s got to look after them. The kids’ll be well fed for once anyway...” (K. Scott, *True Country* 117) While there is abject poverty and no food for children, there is, on the other hand, instances of petrol sniffing and the like, which in a way act as a way of release. Billy narrates the story of Deslie, the young boy who was into the habit:

Deslie always had a small can tied around his neck, and petrol in that can. Deslie was better now. But every now and then, no! he dipped a rag in the lawnmower tank maybe. Petrol ate his insides, his brain, everything. Burned the nostrils, moved astringently, forcing into fissures and pushing hollows and enclosures within him that could not be filled. Next day at school, he knew nothing, not even numbers and was quiet......emptiness within him, and his dark glazed eyes reflecting, especially, dark spaces, shadows, the night sky.
True. He was our youngest, our best trained blackfella. And not even in his own country. And he all the time dying away from the inside out. (K. Scott, *True Country* 176)

While the case of Deslie and his life is a pathetic one, and while Scott may be bringing to the fore, the source and issues of such abuses, the presentation has symbolic overtones. White Australia is akin to the poisonous petrol that has crept into every nook and corner, every fissure and even the brain, of black Australia. Thus while white policies glossed over Aboriginal lives, the decay continued inside, the inside continued to die out.

For Bill, after viewing the decay into which the community had crept in, renegotiation of identity would also involve further negotiation with white practices of assimilation and the resultant identity crisis – something which would show him the way forward. He reinvents the history of Karnama from, ambiguously, two sources, the coloured white mission journals and from elderly women like Fatima and Gabriella, who recount their personal lives littered with tales of subjugation. The amalgamation of archival and communal memory all him to resurrect the past, but Fatima’s storytelling is fascinating for Billy as she fills in the vacant spaces in the journal’s narrative. Gabriella was one of the girls of the community who was displaced by the missionaries:

She got homesick the first year, but Father Paul told her off and frightened her so that she couldn’t go home. And then he had brought Fatima to see her after they had been to see the Pope in Alice Springs. That had helped make her stay.
'I like it,; she told us. 'At uni too, I can do painting. It's like this. I get sucked in, and I forget time and where I am. You know, one day I might paint me a little island, a little place for me to live in there. Fly down into it....and stay there...'

She said they gave her Aboriginal literature to read....she said it was dreaming stories, and they weren't so good to read, not like being told them. Or they were in a language that she didn’t understand and then in English which made them sound silly, or as if they were only for little children. Or it was history stuff. Or sometimes just like any old story, but with black people. Or off-white people.

(K. Scott, True Country 77-78)

Her story reveals the story of many of the stolen generations, the only difference being that she was able to return to the community and work for their betterment. It is a tale of estrangement and homesickness, communal separation and longing for it. But more importantly, her story should also be viewed as her attempt to re-negotiate, for not only does Billy give her a voice, she also, on her part, rejects the made up history of the white people she was served at the university. It is a repudiation of canonizing a history which is best left untouched and allowed to be handed down through the oral method. Scott also reaffirms the superiority of the oral tradition over the written form, for not only does it, for Billy, help to fill up the gaps in the mission’s journals, but also proves that it is the voice of the Aboriginals. Billy lends her voice to tell her story and in doing so, allows her to speak of her aspirations, to fly away, in an island of her own creation, a
pristine world of goodness and sanctity. Gabriella is able to realize the irony of the situation and what the Aboriginals mean in the modern day:

I see now, I see it's a funny place. It's how people would like to think of Aboriginal people. ......

I'm thinking. People been talking to me. There's Aboriginal people everywhere you know. Even like you, paler. We are all different, but the same. Something the same in us all, that what they say.....we like the forgotten tribe of chosen ones, eh?

But what do we share, or have in common? Is it a something, a spirituality or a creativity, a propensity to.....

(K. Scott, True Country 166-167)

The loss of the glorious past generates a negotiation with the present and as Scott amplifies, also a sense of loss of identity, a crisis of identity. Franny the little boy, asked Billy who he was and reminded him of identity crisis:

'And you, where you from? Who? Your mother? Father? Grandmother? Your grandmother, she from here?'

And when our Billy came back from far away, searching, he saw Franny peering at him.......'You, sir, people say you is like us. True?'

Well not black. Or dark brown, or purple-black, or coffee coloured, or black-brown. Maybe tan. But what is this? We are all different. I am not the same. (K. Scott, True Country 164-165)
Thus Franny confuses and makes Billy wonder, think and search, or even grapple to know who he was. Gabriella is also able to realize the irony of the situation and what the Aboriginals mean in the modern day:

I see now, I see it’s a funny place. It’s how people would like to think of Aboriginal people. .......

I’m thinking. People been talking to me. There’s Aboriginal people everywhere you know. Even like you, paler. We are all different, but the same. Something the same in us all, that what they say.....we like the forgotten tribe of chosen ones, eh?

But what do we share, or have in common? Is it a something, a spirituality or a creativity, a propensity to.....

(K. Scott, True Country 166-167)

For her, her Aboriginal identity is very important as also important is the realization that there may be differences in skin colour among them, but ultimately, they are all similar, all Aboriginals. She moves away from the common perceived and white man believed notions of who or what constitutes an Aboriginal and re-negotiates the Western way of thinking by stating that they are the people of the Dreamtime, they are the original inhabitants of Australia, they are Australia. And it for the same reason that white Australia’s treatment of black Australia should be better, for:

If we gotta follow the white law then we expect them to do the right thing by all Australian, by everybody.
We Aboriginal people. Look at us. We’re low down, we down there in the dark, and nobody. One time it was different, for us and this land. We had one that could fix things, and could fly, disappear, punish.

We feel we must find our traditional homeland, go home, go back and try to forget. Or no? maybe we should try to find answers to these problems, we are trying so hard for the past and our hopes to return. Maybe some of that past and our power. (K. Scott, True Country 206)

Thus searching for identity leads Scott to the supernatural powers of Aboriginal people. Oral narratives mention, the magic practiced by old Aboriginal people and such belief system makes the narrator in the above lines speak of re-negotiation through the use of supernatural powers. The narrator states that such practices are an integral part of the tradition which has to be recollected and carried forward, and helpfully, such magic could also cure all ills of the present day. Such magicians would be able to both fix the problem and punish white Australia for is misdeeds. And then would there be proper re-negotiation: “Him dead. We got him. Just like old times. Still got power, see? True. True story. Listen! We could do that. Could could could.” (K. Scott, True Country 208) Such an ability, seems possible or maybe the missionaries understand that time has come for change, for revision of past crimes. There is hope, for as Father Paul asserts:

‘I think God is changing. He must to stay alive in these people…..maybe they, we, will end up with a new God here, sort of major spirit from the Dreaming or whatever, who named everything and us…or should I say the Aboriginals? — and created this special relationship. People, creation, the land.’
'Or, just nothing. People shriveling in this inhospitable land, within an inhospitable, wider society.' Billy had said.... (K. Scott, True Country 221) Thus for Father Paul, a time may and will come, maybe, when white Australia’s religion would have to give way, for even God would change and side with the Aboriginals. Or maybe a spirit from Dreamtime would rule – asserting the superiority of Aboriginal traditional belief systems over Christian concepts: “It is not reality we are homesick for. And not just us Aboriginal one’s either.” (K. Scott, True Country 224) Re-negotiation for the Aboriginal populace would come in diverse ways. For the small boy Francis in Billy's class, the saviour would be “an Aboriginal version of Arnold Schwarzenegger or Robocop.” (K. Scott, True Country 77) For Gabriella, the Aboriginal turning back would be like a revival, of learning, of the Aboriginal past, practices and ways and life: ‘You think? What can we do? Look at it. Put the little bits together like one of the paintings? You know, how I have been brought up, I don’t know anything of the old days; a few word, this and that. But there's something there, that’s what I reckon. Should we try and put it all together and believe in it? Or try and rediscover things, like that Renaissance thing? Do like they say Walanguh could, you know, sing for this new world.’ (K. Scott, True Country 82) Being one of the dispossessed stolen generations, Gabriela knows little about her and her community’s past. But her identity crisis could be dealt with re-negotiation, with a rediscovery of everything, just like the Renaissance, to lead on to a new world for the Aboriginals. But how could such aims be attempted? Maybe, it is time to re-negotiate
one's identity with a weapon from the past, with the past: “the old people, would they like all these things written down ....you need history to understand all this..” (K. Scott, *True Country* 170) Thus it would be the Aboriginal version of history as opposed to the Western story, which would be the main weapon, a weapon if used properly would resolve their issues of identity once and for all.

A very important part of Billy's journey in Karnama is his teaching the young children an alien language, the language of the oppressors and also his attempt at changing the community's way of life. But while he begins with his single voice, then allows other voices and finally returns to his own voice again, what he learns is that ultimately the students teach him more. They are the link forward, they are the architects of the bridge between white and black Australia, between white and Aboriginal adults. And in the end, he realizes that the small 'uneducated' Aboriginal children know more, know who they are and help him re-negotiate his own identity. He came to Karnama to "explore the Aboriginal side of his ancestry" (Pascal 4) As a boy, as he describes in *True Country*, he was proud when his parents told him about his ancestry, about his being an Aboriginal and hence Karnama would be a personal revelation. He realizes that he stands between two worlds – white and black—and does not seem to belong to either. The questions in his mind also stem from his appreciating both cultures but as time passes, and he indulges more with Aboriginal people at Karnama, he slowly comes out into his own and realizes that at Karnama, he felt as if he was at home and he was an Aboriginal at heart. Billy dissatisfaction at his condition also stems from his failing to record his past from his own grandmother and hence he later takes recourse to other elderly women to acquaint him with his and the Aboriginal
community's past. His search for identity is also a curiosity for the Karnama people who question who is and why does he undertake his search, for they are amazed at his lack of awareness – at his not knowing his own ancestry. But after he takes part in the Aboriginal dance of corroboree, he is able to understand who he is. And it is also a such a time that the community at Karnama understand him and know him and welcome him as one of their own. So in the end, he is released, and along with Walanguh floats high up in the sky:

Billy feels Walanguh beside him, they’re mute and grinning, they’re drifting out the window together. Lifted by a desert wind, high in a motionless sky….trying to see, searching Frankenstein a place to land.

Billy in a blue sky, clouds cowwebbing his vision, sun on his back, the air sharp, the shadow of clouds gliding across scrubby ground below. The shadow of him….. and he knew who he was, re recognized the land below him. The river snaking across….the green mission grounds, the cross of the airstrip……

……

See? Now it is done. Now you know. True Country. Because just living, just living is going downward lost drifting nowhere, no matter if you be skitter-scatter dancing anykind like mad. We gotta be moving, remembering, singing our place little bit new, little bit special, all the time. We are serious. We are grinning. Welcome to you. (K. Scott, True Country 254-255)
It is now that his journey is complete. In a magical manner, he has been transported high up in the sky. Just like in *Benang*, he hovers above, and his flight is symbolic. At first, he is unable to understand or see anything for the clouds obstruct his vision, just as it is when he first sets foot on Karnama, after visualizing the place from his airplane. But very soon, the sky clears and just as his realization dawns with the passing of time in Karnama, similarly, his flight starts revealing more. Till a time comes when he can see and delineate everything, the *True Country* is revealed, the land of his community is revealed and he is welcomed, by the same ‘voice’ which had welcomed him at the beginning of the novel. His search is over and re-negotiation is complete.

In *True Country*, Scott takes recourse to a very distinctive and typically Aboriginal method of narration. It is both an inclusive and collective narrative structure which helps him give power to both listeners and narrators. There is a plurality in the multiple voices who speak, a polyphony of voices through which Billy’s own story becomes relative. Thus his own is the lead voice among a host of other Aboriginal voices in multi-voices narrative structure and such a technique helps Scott to bring out the diversity among various communities, while at the same recognize the shared heritage and ancestry as an Aboriginal community. (Fielder 1-2) Such a method also allows Scott to state his intent: “with *True Country* I never thought of it as Aboriginal writing. I was just writing, so I was very pleased when it was accepted like that.” (K. Scott, *Kim Scott in Conversation with Elizabeth Guy*)

Scott’s third work, *Kayang and Me* is where he becomes an essayist or a compiler in a way and hands over the reins of narration to Hazel Brown, or his ‘Kayang.’ The collaboration assumes epic proportions for it is a monumental oral-based history of
the Noongar family of Scott which have lived in the southern coast of Western Australia. The title of the work and the use of word ‘and’ joining Scott with his Kayang underline both the need to tell the story as well as the apprehension as to how to tell it. And it also reveals, that it is very much about the tempestuous relation between white and black Australia, of the problems engendered by white colonization of black Australia. In a Book Talk at the Melbourne Writers Festival in 2005, Scott presented the reasons behind his moving away from fiction to *Kayang and Me*:

...previously I’ve only written fiction ..... and one of the ways it seemed to me I could be perhaps most useful as a writer to my home community was to find a way to carry someone like Auntie Hazel’s voice around, to spread that around, so that we weren’t just talking in the way offered to us, of polemics, you know; indigenous Australia as against white Australia, but I could offer her voice as a regional indigenous voice from our part of the continent. In some ways the title...and I tend to use these obscure words....Benang, meaning ‘tomorrow’, was my last book. This one, Kayang...and for me it’s a way of signaling I’m a literary writer but I want to signal the great importance and value of indigenous languages, how they can open up ways of thinking and of connection, and that seemed to me a way to do it. So two things; *Kayang and Me* is about leading toward regional connections through language particularly and sites, and how that I’ve found they are ways of grounding myself, and thereby by implication of grounding all of us. And I want to offer the voice of Auntie Hazel. (n.pg)
Thus wanting to write about the disputed territory he hails from, Scott aims to write and present to world a history which is also disputed. From such a vision, one can envisage the type of person Kim Scott is, for even though he seems very unassuming and down to earth, he is also a person who very much conscious of his political and social coordinates and his responsibilities to his community. Thus, he opines:

As a writer . . . it seems to me that my identity is about articulating a position I inhabit at an intersection of histories and peoples, and it is an obligation to speak for those people in my family who history has silenced, and by attempting this to step forward with a heritage largely denied me.

(K. Scott, ‘Disputed Territory,’ Those Who Remain Will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal 171)

Thus, though he is a literary novelist, the fact that he also a Noongar and has a responsibility to tell their stories predominate and as such, his last work does away with the tension, with his moving away from fiction:

Scott has made this a priority over the past three or four years, with his third novel, Naatj, being ‘put on the backburner’. The focus remains on stories, but life stories and historical stories become the mode of representation. And there is an art to translating the oral word to the written, for it is quite difficult to do well. Kayang and Me directly connects storytelling traditions with country, culture and identity. (Fielder 8)

As Hazel Brown narrates in the Book Talk, till five years before their joint venture, she had never met Kim Scott, though she was related to him – he is her father’s cousin’s son. She goes on to narrate their first meeting:
I knew of his father but we weren’t very friendly. I didn’t know that Tommy Scott had a son called Kim until he came to my doorstep and introduced himself to me. He said that he wanted to find out who his family were and where they really came from. Well, I opened my heart out and told this boy everything I knew about his family because his family were our family as well. We sat down and talked and talked and talked. Kimmy was interested and we yarnd and yarnd and yarnd. I told him everything that I knew, and about bad things that had happened. Some good things happened too, not all bad things. (n.pg)

Her stories allowed Scott to enter into hitherto untrod territory, for he very soon realized that her history was also his history and somewhere down the line, the history of the two families intertwined and also became a representative of the history of the entire Noongar community. It is probably then that Scott realized that he had to give voice to his aunt, and just as in Benang, his aunts narrated his story and in True Country two elderly women Fatima and Gabriella joined in his reconstruction of the past, in Kayang and Me Hazel Brown told her story:

Then he said to me, ‘Auntie, I think we should write a book.’ Well, then I said, ‘Yes, that’s a good idea. We should put down on paper about all the things that happened in the years gone by.’ It’s still happening now. But I said, ‘You’ll be writing the book and I’ll be telling you what to write,’ because, me, I can’t write. I don’t know how to use a typewriter and those other things that they use. I don’t know anything about it. I don’t want to know anything about it. So we started. (n.pg)
When Scott and Brown start their venture, the apprehension and anxiety is easily noticeable, for not only do they shoulder a great responsibility by trying to be voice of thousands of people of their clan, they also realize that ultimately it would also be a story of all Aboriginals as it would speak of relations between black and white Australia. Thus *Kayang and Me* is set in what is typically Noongar area in the southwest of Western Australia, an area which both collaborators label as home -- also the land which owns them. Both belong to the Wilomin clan of the Noongar community and have their roots in an area around places like Albany, Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun. While Scott was born in 1957, Hazel Brown, his aunt was born in 1925 and she was to “add flesh to the bones of his personal story as a “wadjela Noongar”, a “whiteman Noongar.”” (McGirr n.pg) The journey down memory lane takes the two to as far back as 1840 between the first interaction between a member of her family and a white settler. It speaks about her great grandfather Bobby Roberts and his employment by the surveyor-general J.S. Roe to map the region. The white man’s primary motive was obviously to negotiate the hostile terrain for his colonization process, but the ulterior motive was also to tame Roberts or the Aboriginal people. And Scott’s attempt is to dip into the vast treasure trove of memories and stories of Kayang, of family and relationships and the like, to not only help her re-negotiate her identity, but in the process also explore both his own and Noongar identities. Setting about recording the voice of Kayang and using the same in the work, *Kayang and Me* retains the conversational and oral-storytelling mode of narration, with Scott interposing with reactions and questions. But though seemingly sketchy and fragmented, it is a wonderful amalgamation and presents the connection which exists to this day between
the individuals, their extended families and their communities. Thus it also opens the
door for the reader to tread of hitherto unknown terrain, the world of the Noongars – a
unique world where, according to Kayang, nothing is fully black or white, bad or good. It
is a tale which slowly fans out and spans quite a number of years, erecting in the
process wonderfully sketched characters and persons from the family, and outlining
quite clearly interpersonal relationships within the family and the community, and
connections or interaction with white Australia. But such an enterprise is not an easy
one, for it requires a relationship to be fostered between the two, and Scott finds it very
difficult to categorize her story and even throws up his hands, wondering whether she
was really from his father’s generation, or sometime even before that.

As the work progresses, one begins to understand that “Scott becomes an
essayist while Aunty Hazel remains the storyteller, gaining a stronger presence in the
process” (McGirr n.pg) and the musings or the presence of Scott seems coarse
compared to the span, scope and grandeur of her story but what Scott also considers in
his narrative is “the status of the "born-again-blackfella" and the "nine-to-five black".
(McGirr n.pg)

Any Aboriginal account of the past would invariably deal with colonialism and its
effects on the day to day lives of the people, and Noongar woman Brown’s narrative is
no different. But she begins her narrative with a typical Noongar practice, trying to
establish at the very outset the Noongar place in the land and his ability to live at peace
with it:
I remember when they used to go hunting. Dad used to be late coming back to the camp and the boys'd be wondering. I'd say, 'Oh, Pa won't be long.'

They reckoned, 'Oh, Pa mighta got drownned.'

And I'd say, 'No, he'll light a fire directly. When he come over the hill he'll light a fire and he'll show us.' And next thing you see smoke, and then – not long – Dad coming down the slope towards us.

That's how Noongar used to do it. Years ago they used to light fires to let people know where they were... (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 7)

Brown highlights the age-old Noongar practice of lighting fires to tell their location and communicate with their other clan members and thus present the Noongar way of existence on the harsh country. Her story starts very much chronologically with her birth, but in a bush, as she matter-of-factly says: “Years ago no women had their babies in hospital, you weren’t allowed to” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 8) – her first brush with rules and white racism began at her very birth. Her parentage is reverse that of Scott’s and her mother was “Nellie Limestone ..... [while] her mother was Mary Williams, a full blood Aboriginal ....her father was supposed to have been a white man.” Her mother belonged to the Stolen Generations for she had been plucked away from her family and sent to Carrolup Native Settlement, a place which was so oppressive that “she used to run away.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 8) The whites continued playing with her life for it was common practice of the white bosses to take a ‘black tracker’ when they went after young girls and one day, caught the woman(her mother) and her father Freddy Roberts or Dad Yiller, riding together, Yiller being his Aboriginal name, he was assumed
Aboriginal and they were forced to get married. Later after her father's death, his brother married her mother and "that was the Noongar way, see. She was accepted into the family." (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 8) She ends her introduction of herself asserting: "Wilo, that's us. We're Wilomin. A long-legged people" – basically a tag associated with the clan, even though none had long legs. Drawing in from her description, Scott on the other hand indicated at the very beginning that he was "not long-legged at all, I am following even further behind Aunty Hazel." (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 10) But very soon he spelt out his problems of identity, his inability to understand who he was and what was his position in the great white and black Australian divide:

When I was a child my father told me to be proud I was 'of Aboriginal descent'. Perhaps it was the silence surrounding his words that made them resonate as they did; I'd certainly heard no such thing anywhere else in my life, certainly not in my reading or schooling." (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 11)

Being informed at such a young age, smells of racism, but what his father forgot was that blind knowledge was of no use and statement to his son ignited fires of desire, the desire to unwrap his identity, so that he could really see whether he should be really proud of it.

The inhuman laws of the British chased them everywhere and punishment was readily available, without any cause whatsoever. Thus Brown narrates how she lived in bush and had an unfortunate upbringing – she was never made part of the Aboriginal way of life, method of child rearing – she never got “traditional upbringing of stories around the camp fire, no earnest transmission of cultural values.” (K. Scott, Kayang and
Me 14) Life at such times was pretty horrible, and has Scott had recounted tales of oppression of his uncles in Benang, Brown narrates here:

Individuals were fined for being on the reserve, and fined for being in town. Their crime was being non-Aboriginal in the one place and Aboriginal in the other, after legislation was refined in the attempt to snare those who – as the frustrated bureaucrat put it – ‘run with the hares and hunt with the hounds’ and trip them as they moved to and fro across a diving legislative line.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 14)

Thus it was common practice to erect imaginary law induced borders, just for oppression, and trap the half-bloods like animals. Animals they were made into, being on the run always, between this world and the other. For being light skinned and half-blood, they could not fit into either world, the Aboriginal reserve or the white town. And therein lay their dilemma, for they were unwanted wherever they went and the best treatment they got from white Australia was penalization like animals. Such colonial practices were rampant all over and oppression was the order of the day, especially massacres of Aboriginal people. Thus Brown recounts “Most of grandmother Monkey’s family was massacred sometime after 1880 by white people at a place called Cocanarup…. Some of Granny Emily’s people died there too.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 10)

Interestingly, it is not unknown that such sites of massacres were later converted into or assumed significance as Aboriginal religious sites, something which happened to this place of massacre, for as Brown narrates:

After Mum and Dad got married in Carrolup, Dad took Mum down to Esperance to meet some of the family, and on the way he wanted to take
her and show her where his mother’s family was massacred.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 65)

But even such practices of ‘pilgrimages’ to such sites were governed by Noongar rules and not only was her mother interested, Brown revealed that she was allowed as per law as “she was accepted and you’re not allowed to go places unless you’re accepted into the family tribal way.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* n.pg) Here the insistence and stress on Noongar laws is remarkable and is a pointer to a community at peace with itself sets of governing rules, which can be contrasted with white Australia’s laws which were more discriminatory than wise. In addition, as Brown informs Kim, the place where “they were all buried in a mass grave” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 67) is now being considered an essential part of Aboriginal heritage, a part of their personal history and steps are being taken to enlist it. Such actions reveal not only an awareness of the past through expression of shame at white Australia’s activities considering that “a lot of people died there” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 68) but also the re-negotiation through bringing it to the forefront and questioning the barbarism of the whites: “We lost a whole group of people there. Why should a lot of people die for the one white man?” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 68) Her anger is entirely warranted and hence such places have become Aboriginal memorial sites and spots through which the Aboriginals try to re-negotiate their identity.

White oppression had many faces and torture and abuse of women was very common. But what is also evident in the incident concerning Esmeralda Dabb was that Noongars did not take anything lying down: “The truth was, Esmeralda Dabb was thirteen years old when Dunn raped her, and him and the overseer were busy satisfying
themselves with the young girls and they locked all the old men up in the harness room." (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 64) Retribution was swift and for his act, Dunn was killed by Granny Monkey’s brother, Yandawalla and the colonial equations were reversed. However, the white backlash was equally harsh and the three remaining Dunn brothers announced their intention of shooting Noongars wherever they could lay eyes on them. Such massacres were common and had been noted down by HE Daniels, a policeman who was a young boy at that time:

An Officer of Police was sent out from Albany to oversee what was called in those days an ‘open season.’ I believe that men, woman and children were killed. One group was chased for miles towards Lake Dundas and no-one returned....men and boys killed and women and girls left.....when I was a boy in Ravensthorpe on a school picnic, we found the skeletons of one of the murdered blacks. The teacher hushed it up and put the bones in a box and kept them. There is no doubt that the bones dated from the massacre...it is true that since the massacre, Nyungars have avoided the area...." (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 71)

The young boy’s narrative recalls one of the most chilling and nightmarish sides of the colonial interaction, for it was organized butchery. Very haunting for the Noongars is the concept of the ‘open season’ akin to hunting permits issued for hunting and killing animals or birds at a particular time of the year. What is immediately evident from such practices is that white Australia considered Aboriginals no better than animals and these nigger hunts were part of government policy for the officials from the police stations were deputed to oversee proceedings. What is also chilling is that the murderers
differentiated between the objects to be killed, for while men and boys bit the bullet, women and girl were left behind, to be sexually and physically exploited from time to time. Thus, such sites of massacres are pretty common over Noongar land, for even a school picnic party stumbles upon remains of dead Noongars. Also, notable is the secrecy concerning such activities and while this incident at a place near Ravensthorpe has been reported because of the young boy, there must be and is hundreds of such other sites of massacres, which have never found any mention in even such oral history and thus been consigned to the unrecovered annals of history forever. And hence, it is to the credit of Scott, that some of the innumerable tales of white oppression has got revived because of his efforts and he has set the ball rolling for both negotiation and re-negotiation of Noongar identities. Another record of the same incident, this time of Brown’s Uncle Bill saw the incident from the Aboriginal point of view (narrated by the writer Laurel Lamperd):

Mr. Bill Coleman...heard it by word of mouth from some of the participants on both sides who took part in the incident, though the incident itself happened a hundred years ago......no evidence that John Dunn had sexual relationships with Aboriginal women but it is acknowledged today that many white men, especially men living without white women did. If John Dunn did have such relationships, he would have been obliged to follow Aboriginal law. Whether John Dunn knew about this law or the penalty for breaking it, is a matter of conjecture, but it is doubtful whether the Dunns would have known much of the Aboriginal language or culture.
John Dunn was working at the station with one of his workmen when the Aboriginal execution squad of four arrived. The Aboriginals enticed John away into the bush where he was held down and execution carried out.

If this had been an Aboriginal ‘uprising’, John Dunn, together with his workmen and any other men on the station, would have been killed on the spot.

The family of an Aboriginal so executed would have accepted the punishment but John’s brothers, Walter, Robert and James, were naturally indignant about their brother’s death.....after the unsuccessful police search....the three brothers were given permission by the authorities to shoot fifty Aboriginals...." (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 72)

This representation of the massacre, when carefully scrutinized reveals, first that history can be very easily doctored and secondly, that Aboriginals have a law for everything and they abide by it. The doctoring of history seems to be a clever ploy of the writer Laurel Lemperd, who according to Brown, had ‘mediated’ in Uncle Bill’s version, thereby attempting to suppress his voice. Such a distorting is attained by Lamperd’s openly wondering whether Dunn could be proven guilty in Aboriginal law, as very simply, he was not aware of it. In fact, none in the family were aware of Aboriginal language or their culture and hence should be absolved of their actions, thereby planting in the minds of the seeds of doubt and injustice. But at the same time, he has to religiously note Bills’ version, which proved that Aboriginals were stickler of their laws and Dunn’s killing was execution carried out properly following Aboriginal laws and practices. Also, the grouse used by the white administration that it was a Noongar uprising was false, for
the executors did not massacre all the people at the station. Finally, the incident also reveals that while white Australia had no concern for the rules of black Australia, the price of one head of a guilty white man equaled the heads of fifty innocent Aboriginal people – the grossest violation of human rights possible. Also, the presentation of the incident through Brown is also a method of retelling the story of her uncle and triumphing over Lemperd’s meditative intentions.

Incidents of herding children were common, though racism was evident in such activities as narrated by a cousin of Scott’s father:

when she was a child playing with other children, a truck pulled up and men jumped out and started shepherding all the children on to it. Then one of the adults called out, ‘No, not that one, that’s Will daughter,’ and they separated her from the others.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 89)

An incident very common for the Stolen Generations, but strangely, even though she was left behind because of her light skin colour, the racist behaviour did not leave her and continued elsewhere, as when “as an adult once – once was enough – parked her car in a south-coast town to breastfeed her baby. Someone spat on her, called her a ‘black bitch’ and told her to get out of town.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 89) The torture and oppression was widespread and though initially, Noongars had attempted to maintain cordial relations and had served as guides across the country while working for the settlers, a time came when such white men forgot all about their contributions. Driven by capitalist and imperialist policies, they heaped one injustice after another on the Noongars. Thus as Brown narrates, from the wider communal spectrum:
In the early and middle 1800s many Noongars ... had guided and worked with the immigrants ... there was also conflict ... wanting respect for their own ways and realizing the injustice of the situation, resisted the demands of the immigrant society and were subsequently arrested, imprisoned and imprisoned from their country... by mid 1900s, according to Kayang Hazel, ‘they had the fear in them.’... who survived the initial decades of colonization had very little access to what had been their people’s home for countless generations... [some] found themselves ‘among the white people’... others were evacuated from their traditional homes and interred with other Aboriginal peoples in reserves, missions and ‘settlements’ designed --- so the rhetoric went – to provide vocational training. Children – generations of them – were especially targeted. (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 102)

Such a tale, presents in one giant sweep, almost all of the white oppression that took place during the early settlement period till the modern day. What is very ironical is that the Noongars, as already discussed allowed themselves to be colonized by helping mark and map the very country that was their own and would lose soon. The high ground of white morality and civility is once again questioned in the narrative, for the whites turned oppressors on the very simple people who had foolishly shown them their personal properties. Being a community of resistant and proud people, the Noongars revolted and resisted colonization after realizing the reality behind the settler’s intentions but met such resistance with imperialistic might. Such overpowering brought death and the settler juggernaut rolled on, trampling whatever came in its way towards total
control. Similarly, the survivors found themselves being segregated based on skin colour and the dark skinned found ‘home’ in settlements and reserves. What is most important is undoubtedly white Australia’s unabashed attempts at displacing and finishing off a race of people, depriving them one’s traditional habit and habitat for narrow imperialistic and capitalistic designs. As in Benang, white oppression and inhuman torture in the settlements is also vividly narrated by Hazel Brown, underlying at the same time, the general Noongar condition, the plight of the first inmates at Carrolup Native Settlement and the sexual violence on girls:

Fred Roberts and Fred Wynne ran away from the settlement in 1916. People there got terrible treatment...black trackers ...were really brutal...used and abused most of the young girls, and the real fair girls nearly all took husbands just to get away. Sometimes the girls ran away, but they tracked ’em down and brought ’em back....people weren’t fed properly...young people had to work, but pay or money was never heard of.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 103)

Thus, such settlements were no less than prison camps for the males and exploitation camps for the girls and the story seems to be the same everywhere, for similar tales also speak of the life in the Moore River Settlement. While sexual exploitation was rampant, escape for the girls was either through running away like Molly did in Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence or by taking husbands. But as the tale of Molly in Morgan’s novel and Brown’s narrate, running away was no escape, for they got caught again. Only thing is that, the narration of their tales of negotiation of white settler barbarism leads them to the re-negotiation of their past and Aboriginal identity. In fact, forcing the
girls and women into the settlements was common pastime for the authorities and as Brown has previously noted, they generated terror and fear in people’s minds: “All the time, we had the fear. Sometimes, when we used to see the police come in a horse and cart….we used to all go an hide…[for]…if you weren’t working they’d get you….That man in charge of that settlement, he always found excuses, you know?” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 114-115) Rules were also at place to restrict movement and as Brown narrates, “when we came back from the hospital or anything, we had to walk across the paddock, true Kim. People wouldn’t let us take the road through town… it was out of bounds for Noongars…after six o’clock.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 151)

A very ironical incident narrated by Kayang concerning white whims and fancies regarding Noongars was “when it was compulsory for boys to join the army….to send to Vietnam” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 103) and she had stood up to object. The white men felt that Aboriginal boys should go as “Oh, the Aboriginal boys should be conscripted, because this is their country.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 152) Note the use of the phrase ‘their country’ to which Kayang objected asking, “’What country?’….and someone said, ‘Well Australia’s your country.’” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 153) The irony of the situation is all too evident, for Kayang is able to reveal the opportunism latent in every act of white Australia. For, in matters of governance, land rights, etc, the country belonged to the white settlers as there was profit in it, but the moment there was need for self-sacrifice, the white people suitably and conveniently made the Aboriginals the owners of the country – proving very clearly what an opportunist class the British were and thus her final statement can be fully justified: “What we own in Western Australia is not worth laying down our lives for.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 153) The incident in the
life of Harry Cuddles in *Benang*, in the bar has an echo with the story of Freddy Hardy. Freddy Hardy had a white father and an Aboriginal mother and hence, as the law barred Aboriginals from being served, when Tom, his father took him to a pub, he was served and not his son. On protesting Tom was told: “he’s still an Aboriginal.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 155)

Echoes of lack of rights, especially for hospital treatment for sick Aboriginals resound in *Kayang and Me*, but the most heart rending involved herself and her daughter Valda Glennis:

One Monday in June 1951….my baby girl, Valda Glennis. She had taken sick suddenly and my husband and I made the trip …to get help…..I went to Dr. Parton’s house ….Mrs. Parton told me that her husband did not have surgery on Mondays….went up to the hospital where I saw the matron, Miss Formby….’Oh, I can’t keep her in the hospital….you better take her home.’

You know I felt hatred towards that woman…..went back to the doctor’s house….saw the doctor standing in front of the window….she told me that Dr Parton was up at the golf links playing golf……went back to our camp….seven o’clock that night my little girl child died in my arms. I saw that he went to court. I made a lot of trouble for him……he got banned from practicing medicine….He said, ‘I lost my job.’ I said, ‘I lost a child. And lots of others did too." (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 164-165)

Despite being one of the saddest days of her life, the incident also reveals one of the few incidences of Aboriginal triumph over white barbarism. She negotiated the loss of
her baby, but in her act of vengeance and retribution, in being able to stop his practice and make him jobless, she achieved what very few at the time could….a reassertion of her rights and acceptance from society at being an Aboriginal. While in Benang Scott had to deal with A.O. Neville all his life so much so that he almost became a character in it, in Kayang and Me, there are passing references in a couple of places, but more or less, the Chief Protector did not infringe as much as in Harley’s life. Thus Kayang narrates that once in the 1930s, Neville stared enquiring about the children of Fanny, especially wanting to know whether “her son – also called John Mason – was half-caste or quarter-caste.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 62)

The theme of loss of identity, as in the other novels of Scott, dominate Kayang and Me too. Commenting on his objective, sense of loss and his first novel, Scott writes:

Clearly, I had very few close relations who identified themselves and were accepted as Noongar.....I applied to be a teacher at the government school there, hoping to connect with indigenous family with roots in country and community....I was not successful. The name was coincidental, but the disappointment of not finding the country or people I came from fed my first novel, which I wrote with the lyrics of Midnight Oil’s ‘Dead Heart’ stuck to the wall beside my desk. The chorus of that song is defiant – how we carry the True Country in our hearts, and how our ancestry cannot be broken – but I think the novel emerged from the chasm between the affirmation of those lyrics and the title’s sorry tale of loss. ‘True Country’ indeed. (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 16-17)
Kim goes on to narrate that when he was researching *Benang* he also visited the archives and was haunted – “Who I was. ‘The first white man born?’” His story is also intertwined with the story of Ethel Standley, Uncle Will’s cousin. In a letter written in 2000 to the Ravensthorpe Heritage Committee, she complained about the non-inclusion of Will’s fathers among the founders of the place:

> Looking back over a lifetime of experiences and living I’ve drawn my own conclusion as to why my family has been ignored. Racism is as strong today as it ever was, and, as all the earliest settlers know....my grandmother was .... Aboriginal ... hence our ostracism. Times have not changed a great deal, but I feel very strongly about this.... (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 90)

Her letter is a living testimony of the situation, that even today in Australia, and it is her experienced conclusion about racism, race is something about which one is aware of from the very first time white men set foot on Australia. But what is the way forward for Aboriginal people at a loss about their identity? Scott quotes from Lynette Russell in *A Little Bird Told Me*:

> While I am careful not to describe myself as an Aboriginal person – to do so would trivialize the experiences of those people who have struggled and fought for their survival – I proudly embrace having Aboriginal heritage. (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 189)

And to her statement Scott adds that she is very right in showing sensitivity:

> The collective struggle against racism and oppression is a major component of most people’s Aboriginal identity. But does that mean our
children will also need to experience it? Is oppression, other than the historical experience of it, the best way to develop community and an array of future possibilities? (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 189)

Thus *Kayang and Me* is in a sense reassertion of one’s past and one’s present rights – it can be interpreted as “the consolidation of ‘cultural capital’” of the Noongar community for it ensures broadcast of thoughts and restoration. Though assertive, what is more important and surprising to see is that even in the face of such oppression, there is a lack of bitterness, for according to Scott:

the compassion, the forgiving nature, the spiritual generosity, they’re the most important things for us to hang onto, despite the history we share of power imbalance which Auntie Hazel’s already referred to, and of injustice. It’s difficult to hang on to those things though because one is inclined to feel bitter when we think of our own ancestors who were so inclusive at the point of first contact. (n.pg)

But the lack of bitterness does not eliminate reassertion and hence Brown continues recounting tales of the Noongars standing up to white ill-treatment: “the Roberts family... they stood up to them, and also the police, and people like Chief Protector of Aboriginals, A.O. Neville and his representatives.” (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 112) It is not that love was not present, and Kayang refers to people like Brother and Sister Wright who were “too supporters of Noongars”, but the problem lay elsewhere for even though she carried a lot of fond memories what haunted one and all was “the very existence of reserves and missions within the structure of wider society suggested that you were not wanted....an experience that tends to breed shame.” (K. Scott, *Kayang
and Me 118) But within the confines of such settlements hope always existed and very often, there was development of anger and ultimately, “a strong sense of collective identity” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 119) for with such confines and in the hearts of the Noongar people developed the desire to regroup, negotiate through the community’s sense of identity, history and justice and ultimate re-negotiate their position in the land of their own. Her reassertion is complete when she encountered a white man while entering a pub and they hit the doors together;

‘Hey,’ he said, ‘shouldn’t you have let me go through first?’... I said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘Why should I?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘you’re Aboriginal’... I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘Well, I’m a white person....

And I said, ‘Listen here mate, it’s the principle, and it’s respect. It’s not about the colour of our skin. Seeing as how you are supposed to be a gentleman, even if you’re white, and I’m supposed to be a lady, even if a black one, I was supposed to ho before you. It was always taught to me as a child, the woman goes first, and the man comes after her.... Aboriginal men, they respect their women...if your mother taught you what life was about, then you should have been taught that a woman will precede a man. No matter what race, or the colour of their skin. (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 147)

Thus, her assertion is unswerving and aims directly at the rules of nature and natural justice, and also at the white man’s traditional educational system or practices. She also plays with the word ‘gentleman’ telling him point blank that he is no gentleman who doesn’t respect a lady, forget skin colour. Another example of her reassertion of...
Aboriginal, if not human rights is evident when she wrote a letter to Mr. Beazley complaining about the water they were getting to drink: “I think this dam is diseased. Everybody wants citizenship rights. They want the right to drink. But what we need for our people is water. We need clean drinking water above all things. Because water, ‘I said, ‘you cannot live without it.’ (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 159) She is very firm and pointed in her arguments and bit sarcastic too, for her fight is not for a right to drink alcohol but to drink pure water – herein lies her triumph over white Australia, for very soon, Mr. Beazley had to solve the problem, a dam was needed – “We want to put a dam down here.” (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 160) And dam, they got and even rain for it, through the Aboriginal practice of skinning a kalari or a yellow tongued lizard, which once again established that even though the white man may build the dam, it was useless without water, which only traditional Aboriginals could provide. For they knew both nature and the environment and the white intruder would always have to depend on them for survival – the Aboriginal was always superior.

From such a position, Scott and Hazel Brown move towards the modern day, where they find that slowly, there has been the making of a desire for bridging the gap between white and black Australia, between the two peoples. Hence, they find and see hope in present day social events:

Advertisements beam Australia’s Aboriginality to the world, as part of national image and identity. planes fly Aboriginal art through the sky, and the 2000 Olympics’ ceremonial symbolism of a white man accepting the had offered her by an Aboriginal elder surely means something. (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 200)
Expressing such positive optimism, Scott writes towards the very end, after quoting from Galeano in *In Defence of the World*, that while Galeano espouses action and struggle for re-negotiation, he is for

Writing – this making of small marks upon a page which is sometimes like beginning a journey, even a collective journey, a gradual one-at-a-time bringing together of hearts and minds as a way to contribute to a Noongar and increasingly wider, sense of community – is also action and struggle. As is continuing, a heritage from before colonization and, grafting and growing, shaping something new from the roots. (K. Scott, *Kayang and Me* 208)

And in that his and Hazel Brown’s re-negotiation is complete, for he has been able to first help her negotiate her past life and times of oppression, relive her memories of her family and the community, of her colonial encounters and her standing up to white neglect; and then provide her the voice, through his writings, to re-tell and hence, re-negotiate.

Thus in *Kayang and Me*, Scott appropriates the oral storytelling mode for ‘historical’ purposes, for both biographical and autobiographical purposes – tell the personal and communal story, the story, which has at its core, issues of culture, identity and the nation. For Scott, Hazel Brown serves many roles, for while she is part of his extended family, she is also the “genealogical authority [connecting] us up to tribal names” (Buck 7) and very importantly, the elderly woman or Kayang who populates all his works as narrators. So be it his aunts in *Benang* or Fatima and Gabriella in *True Country* and Kayang Hazel Brown in *Kayang and Me*, all carry forward the ancient
tradition of the motherly figure telling / narrating to future generations stories of all kinds. Utilizing such a tradition, Scott attempts to connect and unite the family stories of Kayang and his, so that they become another history, history of the Aboriginal people and entirely different from standard history which does not tell all. (Fielder 8-9) At such a stage, Scott’s personal crisis comes to the forefront:

... when I was a little kid my dad would say to me, and it sounds a bit racist in its own way, ‘You’re Aboriginal.’ Sometimes he would say, ‘You’ve got Aboriginal in you.’ And he would say, ‘And that’s the best part of you.’ But that’s about all he could say. And my understanding is, having been in many ways dispossessed himself, and his language and other things taken away from him, he had some sense of resentment, sullen resentment, or an awareness that things could be other. Especially in terms of one’s Aboriginality. And one’s sense of history. Things could be other and better than they are now. (Buck 5)

Thus it is the ‘other; towards which he works, in a sort of journey from a position of total loss and denial to a new stage of re-negotiation through recovery and reassertion of identity – both his and Brown’s and also the entire community’s. But it is also a matter of choice, a choice that the two have to make, not only for themselves but also for the entire community, on the way forward:

... being told to be proud of your Indigenous identity, especially without an informed historical perspective and relying on empirical evidence – the legacy of that history of oppression - can mean being trapped in a reactive loop. In wanting to affirm your identity,
and wanting confirmation of it, you perpetuate too much of the way things are now, and an Indigenous identity can even come to mean don’t achieve, don’t succeed, because success is associated with a ‘white’ identity. (K. Scott, Kayang and Me 190)

And the opposite is also true, for as Fielder points out, “all too often the products of poverty and oppression have come to define Aboriginality. Just like poverty traps, reactive loops tend to be structurally, historically and socially reproduced. “ (Fielder 9)

Kayang and Me also deals with the present day situation, especially the racism still evident, both inside and outside, for past impositions and policies still haunt. As with Brown and a majority of Aboriginals, the struggle is also laced with kindness and lack of bitterness towards the oppressor. They realize that they can win, dominate and subvert, regenerate through love and when love and human kindness dominates, they can be the First Peoples of Australia once again, the rulers and the colonizers, maybe, the colonized.