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Author/s: SOMALI SAREN

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mrsejournal@gmail.com

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Benang: Shaping Identity under the White Gaze

SOMALI SAREN
Research Scholar
Department of Indian and World Literature
The English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad, India

Abstract: Though the word 'black' mainly refers to the people of African descent, the experience of defeat, dispossession and denigration is shared by the blacks all over the world. Kim Scott's semi-autobiographical work *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) depicts the exploitation of Australian Indigenous 'black' community during 1930's to 1960's when the notorious policy of biological absorption was introduced. This paper looks at the struggle of the Aboriginals exemplified in the black characters of the novel *Benang,* how they cope with their subjectivities created by white others, and how the protagonist Harley overcomes the 'existential *unfreedom* of the black body' to regain his identity under the white gaze by a healing identification with the black people and culture from a sense of psychologically damaged being.

Keywords: Australian, aboriginality, Fanon, black identity, white gaze, racism.

In chapter 5 ("The Fact of Blackness") of his book *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon recounts his encounter with the "white gaze" on a train; "Look, a Negro!" was hurled at him by a child. The child, the

white other, perceived Fanon through his white imagination, and in the process, forced Fanon to see himself through white gaze:

> I subjected myself to an objective examination. I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristic; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism...completely dislocated, unable to be aboard with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. (Fanon 1986, 112)

"Body, psyche, and world mutually influence and constitute each other" (Sullivan 2006, 10) as Fanon establishes in the above. In a world dominated by the white, black man is reduced to an object. And the only way of liberation is, as the colonized was made to believe, to be a white.

Though the word 'black' mainly refers to the people of African descent, the experience of defeat, dispossession and denigration is shared by the blacks all over the world. Kim Scott's semi-autobiographical work *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) tells the story of such Australian Indigenous experience. It tells the story of suffering and oppression faced by the blacks during the late 19th and early 20th century Australia when biological absorption of blacks was taking place. The novel draws facts and information from books and letters by A. O. Neville, the Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915-1940, who fathered this idea in order to create a homogeneously white nation.

In A. O. Neville's text *Australia's Coloured Minority* (1947), race is represented as nothing more than color. However, it is never just color; it is also a matter of social and cultural hierarchy. According to the text, when Aboriginal people's skin is not dark they cease to worry "white Australia" (the fantasy of white Australian in the mid-twentieth century to create an Australia where all will be white one day). The change in skin color from black to white represents a matching set of behavior organized around the white notion of decency, work and morality. The shift from a position of being "unmistakably [not white]" to "almost

like a white" and finally "indistinguishable from one [a white]" (Neville 1947, 57) is presented as desirable, a form of progress. Thus, the process of biological absorption was carried on with enthusiasm in the name of liberation of the black.

The narrator of the novel, Harley, is apparently a success of this eugenic policy; he is the "first white man born"' (Scott 1999, 12). Harley, like the other black characters torn off from his aboriginal descent, traces back his Indigenous ancestors to discard the white identity imposed on him by his white grandfather. However, this was not an easy process as exemplified in the other characters such as Will Coolman, Kathleen, Topsy in the novel. This paper looks at the struggle of the black characters in the novel *Benang* to cope with their subjectivities created by white others and how the protagonist Harley overcomes "existential unfreedom of the black body" (Weate 2001, 172) to regain his identity under the white gaze, by a healing identification with the black people and culture from a sense of psychologically damaged being.

Under A. O. Neville's direction people of Aboriginal descent were turned into objects, each of them being given an identification number and a personal file. The file of Sandy (Two) Mason describes him as a person who has "*the appearance of a half-caste, but is certainly lighter than usual…. he has a quite refined appearance, although he looks a sick man, and this may account for lightness in colour*" (Scott 1999, 43). His residence is "*an ordinary house which from outward appearances is in good order, but no attempt is made to cultivate the ground surrounding the house*" (Scott 1999, 43). For a person with black origin the white gaze becomes important as in the report Sandy (Two) Mason's white neighbor Mustle's testimony of his character has been recorded. Thus, seen through white gaze, Sandy (Two) Mason has been reduced to an object of scrutiny.

These files were to help officials to decide if a *native* is qualified to be exempted from the Aboriginal Protection Act, that is, if a black person can be allowed to live in a wider community. Granting exemption was a way to erase indigenous identity and culture as it required complete disconnection from other *natives* and homeland or it

could be revoked by the state. This promise of a better life did attract many applicants. But the standards required for exemption were high, it was not freely issued. Jack Chatalong's request for exemption was rejected in the view that once permitted to enter Pub he might supply liquor to the *natives*. The fact that he was seldom seen with other *natives* or *half-castes* and his good character (as mentioned in official report) was overlooked exposes racial prejudice or discrimination remains intact in the authority, and so among common men. Even exemption does not include an Aborigine in the white world as seen in the Pub scene where Harry was harassed by white men despite exemption. He was told by a white man, "You might have some bit of paper but we know what you are. You don't belong here. Not with us" (Scott 1999, 316).

What does make life less unproblematic is a black man buried under white skin. Wearing a white mask and being part of the mainstream was more convenient than an exemption. Thus we see characters as Sandy One, Sandy Two and Will Coolman to lean towards their white identity.

Throughout the novel Sandy One Mason was represented as a pure white man until near the end Harley establishes him as an Aborigine. "With his olive complexion and fair, almost blond, hair", Sandy One "looked quite exotic, reminding travelers of some people in the south of Europe" (Scott 1999, 346). Jack too called him "blond ancestral hero" (Scott 1999, 466). His blond hair confirms him to be a white in the eyes of the other. Also, as Harman points out, by associating Sandy One with blondness and heroism other characters align him with Christian elements informing modern Europe constructs of whiteness, "locating Sandy One Mason within the Christian tradition endows him with savior-like qualities" (Harman 2004, 25). He did save his family to the extent it was possible with his whiteness. Sandy by not acknowledging his Nyoongar identity openly, tried to protect his family, to offer them a future, and to be recognized by the settlers as someone. He accepts the freedoms that are extended to the white citizens in the hope of saving his family. He was aware of the consequences he and his family had to face if he had embraced his Nyoongar identity openly. He had seen "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 closed door, weak with laughter." (Scott 1999, 493) Hiding his black side seemed the best way to continue. As Lisa Slater observes, "Racism causes Sandy to participate inadvertently in assimilation practices, which result in him losing control of his speech" (Slater 2005, 67). Scott writes about him:

> Passion a plenty, but not the words for it. Now his words left him faster than he had ever acquired them. There was the trouble with his tongue, at the tip. It was wooden and dead, the skin turning black and flaking all the time. (Scott 1999, 253)

Harley's Uncle Will too rejects his black identity under the pressure of white gaze. As a little kid he started writing local history. There he established his white father as the earliest settler, the pioneer. He had completely ignored his mother who actually belonged to the place and familiarized the place to his father. His view is in par with the colonizers who considered Indigenous land to be un-owned land denying Indigenous property rights. He overlooked the territorial dispossession his mother's people had faced; driven out from there habitation to *native reserve*, segregated from the world.

Will, a *quadroon* has been described through Ern's eyes as someone whom you could pass for a white: "You wouldn't hardly know. Not when you saw him dressed up, at places where you would not expect any native to be. He spoke like a young gentleman, almost" (Scott 1999, 116). In fact his father, Daniel Coolman, had named him as the "first white man born." His father had cut off Will's aborigine connection. Since a child he had been kept away from associating with his Aborigine relatives as evident from the school incident. Will was fine in the school until his cousins joined and his black association became public. White parents refused to send their children to the school to save them from "moral and physical contamination" (Scott 1999, 302) and "Will Coolman was taken ill" (Scott 1999, 301). The segregation experienced by his cousins in the childhood was not part of Will's childhood:

> The school expanded around those students who remained; the walls, the fences moved further away — or perhaps it was that the students moved closer together. Even at recess times, they never moved further apart than the distance a ball could cross. (Scott 1999, 301)

However, schooling experience lasted for only a few days for his black cousins. The local Member of Parliament and the members of various civic bodies took up this white cause and "a next day" (Scott 1999, 302) things were back to normal. Black children were removed and, after a few days, Will Coolman was back to school.

Though his fair skin and detachment from other Aborigines helped him in getting few privileges alongside the whites, when he wished to buy land in the town, he was asked to go to the Aborigines Department. This rejection of Will Coolman can be explained by white's ambivalent approach to miscegenation. Though it is appealing for them as it was a promise of obliteration of Aboriginality, at the same time there was fear of white degeneration. As Homi Bhaba argues that colonial discourse never really wants its colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers- this would be too threatening (Bhabha 1994). Instead of creating a white who reproduces the colonizer's assumptions, habits and values what it creates is a mimicry that is close to mockery. By rejecting Will of the right a white man deserves, the colonizer creates is a mimic man.

Daniel Coolman was successful in following Neville's idea. He brought up Will like a white man; married his daughters to white men. It was sort of murdering and helping people to do the same as Jack observed. But Will defended his father, "What could he do? He had to look out for us, his children" (Scott 1999, 339). Will's discomfort with this view is a clear sign of his acceptance of the identity the white world has imposed on him. Will Coolman was a model example of native upliftment in Ern's eyes "which could be achieved with the right kind of help and encouragement" (Scott 1999, 402). Leaving behind his Aborigine root, Will started from the beginning: married white woman, his children never met their grandmother. But ironically for a living he was shooting Kangaroo, and it was his mother who taught him hunting.

The Nyoongar women in contact of whiteness have been turned into a body machine; they just serve as an instrument in the process of the creation of "the first white man born.'' The female characters are merely appearing before disappearing in the background; even in case of Harley's mother: "It may be that a reader is wondering about my own mother, especially in such a story of men, with silent women flitting in the background" (Scott 1999, 400). Women have been denied the mother-identity; instead, it is white men who replace the mother-figure by holding the generative power of procreation. As Harley states, "My grandfather intended to be my creator" (Scott 1999, 35), "I was his product" (Scott 1999, 437). Both Kathleen and Topsy have been treated as an object; they are the victim of Ernest Solomon Scat's sexual desire and eugenicist project. As Lisa Slater observes, "Ern deploys his Nyoongar wives in the service of bringing his own identity into inscription" (Slater 2005, 67).

When first time Ern saw Kathleen, the first thought that occurs to him is "opportunity." Later he examines *half-caste* Kathleen to verify if she is suitable object to achieve his means:

> Once again, Ern thought to himself: she is slim, she is young. A native woman, of course, but she wore shoes, and her faded dress was clean. Her hair shone. Ern sniffed, and believed he could smell the soap and fresh water on her. He breathed all the more deeply because of it. (Scott 1999, 75)

She is bestowed with the identity of being a "white girl" by Sergeant Hall, the Local Protector. And to keep that whiteness intact she was not allowed to step out of the house like her daughter Topsy. Always instructed and defined by the other, Kathleen was not left with voice of her own: "When Kathleen found Ern embracing Topsy…she could only give a little noise of surprise" (Scott 1999, 135). Her inability to bear Ern a son and with her eventual replacement by Topsy, now useless for him, she was thrown out of his life. For Ern she is a voiceless body.

Topsy is even better specimen than Kathleen as she was fathered by a white man, Sergeant Hall. Again Ern's scientific eyes observed:

> Topsy was young, and small, and as fine-boned as a bird. She looked exotic, her hair sometimes seemed almost golden, and she spoke and moved with remarkable elegance given the limited tutoring he had given her. She seemed… almost a new species. (Scott 1999, 135)

Ern starts shaping Topsy's identity as a white woman. She is to see the world from the white side. He took her to the edge of a nearby town where they could look down over a rough clearing. Ernest informs and educates about the things below them: *"native reserves, settlements,* and *missions"* (Scott 1999, 137). In Ern's supervision Topsy was in the process of becoming a 'mimicry' (Bhabha 1994) of a white woman. 'Mimicry' is considered as unsettling imitations of the 'other'; the desire of the colonized to break away from the 'self' in order to move towards 'other'. In case of Topsy this 'mimicry' is a forced one, a tyranny of the White. It reaches its pinnacle when Topsy gives birth to Tommy who cannot be called as the "first white man born" due to a change in law. Disappointed and frustrated Ern was unable to see his plan shattering down again engaged in turning Topsy into a white woman desperately: "Ern poured bleach into the hot water, placed his hand on the top of Topsy's head and pushed her under" (Scott 1999, 160). Topsy looked at Ern's patchy mirror in search of herself. But all she found was an incomplete face with flecks and spots and few pieces missing. Kathleen and Topsy, using mirror, both tried to perceive themselves through their own eyes but what reflected back was the white gaze pointing at their "increasing areas of blackness, more pieces missing and making [them] invisible" (Scott 1999, 163). As Lisa Skater points out, "They cannot signify in and for themselves. They have lost their ability to make sense. Their complex material existence is denied so that Ern's over-determined, limited self might come into being" (Skater 2005, 65).

Benang is a semi-autobiographical novel. Kim Scott, with his mixed heritage – both Nyoongar and English, is "the first white man born" in his immediate family. He wanted to express the psychological damage and cultural dispossession he has experienced. In an interview Scott comments that he is reluctant "of being niched in the mainstream . . . and it seemed to [him] to start off as 'here I am, the first white man born

in the family line' was to avoid that pigeonhole, and to be very provocative" (Scott 2000). The eugenic policy was to abolish the indigenity altogether and create a homogeneous, white Australia. Hidden under the white skin is the indigenous identity that Scott wanted to bring out like Harley in *Benang*. The white gaze considers them to be 'first white man born'. It is their endeavor to discard the white identity fixed on them through the white eyes or by their white skin.

Harley is apparently the success of Ern's eugenic project; he is the "first white man" created by him after a number of failures. The idea came to him while conversing with James Segal, the Travelling Inspector of Aborigines. James explains the logic provided by the colonizer for the biological absorption of the indigenous people, "'The Settlements,' he said, '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'" (Scott 1999, 47). Driven by the desire to be the creator of "first white man born" in his family line and justify his sexual desire for Aborigine women, Ern decided to initiate his project of *native* uplift, thus masquerading his actual aim under the eugenic project.

Ern's grandson Harley is the "first white man born" in his family line – Harley's body does not carry the visible signs of his Aboriginal ancestry. Ern carefully kept him away from his black relatives and tried to mold him as a perfect white man under his strict supervision so that Harley does not "regress and revert to less civilized ways" by any chance as it would mean failure of his experimentation. Thus, when Ern sees Harley's school report indicating his lack of potential and *native* laziness, frustrated, Ern "struck [Harley] to the ground and delivered a kick which sent me sliding across the floor" (Scott 1999, 19).

Harley's non-linear narrative is indicative of his undoing of Ern's linear progress through generations to produce the first white man as presented in the photographs, photographs which were not captioned with person's name but with racial category. The idea was to erase out blackness from the skin fraction by fraction with each generation. From "*full-blood"* to "*half-caste (first cross)"*, to "*quadroon"* to finally "*octoroon*" (Scott 1999, 28). In the manner of Darwinian evolution, the

third or fourth generations are deemed as fit to live like the rest of the 'civilized' community since "no sign of native origin is apparent" (Scott 1999, 28). Drawing from evolution theory, Aboriginal people were represented as at the bottom of a scale of human progress which placed white men at its peak. From the white point of view, it is achieving success fraction by fraction:

> They spoke of breeding and uplifting… [They] wished to seize people in their long arms and haul them to their own level. Their minds held flickering images of canvas Ascensions, with pale fat cherubs spiralling upwards into the light. They saw steps leading up stone pyramids, and realised that some creatures were simply unable to continue higher, even though the steps were there for them. Their noble selves sat at the top and no, they did not see themselves as leering, as guffawing, as throwing scraps to those below. (Scott 1999, 77)

Referring the Aboriginals as "*full-blood*", "*half-caste*", "*quadroon*" and "*octoroon*" by the colonizers is permeating in the novel. Therefore the colonizers perceive the *natives'* skin colors as the salient feature. And Harley finds himself among those photos as the "*octoroon grandson"*:

> I saw my image inserted into sequences of three or four in which I was always at the end of the line (even now, I wince at such a phrase). (Scott 1999, 28)

When Ern finds Harley in his library, he realizes that his carefully documented scheme has been discovered. In shock, he falls to his knees in his study doorway, clutching at his chest with one hand and waving feebly at his grandson with the other. It left Ern paralysed symbolically representing the powerlessness of white gaze. The white gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness. But when Harley got access to Ern's archival documents, he begins reversing the eugenic act. Harley relinquishes the white gaze and deconstructs the power relationship between them right before his grandfather's eyes as he watched like a feeble audience.

Ern, the white colonizer, objectifies the indigenous people. He is obsessed with the percentage of Aboriginal and white blood in each person. The subjectivities of blacks are denied. They are written as, Harman points out, unwitting participants in, and the outcomes of, a socially engineered breeding project. The rich history and institutions of the indigenous population are physically and symbolically destroyed, and in their place the colonizer produces a new breed of people who deserve only to be ruled. All they were left with the identity located in the gaze of the imperial Other. This imposition of identity is similar to what Fanon experiences on the train. That unlike a white, a black cannot participate freely in the schematization of the world: "A white *mythos* inserts itself between the black body and its self-image, becoming the 'element-used' in a reflexive understanding of black subjectivity" (Weate 2001). Scott brings out this helplessness of a black man's body through the use of mirror as seen in the case of Topsy. Kathleen and Young Jack are also seen questioning their reflections as they examined themselves on shining surface of knives, forks, spoons, pot and pan to try to ascertain what remains and what has been taken away.

Harley found his mirror image in disagreement with his consciousness: "Hovering over a mirror, I saw a stranger". He feels alienated in his own skin. He objectifies himself as he examines his white appearance in the mirror:

> It was hard to focus, but this much was clear; he was thin, and wore some sort of napkin around his loins. Dark blue veins ran beneath his creamy skin, and his nipples and lips were sharply defined. (Scott 1999, 14)

Though unaware of his aborigine inheritance at that time Harley could see his mirror image shifting and changing shape foreshadowing his uncovering of the other part that his grandfather had kept hidden:

> And then I saw myself poised with a boomerang, saw myself throwing it out to where the sky bends, saw it arcing back again but now it was my tiny, cartwheeling mirror image which was returning, growing, merging

> with other crowding, jostling selves into one shimmering, ascending me. (Scott 1999, 14)

Later he understands that all of them were deceived by his "grandfather's various mirrors." It was like reading about themselves. To understand their own subjectivity that has been constructed by the white Other. "But could I trust any mirror?"(Scott 1999, 160), Harley wonders. By questioning the white gaze Harley unsettles the identity that has been thrust upon him.

The aim of Harley's "grandfather's mirror" is to create a white body. A nation of whites. But there is always a potential threat of 'return of colour' or 'throwback' as a way of Aborigine's resistance. In order to abolish aboriginality, as Catriona Elder states, "it has always been marked as ontologically fixed rather than subject to change. Thus any trace of blackness or potential return stands for an irrepressible Aboriginality" (Elder 2009). This posits a threat to the project of 'white Australia'. Harley to turn his grandfather's success of his experiment into a failure begins his process of returning to color by tracing back his black ancestors:

> Raised to carry on one heritage, and ignore another, I found myself wishing to reverse that upbringing, not only for the sake of my own children, but also for my ancestors, and for their children in turn. And therefore, inevitably, most especially, for myself. (Scott 1999, 21).

For Ern, his whole life's effort was at stake with Harley. Harley embodies the success of his life, till Harley started undoing every effort of his. Ern had put extra effort to maintain Harley's "*selective separation from antecedents*" (Scott 1999, 30) which was an important criterion for an Aborigine descent to assimilate in white society. This has been presented through the tree by Harley's window, "It towers over the house, and Grandad believed its roots threatened the foundations. He was right in that, they have cracked one wall" (Scott 1999, 109). Insecure with the stability of the white identity he has constructed for Harley, he orders, "*Cut down the tree. Burn it, dig out its roots*"; "He might also have written: Displace, disperse, dismiss" (Scott 1999, 109). The tree symbolizing the tree of a Nyoongar family

threatens with the possibility of a strong root that can overcome Harley anytime. The day he had stroke, he had ordered Harley to cut the tree down. The same day Harley discovers his "black" root in his grandfather's reading room and he cleverly trimmed the branches which were close to the window, giving Ern the illusion that there is no threat. And when Harley brings him to the garden, to his horror, he sees the tree standing there: "The tree still lived; it would grow again" (Scott 1999, 110). Similarly, Harley's Aboriginal family, while depleted and diminished, is intact and holds the potential for new life to spring forth from those who remain.

Linda Martin Alcoff concludes her discussion of raced identity in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and The Self* saying that it does not "simply involve social status but also involves one's affective, genealogical and familial relationship to historical events and traumas. Race, operates, then, as a historical consciousness, and as such is not subject to deconstruction but always requires interpretation; it will be enacted differently in different generations and political communities" (Alcoff 2006, 289). For Harley to (re)discover his identity needs to go back in history, as he realizes that his identity is based on history rather than biology. It is mostly his Uncle Jack who guides him on his way to reconnect with his Aboriganility.

Harley is often seen to be hovering which suggests his loss of a fixed identity. It is his constant fight with his refusal to succumb to the fixity of white identity that his grandfather has tried to impose on him. Despite his effort to control it he often seems to be "spread out against the sky like a banner" (Scott 1999, 149), like a banner of success. In one such incident Uncle Will tried to bring him down but he went up with Harley instead. It is Uncle Jack who pulled them down, as Harley describes:

> Uncle Jack's turn. And for some reason, which I could not comprehend at the time, he was able to get hold of Will, and was both weighty and strong enough to pull the two of us in like spent fish. (Scott 1999, 149)

Jack Chatalong, unlike Harley and Will, has been in constant touch with his black identity. Later he realizes this fact, "Things are never so bad

when you're together, or so I have been' told. It was what made Uncle Jack strong enough, eventually, to lead me back" (Scott 1999, 96).

Jack's role in Harley's life is indicated in the very first day Uncle Will introduced him. Harley observes:

> Jack was so quiet. However once he recognised me, he began to speak, and the words flowed as if they had been dammed-up too long. It was a deluge of words which drowned my grandfather's own, flooding them so that Grandad's filed notes and pages seemed like nothing so much as debris and flotsam remaining after some watery cataclysm. (Scott 1999, 61)

Jack brought with him the real history of their black ancestors, the history that was not constructed by the colonizer who in face denies them of any history. Jack introduced him to the Nyoongar community and his relatives. And Harley with his intuitive power reads beneath Sandy One's white skin and re-establishes him as an Aboriginal, thus reconstructing his family history. Under the professional gaze of the local policeman, Sergeant Hall, Sandy One is noted, categorised, and mentally filed away as being "an Englishman". Harley Ultimately, he discovers and reveals that Sandy One's grandmother was an Aboriginal woman, and his grandfather, a sealer who raped her. One of Sandy One's white contemporaries claims to "know who Sandy One Mason is". He states that Sandy One is "a nigger, really" (Scott 1999, 483). The transition of Sandy One Mason from white man to Aborigine has set a family precedent. It has turned the very root of the family from white to black.

Harley starts writing to recover from the situation to know who he is. However this starting is not from a "clean slate" that Ern had envisioned for him. The colonizer strips off the *native* of their land, culture and language – the essential elements that formed the colonized identity. Thus Harley is in search for a language as using his grandfather's static and prescriptive language would not take help him to find his subjectivity. He must find his style of speech to bring together the part and pieces his grandfather has left. He has to write a counter narrative to make the Nyoongar voices heard: "We are still

here, Benang" (Scott 1999, 497). Thus, he starts with his "shifting snaking narrative" (Scott 1999, 24) of his past, present and future, his alternative non-white way.

As discussed earlier, in the novel the feminine role of procreation has been shifted to the white men which results in an imbalanced existence of feminine and masculine. Thus, under the white oppression there is absence of black men in the act of procreation. Through his relationship with the two sisters Harley re-establishes the feminine and masculine sphere in the novel. By participating in the act of reproduction with the two sisters, Harley undoes the emasculation black men had been subjected to. He says, "The two of them helped me grow from my bitter and isolated self; let me reconcile myself to what it means to be so strangely uplifted" (Scott 1999, 452). As Chiara Minestrelli observes that they work as a "healing power" (Minestrelli 2011, 94) for the narrator. Harley himself states, "The women and I...This is no romance, it is not romantic love I speak. Negotiation, perhaps. We had shared experience, came to learn together. We shared responsibilities" (Scott 1999, 452).

The question that naturally arises is why any amount of white blood does not make one white, while a little amount of Nyoongar blood includes one in the Aboriginal race. In the era of early modernism with the discovery of new places, Europeans started labeling and mapping of conquered terrain, the naturalist classifications of life forms of all type to understand and manage their suddenly enlarged world (Foucault 1970). Following this assumption Cornel West argues that this technique was also applied to the human species. This comparative analysis "based on visible, especially physical, characteristics permit one to discern identity and difference, equality and inequality, beauty and ugliness among animals and human bodies" (West 1982, 55) gave birth to the concept of race and racial difference based on visible and classifiable. Hence the dominant humans couldn't tolerate the coexistence of blacks and whites; living with a lesser being. Therefore, the acceptance of one's identity based on the consciousness built by the other (the white) is consenting to racism. As Kim Scott writes in *Kayang and Me:*

> It was Noongar people who created society here and their reaction to 'first contact'. . . offer mostly sound values upon which to build, and within which 'white' society could be accommodated. Unfortunately our shared history has demonstrated that the alternative-accommodating Noongar society within 'white' society has proved impossible, to the detriment of what we all might be. As I see it, this is the reason enough to offer those who insist on asking why a small amount of Noongar blood can make you a Noongar, while any amount of white blood needn't make you white. It's a considered public position intend to foreground inequalities in our society, and particularly in our history. (Scott and Brown 2013, 127)

Thus, in spite of descending from both Nyoongar and white community, Harley started to reject his whiteness and reconnect with his aboriginality. As Slater observes, "Scott is attempting to reverse the colonial process that controls, regulates and limits Indigenous people by categorizing them. He insists on the complexity and singularity of Nyoongar people" (Slater 2005, 70).

Harley refuses to be objectified. He refuses the privileges of being white. His rejection of both white gaze and whiteness separates the value and superiority the eugenicists and assimilationists attach with whiteness. Instead, he "values a social body that is beyond Western reasoning" (Slater 2005, 71). More than just coming in touch with his blackness, Harley seems to be in the process of dissolving Manichean binary – black and white, uncivilized and civilized, colonized and colonizer – as evident from his fathering children with both a black and a white woman. He is eradicating the differences. In peace with himself, Harley forgives his grandfather towards the end of the novel: "*Perhaps it was this sort of detached interest; that of the scientist, with his trained mind and keen desire*" (Scott 1999, 415).

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