

3. *The Stolen Generations, a Narrative of Removal, Displacement and Recovery*

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“The real horror story of Aboriginal Australia today is locked in police files and child welfare reports. It is a story of private misery and degradation, caused by a complex chain of historical circumstance, that continues into the present” (Kevin Gilbert 1984 [1978]: 2-3)

“Today Indigenous Australians assert that rather than referring to a distinct policy governing a specific slice of time, assimilation has persisted as core doctrine in policy-making over the generations from first contact to the present” (Anna Haebich 2008: 9)

1. Relocation and dislocation

After Europeans massively settled other continents on the waves of capitalist development and expansion, globalisation has made Europe a receptor rather than source of migrants. Its increasingly ethnically-mixed profile has forced a debate on the nature of Europeaness, and affects the rights and obligations of immigrant populations (Vidal-Folch 2008; Zizek 2010). The appearance of xenophobic parties and the recent right-wing pull in many national parliaments are a clear indication of the vexed nature of European cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Indeed, it is the complex cultural fit *and* misfit of migrants within Europe’s social tissue and the facilities and constraints influencing this process that call for international points of comparison so as to address how its increasing cultural plurality affects European nationhood, belonging and territoriality.

The case of territorial dispossession affecting Indigenous Australia (Aborigines and Torres-Straight Islanders)¹ over the last two centuries, an instance of forced migration to the margins of white settler society, may speak back to European fears of displacement by the ethnic Other. This chapter analyses the ways in which Australian settler society has dealt with the Aboriginal population in its colonising thrust, and what strategies it has employed to effect Aboriginal cultural and physical displacement from their tribal

lands in its aim to control vital resources. White frontier violence, the dispossession of ancestral country, the relocation to missions and reserves, child removal and institutionalisation have all played their role in a process of displacement often considered genocidal.

Understandably for what is at stake, genocide has been a controversial term in its Australian application, as the policies of different periods may not tightly fit the official UN definition of the *intentional, organised* destruction of (part of) a racial, ethnic, national or religious group in a *reduced* time span, and these differences have been used to deny the overall destructive impact of official policies (Moses 2005: 23). From competing perspectives rival terms such as holocaust, extermination, cultural genocide or extinction have also been used to describe the impact of 200 years of colonisation on the Indigenous-Australian peoples. Yet, the Indigenous law expert Larissa Berendt observes that “the political posturing and semantic debates do nothing to dispel the feeling Indigenous people have that [genocide] is the word that adequately describes our experience as colonized people” (Moses 2005: 17).ⁱⁱ

This chapter will take Berendt’s cue in focusing on the plight and testimony of the Stolen Generations, a large group of mixed-descent children forcibly removed at great distances from their Aboriginal families and raised to fit into white society. Their vicissitudes have lately become visible, worded and documented in human-right reports, academic study and artistic and literary work. It is these children that became the main focus of assimilative government action; it is in their defencelessness that the breach of basic human rights is salient; it is also in their current recovery as Indigenous rather than white Australians that the resilience and ongoing presence of the Aboriginal communities and cultures are manifest, as shown in the *Bringing-Them-Home Report*. After an overview of Australian assimilative policies and these children’s location in these, this chapter will address their testimony of diasporic displacement in some representative Indigenous literary output from the state of Western Australia.

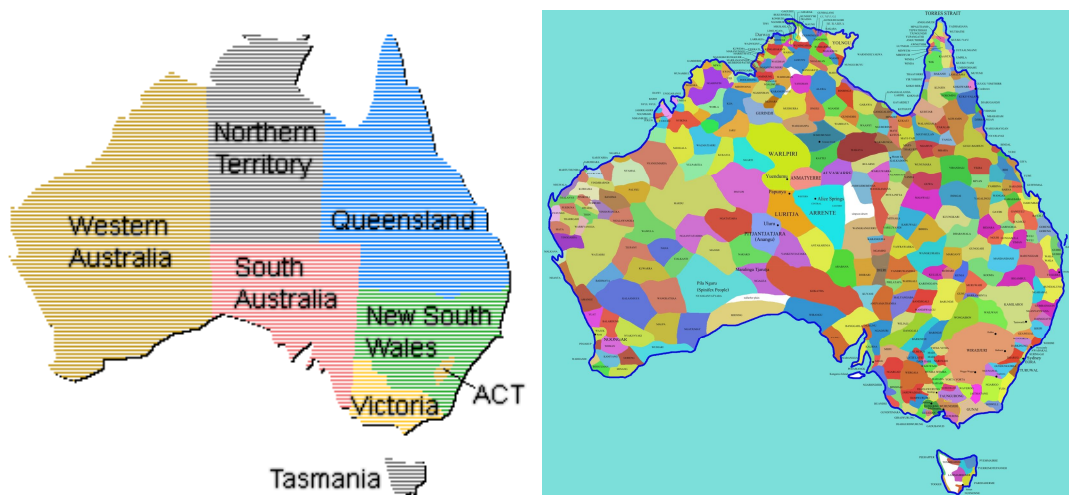
2. Unofficial and official policies of dispersal and destruction

The process of Indigenous assimilation through geographical displacement has most intensively taken place in the more densely urbanised south of the continent, where most of their extant, part-Indigenous detribalised populations live in urban settings. Less affected have been the continental north and centre, which hold remote communities considered to retain a more ‘traditional’ and ‘genuine’ Aboriginal lifestyle and pedigree. Their presumed ‘authenticity’, the result of policies of segregation, has been a powerful discursive tool with which the mainstream has written Aboriginality into marginality and off the Australian map; there is no place for their ‘primitivism’ in contemporary Australian society other than theme park nostalgia. Its counterpart is the assimilative rhetoric which denies the Stolen Generations their Indigeneity and thus a vast but grey area of interculturality.

Long considered subhuman, the Aboriginal population did not form part of the Australian census up until the National Referendum of 1967, but reliable estimates hold that at the end of the 19th century they numbered between 60,000 and 80,000 members

in an uneven spread across the continent, with most of the tribal survivors living in its north and in its central desert. This contrasts sharply with a possible population size of 1.25 million before white colonisation (Haebich 2000: 138). The 2006 census calculates the Aborigines at a mere 2.5% of a total Australian population of 21 millions; this amounts to approximately 500,000 people, provided one includes the vast group of mixed descent who increasingly identifies as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006: 4). If the latter denotes a substantial recovery from the 1896 statistics, it still falls far below realistic estimated pre-contact counts, and highlights the heavy impact of white civilisation on the original inhabitants of the continent both in the number and composition of Indigenous descent.

Aboriginal migratory movement is rooted in colonial defeat, in which the control over tribal land and culture were relinquished in the face of an overpowering migratory wave from abroad. The Aboriginal communities tried to withstand the invasive thrust of British colonisation starting in 1788, but they were unable to fight off the ever-increasing numbers of foreigners who occupied Indigenous territory with new land uses and caused Indigenous dispersal and destruction with superior weaponry and imported contagious diseases. A process of dispersal and forced migration took place in which local Aboriginal communities were pushed to or beyond the margins of their territories by new settlers of Anglo-Celtic origin (Haebich 2000: 67-9). While this migration may seem internal, it is perceived as transnational by Aborigines. They “may claim *diasporic* identities [...]asmuch as their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented towards a lost or alienated home defined as aboriginal (and thus outside the surrounding nation-state)” (Clifford 1994: 309, my emphasis, quoted in Pulitano: 40). Indeed, the remnants of the so-called First Nations found themselves decimated, stripped from kin, culture and traditional country, and pushed into fringe habitats of bare subsistence, often outside their homeland. The larger geo-political redefinition of Australia by the non-Indigenous mainstream, who unlike other settler states (USA, Canada, New Zealand) still does not recognise indigenous sovereignty, was endorsed by the Australian Federation in 1901, which created a single nation space of Anglo-Celtic pedigree.



Political maps of Settler Australia and Aboriginal Australia

<<http://derqusa.com.pe/home/>> Access 5 May 2011

<<http://mappery.com/map-of/Australia-Aboriginal-Tribes-Map>> Access 5 May 2011

Traditional mainstream accounts of Australian history present white colonisation as the benign settlement of an empty *Terra Nullius*—an 18th century legal term for “a land belonging to no-one” (Reynolds 2003: 14)ⁱⁱⁱ—and European civilisation as the advent of progress and modernity (Windschuttle 2002; see Manne 2003 and Attwood 2005 for reactions). Yet, these narratives cover up a history of invasion, extermination and violent displacement which pushed local Aboriginal societies out of their self-sustaining hunter-gatherer habitats, causing death, destruction and bare subsistence (Cf. Reynolds 2003: chapters 4-8). The indiscriminate frontier violence of the 19th c. sought to clear tribal land for market purposes, and left an indelible mark on Indigenous Australia, forcing Aboriginal relocation from tribal land to cattle stations, mission-reserves and town fringe camps.

In the first half of the 20th century, Aboriginal displacement was re-enforced and institutionalised by state policies of dispossession and removal inspired by late-Victorian eugenics, which foresaw no viable future for ‘primitive’ man in the face of Europe’s civilisation and ‘racial superiority’. Euphemistically known as protection, these official policies had a twofold structure of biological segregation and absorption. Aboriginal relocation and institutionalisation on missions and reserves aimed to separate extant tribal ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal communities from the mainstream and ease their way to physical and cultural disappearance. Deemed unable to develop ‘civilised’ standards of behaviour, the ‘full-blood’ Aborigine was considered expendable and doomed to extinction. As Stewart Murray of the Victoria Aboriginal Land Council denounced in Kevin Gilbert’s 1978 volume of interviews, *Living Black*:

Our people have had a vicious hard battle to survive in such a small state with three and a half million other people. In 1940 we were down to about five or six hundred people. They almost wiped out with their protection policies. Herding them into reserves and herding them back out again (Gilbert 1984 [1978]: 77).

Conversely, their part-white offspring was deemed intelligent enough to allow for their biological ‘absorption’ into the mainstream through basic training, child fostering, adoption and institutionalisation, providing a handy labour force for menial tasks.

Aborigines resisted the destruction of traditional means of sustenance in the bush by their integration into the pastoral industry on the basis of underpaid, unsteady seasonal work, and thus to some extent managed to elude mainstream control and interference. Yet droughts, economic slumps and the latter’s decreasing importance compounded the already existing poverty amongst the Indigenes and increasingly forced them to gather and wither on mission or reserve land, where they were subject to strict state control; or to move to more urban settings, giving up part of their culture and often living in squalor (Haebich 2001: 608-9), as Ruby Langford Ginibi records in her autobiographical novel, *Don’t Take your Love to Town* (1988). These dire conditions remained unaltered despite the new social engineering that replaced biological absorption as of the second half of the 20th century.

After Social Darwinism had shown its most horrifying face in the holocaust of the Second World War, the official paradigm became the assimilation of all Aborigines, whether of mixed descent or not, into white society by enforcing the ideal of modern suburban nuclear-family life. This would lay at rest the criticism of international,

humanitarian and Aboriginal organisations wielded against Australia's racist policies, as well as undo the states' "parochial concerns in dealing with Aborigines" by increasing federal control (Haebich 2000: 418). Despite the new policy's more humane outlook, continuing state intervention contributed substantially to the dire Indigenous situation in outback, bush and urban fringe areas. While it denied the Indigenous the necessary means and control over their own lives to improve their living conditions, it simultaneously blamed them for the ills provoked by white society and thus, for not fitting in, which fatally provoked their welfare dependency, lack of self-esteem and dysfunctional behaviour. Thus, Kevin Gilbert could write:

White people's devaluation of Aboriginal life, religion, culture and personality caused the thinking about self and race that I believe is the key to modern Aboriginal thinking ... It is my thesis that Aboriginal Australia underwent a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the mind of most blacks today. It is this psychological blight, more than anything else, that causes the conditions that we see on reserves and missions. And it is repeated down the generations (Gilbert 1984 [1978]: 2-3).

After the 1967 referendum, policy changed again and shifted from assimilation to multiculturalism. The 1970s saw the introduction of the concepts of self-management and self-determination in policy for Aboriginal communities, and the *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975 was a federal initiative to "ratify Aboriginal and political rights and to prevent acts of racial discrimination" (Haebich 2000: 572). The concession of Indigenous land rights in different states worked up towards the *Native Title Act* 1993, but the latter has been partly neutralised by later legislation (*Wik Decision* 1996 and *Native Title Amendment Act* 1998), so that "only about 20% of Indigenous people now live on the land that is the source of their Dreaming and spiritual well-being" (Sanderson 2007: 35). Multiculturalist policy has not been able to undercut the legacy of mainstream control, racism, violence, incomprehension, under-funding and neglect. In many communities, this has created a permanent scenario of fragmented, dysfunctional kinship structures, unemployment, welfare dependency, chronic mental and physical illnesses, early death, under-nourishment, substance abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence and child abuse (Langton 2008: 155, 158). Also, the patronising and/or self-serving nature of mainstream social-service industries has not ameliorated the situation for many Aborigines, its controlling functions acting as disguised tools of assimilation. Thus, the eugenic doomed-race prophecy has become self-fulfilling for many Aborigines due to the unrelenting mainstream control over their lives in whatever guise.

The current situation in the Northern Territory exemplifies how these issues remain tense points of political debate, where Aboriginal children are yet again the focus of, and justification for government action. Assimilation heavily resonates in the polemic Federal military and police intervention in remote Northern Territory Aboriginal communities as of 2007, officially to curb the child sexual abuse in remote Aboriginal communities denounced in the 2007 government report *Little Children are Sacred*. Blatantly at odds with the UN charter on the indigenous right to self-determination,^{iv} the intervention is condemned by the majority of Indigenous spokespeople as another instance of assimilation into mainstream society based on the denial of, rather than the respect for ethnic difference (Hickson 2007: 6; Dodson 2007: 22). It is telling that the

Northern Territory Intervention has only been possible because this area—whose Aboriginal population, at 30%, is much greater than other territories—is not a formal Australian state and thus under direct Federal control; this emulates on a grand scale the mainstream control wielded over Aboriginal communities on the local level. It is also noteworthy that the Intervention still continues today no matter the political colour of Federal government, and finds its inspiration for Indigenous relief in a neoliberal model of social engineering that foists individual ownership and market values onto people who choose to live otherwise (Sanderson 2007: 34).

3. The Stolen Generations

A crucial role in the mainstream management of Indigeneity has been played by the politics of Aboriginal child removal, which has taken the Indigenous diaspora to its furthest extremes. It formalised the frontier practice of Indigenous child abduction for exploitative purposes into the cornerstone of genocidal practices against the Aboriginal ‘race’. The direct and cross-generational trauma caused by dispossession and dislocation, resulting in a drastic reduction of absolute Aboriginal numbers, loss of kinship structures and detribalisation is emblematically reflected in the plight of the Stolen Generations. This large population of mixed European-Aboriginal descent formed the core of governmental action in the institutional effort to exterminate the Aboriginal community by their biological absorption in the period 1930-1950 and social assimilation into the white mainstream in the period 1950-1970. As Anna Haebich writes, “Aboriginal families faced a range of anti-natalist practices and measures—official neglect and failure to intervene to halt declining populations, vastly inferior and inadequate services, legislative prohibitions on sexual contact and institutionalisation to separate Aboriginal men, women and children” (2000: 272). Child control was understood as a vital tool to control the size of the Aboriginal population.

Frontier life, with its absence of European women, had been conducive to the sexual abuse of Indigenous women by white settlers. It had led to multiple ‘half-caste’ progeny around the cattle stations, on reserves and in town-fringe camps, which would normally not be recognised by their white fathers. To curb the threat this growing mixed-descent population waged on neat racial borders and the white prerogative on economic resources, eugenic programmes were implemented on the state level to absorb part-white children into the mainstream whenever their skin colour (and therefore supposedly higher intelligence) allowed (Slater 2006: 54-5). As an Aboriginal welfare officer ironically muses:

So [white people] came out with all these sincerest motives, you know ... to give these poor little devils a chance in life ... There’s a chance for ‘em, you see, there’s some hope for ‘em because they’ve got white blood in their veins ... even though they wouldn’t admit that these kids had white fathers) (Vi Stanton quoted in Gilbert 1984 [1978]: 7).

Justified in Aboriginal parents’ inability to raise their children in acceptable mainstream ways, absorption into the white race through removal, fostering, adoption and interracial marriage revealed itself as a breeding-out policy; such “smoothing the dying pillow” of the ‘race’ (Haebich 2000: 134) would restrict the Aboriginal population on reserves and

missions to 'authentic full-bloods' and automatically work towards falling numbers and their forecasted extinction under the guise and guidance of 'humane' mainstream intervention.

Removal would entail severing the emotional, physical, cultural and geographical bonds with the child's Aboriginal progenitors and heritage in a process of displacement, silencing and denial of ethnic origins, in which mission reserves, children's homes and well-meaning white families all played their role. The trials and tribulations of those part-white children, taken from their Aboriginal families and placed in institutions and white adoptive or foster families, preferably at enormous distances from their Indigenous kin, have only been uncovered relatively recently. The magnitude of this traumatic exercise of enforced separation and oblivion was first described by the historian Peter Read in the late 1980s:

In Australia today there may be one hundred thousand people of Aboriginal descent who do not know their families or communities. They are the people, or the descendants of people, who were removed from their families by a variety of white people for a variety of reasons. They do not know where they come from; some do not even know they are of Aboriginal descent ... As they grew up, they were expected to think white, to act white, and in the end to be white (1997 [1989]: ix).

Read's claim was later lent support by the official Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry; its 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report concluded that "between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities ... In that time not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal" (Haebich 2000: 15). The report laid bare the almost invariably traumatic experience of these mixed-descent children in government institutions and white families, leading to their dysfunctional and (self-)destructive behaviour in society—entrenched alcoholism, substance abuse, violence, crime, suicide and so on. Indigenous Australian literature has both reflected on and evolved from the trauma of separation and removal, describing an acute sense of physical and emotional displacement, and yet, resilience in giving voice to this experience.

3.1. The Western-Australian context

Up until the 1970s, Western Australia had as every Australian state—with the exclusion of the Northern Territory—the exclusive power to legislate in Aboriginal affairs. While the State of Victoria concentrated on absorption and assimilation due to its dense overall population, the thinly populated Queensland initially opted for segregation (Haebich 2000: 161-2). Western Australia, a large state with a more populated south and empty north, applied both systems to manage its Aboriginal population, one of the largest of all states, which at 24,000 'full-bloods' and a 1,000 'half-castes' only made up only 1% of the state's overall population in the early 20th century.

Western Australian legislation gave the state almost absolute powers in child removal: the Western-Australian *Aborigines Act* 1905 conferred the Chief Protector of Aborigines full control over “Aboriginal employment and sexual contact and powers to remove and institutionalise ‘mixed race’ children” (Haebich 2000: 186-7), becoming the legal guardian of any ‘full-blood’ and ‘half-caste’ children. The *Aborigines Amendment Act* 1911 only increased these powers by including ‘quarter-castes’; it forced Indigenous “[f]amilies [to] live[-] under constant surveillance and ... to observe strict barriers separating white and black” under threat of severe penalties. The implementation of the *Aborigines Act Amendment (Native Administration Act)* 1936 further broadened the scope for biological absorption by including “children and young people of virtually any degree of Aboriginal descent” (Haebich 2000: 278-9). It was in this legal context that the notorious and influential Western-Australian Chief Protector of the Aborigines, A. O. Neville, active between 1915 and 1940, implanted the system of institutional child removal to special reserve locations, such as the Moore River and Carrolup Native Settlements. Systematic under-funding of the Department of Native Affairs, worse than in any other Australian state, exposed Aboriginal families contained in reserves and missions to a chronic lack of work, training and adequate housing and sanitary infrastructure; consequently unable to provide for their children and deliver the stipulated standards of hygiene, food and care, parents were easily accused of child neglect and penalised with child removal.

In the period 1950-70, the new policy of social assimilation failed to produce the westernised Aboriginal family unit due to continued under-funding and lack of political commitment. While missions were promoted over reserves to ease assimilation, ongoing administrative control curbed Indigenous initiative, unemployment soared, race barriers were kept in place, and the destruction of kinship and cultural networks through child removal etc. continued (Haebich 200: 420). While much restrictive and punitive Western-Australian legislation was repealed in the third quarter of the century (*Native Welfare Act* 1954 and 1963),^v the new Department of Native Welfare (DNW) long retained its powers to intervene families considered of Aboriginal descent. As of the 1970s, Aboriginal policy increasingly becomes a federal affair, and after the DNW merges with the Department of Child Welfare in 1972, Aboriginal child care is subsumed under mainstream child care but ironically, this would not lessen Aboriginal child removal (Haebich 2000: 523-7).

4. Western-Australian life-writing

Indigenous literature has become an important means of articulating the silenced Aboriginal life experience of the Stolen Generations, and voices its ongoing struggle against assimilative policies. As Michelle Grossman writes, this has given rise to a re-interpretation of the western genre of the autobiography as *Indigenous life-writing*:

... the cultural status of life-writing as a genre more willing to engage with representational *métissage* across cultural and language traditions and communities than conventional literary Western paradigms has offered new opportunities for adapting the published text to the concerns and contributions of

those whom such paradigms formerly excluded or marginalised, particularly at the levels of ‘speaking’ and ‘writing’ (Grossman 2006).

Yet, life-writing also became the focus for conservative mainstream criticism of a presumed lack of historical exactness and Indigenous authenticity and thus: truth in these auto/biographies (Kurtzer 2003: 183). Thus, more recent Indigenous writing has resorted to fiction as a means to approximate reality with a picture “more true than the truth” (Kunhikrishnan 2003).

This trend is salient in life-writing by part-Indigenous Western-Australians, which engages with the local context of absorption, assimilation and multicultural integration in various modes. The next sub-sections address the novelistic work of Doris Pilkington, Glenyse Ward, Sally Morgan and Kim Scott. Figuring as representative Indigenous authors in the new *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* (Heiss & Minter 2008), these four authors are dealt with in order of their work’s narrative complexity, although this also largely overlaps with a generational issue. Other Western-Australian writers listed in the latter publication are not considered here, either because their Indigenous status is dubious (Mudrooroo, Archie Weller^{vi}) or their writing takes place in other literary fields (Jack Davies, Alf Taylor, Jimmy Chi, Pat Torres, Jimmy Pike).

4.1. Glenyse Ward

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

Her autobiography does not address the reasons for her removal but a biographical note at the end of the 1995 edition reveals that “[w]hen her mother took her to the doctor’s when she was one year old, she was taken away by Native Welfare as her mother was deemed unfit.” The excuse of failing parenthood in terms of elementary care and hygiene etc. was typically used to justify child removal and institutionalisation. The text addresses the trauma of the Stolen Generations with a brief brushstroke on the opening page:

You see in the early days of survival and struggle, there was a lot of hardship and agony amongst the Aboriginal people. Through the misguided minds of earnest white people we were taken away from our natural parents. This affected all of us. *We lost our identity* through being put into missions, forced to abide by the European way (Ward 1995: 1, my emphasis).

Thus, dispersal locks into cultural death. Any development of an Indigenous identity is suppressed by the mission, where she receives basic education, is instructed in domestic tasks, and disciplined in Christian ways. Mission life almost erases the emotional bonding with her parents and takes over her sense of home and comfort; she entertains warm memories of the mission's Christian charity, which starkly contrast with the Bigelow environment, where the never-ending list of domestic chores at scant pay, daily drawn up by the mayor's wife, is short shrift for economic exploitation.

Significantly, Glenyse's time at the mayor's home is the text's main focus, as it addresses her process of personal growth in adverse circumstances imposed by racist mainstream society, embodied by the mayor's wife. As Mrs Bigelow's "dark servant" (12) and "slave" (19), she becomes an insecure, negligible, depersonalised non-entity—a "robot" (62), "shadow" (77), or "dummy" (131), unable to express herself. Typically, "In those days, not so long ago either, we were not allowed to say anything against our white bosses. So I hid my feelings and told [Brother Leonard] they were good and I liked it there, just to please him. If only he had known how I felt" (126). Nevertheless, the text shows her slow process of growth towards a fuller self-awareness and more assertive attitude. She finds ways to circumvent the exploitative nature of the imposed chores and to enjoy herself, and her friendship with the old Aboriginal station hand Billy and some fellow Nyoongar girls working for other local families provide the emotional bonding and security she needs to develop as a person. Eventually, "I had started to hate the place, and had made my mind up to leave as I was sick and tired of their attitude towards me" (151). This awareness allows her to loosen her bond with the mission and make her own choices.

Thus, while the I-persona of this Aboriginal *bildungsroman* is forgiving towards the "earnest" though "misguided" settler Australians that severely affected her life, the text works up to the act of Indigenous resilience in Glenyse's elopement; it addresses her upbringing and survival outside her cultural environment up to the moment she is old and experienced enough to take life in her own hands. While she does not recover the link with her Aboriginal parents, her father having died and her mother being refused contact with her (126), Glenyse's autobiography finishes on an optimistic note as she runs away from the white family that exploits her: she was "thrilled ... There was no looking back for me" (157). The epilogue's poem and biographical note follow this up by explaining she made a career as a nursing assistant, joined the Community Health Service, got married to "the private barber for the Governor of Western Australia" in 1975 and continues writing (169-71).^{viii} Despite this account of Indigenous resilience, there is an arguable element of accommodation in her autobiography in that it speaks out to understanding and reconciliation with the mainstream, thus projecting a "non-threatening" image of Aboriginality (Kurtzer 2003: 184-7); this is especially so in the epilogue, which expresses a hope for future equality and equal opportunities that still has not materialised.

4.2. Doris Pilkington

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

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

The rabbit-proof fence was completed in 1907 to control an imported European pest, the rabbit, and keep it out of the state. The fence spanned more than 1,800 km from Esperance on the south coast to Port Hedland in the north, but proved ineffectual. Meant as an element of division, "[i]t was a typical response by the white people to a problem of their own making. Building a fence to keep the rabbits out proved to be a futile attempt by the government of the day." It turned, ironically, into "an important landmark for the Mardudjara people of the Western Desert region" as it guided their migration from the remote Pilbara region to the south. Thus, against reader expectations, "[f]or the three runaways, the fence was a symbol of love, home and security" (109). It was only natural for Molly to choose the fence as their guidance on the trek home from the Moore River institution, where "conditions were so degrading and inhumane ... that a staff member ... later pronounced that anyone living there, children or staff, were doomed" (75).

Successfully coping with unfamiliar landscapes, climatic conditions and pursuing Indigenous trackers and police officers, they outwitted the Chief Protector of the Western-Australian Aborigines, A.O. Neville, who ardently sought their re-institutionalisation. Confiding in nothing more than her quick wits and bush skills, Molly managed to complete "what was, without a doubt, one of the longest walks in the

history of the Australian outback” (129) and lead her cousin Daisy back to Jigalong—her cousin Gracie separated from them to go and meet her mother at Wiluna, but was caught and returned to Moore River and never saw her cousins again. Not surprisingly, the girls’ 1,600 km journey on foot has become a symbol for the diaspora and mistreatment of the Stolen Generations and a remarkable homage to their resilience and resistance to policies of absorption and assimilation. Its successful completion also brings into relief the systematic under-funding of Neville’s Department of Native Affairs, which eventually backfires on his efforts to retrieve Molly and Daisy and blemishes his prestige. Neville signs his defeat in the official correspondence retrieved by Garimara: “It’s a pity that those youngsters have gone ‘native’ ... but it cannot be helped” (129).

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

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

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

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

4.3. Sally Morgan

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

In *My Place*, Morgan describes a poignant instance of cross-generational trauma and displacement—the slow discovery of her own Indigenous descent and the resulting redefinition of herself from whiteness into Indigeneity in the 1970s and 80s. She does so by recovering a family history spanning three generations which traces back her Aboriginal descent through the matrilineal, a fact which has been completely covered up by her mother and grandmother for fear of child removal in accordance with the stipulations of the 1936 Act. The Morgan family, consisting of Sally, her sister and brother, mother and grandmother have been passing as non-Aboriginal by pretending to be "Indian" (Morgan 1988: 38) in poor suburban Perth, the capital of Western Australia. The fear of child removal is great due to the poverty this mono-parental household is exposed to, especially since the early death of her dysfunctional white father due to war trauma. The re-establishment of Aboriginal kinship links entails retracing her mother and grandmother's migratory path to its origin in the far north-west of the state, the Pilbara district, where Sally finds her connections to traditional country and Indigeneity—the Palku and Nyamal peoples (Pulitano 2007: 41).

Morgan addresses the process of finding this repressed identity in a complex, communal way, and the recovery of her Aboriginal heritage takes the shape of a *bildungsroman*, psychodrama, detective story, mystery and choral novel. Whereas the first section of the auto/biography arguably reads as a white middle-class woman's story (Huggins 2003: 62), the acceptance of her own Indigeneity is the sign to fade out for her voice and introduce her direct forebears' in the oral tradition's way: her uncle's, her mother's, and most importantly, her grandmother's. These voices trace a critical path back into a past that should never be forgotten and needs to be addressed if Australia is to come to terms with itself as the democratic nation of the 'fair go'. They tell a story of traumatic removal and displacement fed by racial policies with additional gender and class connotations. Her 'half-caste' uncle's life is the Australian battler's but compounded by his blackness, which makes it virtually impossible for him to make a fair living in rural Australia, although/because he is the unacknowledged son of a wealthy white station owner. Sally's mother's life is conditioned by the early separation from her

grandmother and placement into Parkerville's Children's Home near Perth under the 1936 Act, by their troubles to re-unite, and by the fear that they will be separated once again by official policy. Her grandmother's life is severely affected by the sexual abuse committed by the wealthy white station owner Alfred Howden Brockman, who is also her and Arthur's father. Working as a domestic for him after she is separated from her Indigenous family, she is the object of repeated incest, giving rise to multiple offspring which is later removed (Laurie 1999). This incest secret is arduously guarded, indicating the amount of racial-sexual trauma involved in Sally's origins (Puritano 2007: 43; Kennedy 1997: 235-60).

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

4.4. Kim Scott

The poet and novelist Kim Scott was born of mixed descent in Perth in 1957. His writing analyses his own marginal position in Australian Indigeneity as an assimilated urban Aborigine and the consequences this has for identity formation. Thus, he advocates for a pluralistic, inclusive sense of Indigeneity catering for marginal cases as his own: "You're an anomaly, because of our damaged history, but that's who you are (Scott 2000). He made his first incursion into life-writing in 1993 with *True Country*, a semi-autobiography which reflects on his displacement as an almost-white urban middle-class professional of 'diluted' Aboriginal blood. *True Country* retraces his unsuccessful search for Aboriginal origins in the Kimberley region in the far north of Western Australia after a misleading genealogical cue taken from the Benedictine New Norcia Mission 130 km north-east of Perth (Scott 1993: 221). Scott's novel investigates the living conditions for Aborigines on a mission compound in remote Australia and the inevitable signs of community breakdown and yet, resilience in the face of white civilisation and intervention as seen through the eyes of Billy Storey, a part-Aboriginal teacher from Perth. It laid the ground for a much more ambitious project, *Benang*, published in 1999 and co-winner of the Miles Franklin, Australia's most prestigious literary award, in 2000.

Benang is a long, semi-autobiographical, cross-generational account of Scott's search for Indigeneity, and simultaneously a dissection of the policies of absorption and assimilation inflicted on Western-Australian Aborigines and its genocidal effects. Scott manages to experiment with eugenic language so as to open it up for critical perusal (Scott quoted in Fielder 2006), which goes hand in hand with a complex narrative structure defying traditional linear story development. *Benang*, a Western transcription

of his Nyoongar family name on his mother's side, is a demanding reading exercise that unravels the complex horizontal and vertical kinship connections across five generations and Western-Australian space, hidden from sight by official mainstream policy and Nyoongar resistance to it as emblematically shown in the elusive wanderings across tribal and alien country of his great-great-grandmother Fanny Benang and her mixed descent.

The figure of A.O. Neville looms ominously in the background of this tale through his (fictional) family connection to the protagonist's white grandfather, who carries out an amateur eugenic experiment to father 'the first white man born into the family' (Scott 2003 [1999]: 13), parallel to the racial white-washing pursued by official policy. In its description of Ernest Scatt's abusive racial-sexual politics, *Benang* denounces the perversion of eugenic thought and the policies of racial segregation and absorption derived from it. This comes emblematically to the fore in the vexed case of Harley's father, Tom Scatt, who cannot pass into 'whiteness' due to the broadening of the legal definition of Indigeneity in the 1936 Act, which fatally excludes him from mainstream advantages and privileges (Scott 2003: 80, 367). His failure to perform 'whiteness' and the harm this causes him eventually bring Harley under his grandfather's control.

Harley is only able to shed Ernest's control and recover his Nyoongar roots after a car accident in which his father dies. Taken by his Indigenous uncles on a 'walkabout', a healing journey of reconciliation with tribal culture and country, Harley manages to tap into his Indigeneity and converts into an uncanny white *djanak* or shaman for his tribal kin. Aboriginal displacement in this novel is countered by Harley's capacity to levitate and 'sing' tribal people and country into place by building on an unfamiliar hybrid form of the Dreaming—the mystical connection to the ancestral Aboriginal universe which lies beyond time but is anchored in local space. Thus, the novel also becomes a chant towards a hopeful future of cultural resilience and recovery, as the title *Benang*, besides a family name also Nyoongar for 'tomorrow', denotes. As Harley says at the end of the novel:

Speaking from the heart, I tell you that I am part of a much older story, one of a perpetual billowing from the sea, with its rhythm of return, return, and remain ... I offer these words, especially, to those of you I embarrass, and who turn away from the shame of seeing me; or perhaps it is because your eyes smart as the wind blows the smoke a little toward you, and you hear something like a million million many-sized hearts beating, and the whispering of waves, leaves, grasses ... We are still here, Benang (Scott 2003: 496-7).

Benang is a literary journey across space and time which emulates the setting where Kim Scott finally located and re-established his Aboriginal kinship connections, the south-east coast of Western Australia. While continuing his life in Perth, the distant Nyoongar tribe of the *Wilumin* has turned into his cultural referent in life and writing.^{xi} Thus he "stress[es] that I am in many ways dependent upon that community, and ... locate authority in that community rather than in myself as an individual" (Kunhikrishnan 2003). Not surprisingly, Scott practices *fictional* life-writing as the means to protect and cushion his tenuous sense of Indigeneity but firm commitment with the remains of an Indigenous community which has managed to survive the genocidal impact of Australian racism.

5. Conclusion

The traumatic diaspora of the Stolen Generations, documented in Indigenous life-writing, academic research and the *Bringing Them Home* Report of 1997, has been at the centre of Australian politics over the last two decades. This interest contradictorily culminated in the Northern Territory Intervention of 2007 and official Apology of 2008, which highlight the schizophrenic attitude with which mainstream Australia has dealt with Indigeneity. While there is no doubt that, over time, many settler Australians have meant well towards the Indigenous peoples, it is no less true that much of the current trouble in Aboriginal issues is the result of a fatal vicious circle of incomprehension, neglect and under-funding, as over the years the responsibility for Aboriginal development, welfare and funding, while never relinquished from mainstream control, has been shed systematically and opportunistically from administration to administration (Haebich 2000: 444-5). Indeed, until the 1970s Aboriginal affairs were State rather than Federal responsibility, so that any consistent policy on the national level had little chance of finding local support or federal funding and vice versa.

Conducive to this dire situation has been the fact that, unlike the USA, Canada or New Zealand and against UN human right conventions, no Australian government has ever signed a Federal treaty with Indigenous Australia which would guarantee full citizenship rights, land rights, sovereignty etc., and oblige the Federation to assume binding commitments with the original owners of the continent. Rather, the lack of peer to peer treatment in Indigenous/non-Indigenous affairs is echoed in the ongoing Aboriginal claim for self-definition and self-determination (Hinkson 2007: 6; Dodson 2007: 22; Sanderson 2007: 34). The long fight since first contact to achieve a minimum of citizenship rights (e.g. National Referendum 1967; *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975), land rights (e.g. *Native Title Act* 1993) and self-determination shows how basic humanity has been systematically denied to Indigenous Australians in favour of white interests. The rhetoric of the official Apology to the Aboriginal Nations for the damage inflicted on the Stolen Generations, issued by Parliament on 18 February 2008, enters in conflict with the ongoing, invasive nature of the Northern Territory Intervention, parading as child humanitarian action. This contradiction only reinforces the suspicion that considerable white resistance to building a joint and therefore Indigenised nation space remains firmly in place (Dodson 2007: 27-8).

Indigenous-Australian displacement has been the result of the massive invasive thrust of a large group of new settlers which disowned the original owners of, and expelled them from their land in a process that has been both diasporic and genocidal. As such, it speaks out to current European anxiety about the impact of mass immigration in suggestive ways, questioning extreme manifestations of nationalism, xenophobia and racism. Indeed, we may take the Dutch-Indonesian-Australian scholar Ien Ang's apt phrase into our own geo-cultural context: Europe shares Australia's fear of being "Aboriginalised" (Ang 2003: 60), which is that the fate that befell Indigenous Australians due to Europe's colonial project will happen to Europe's mainstream population if mass immigration continues unchecked. Taking into consideration our continental population numbers and resources such fear is unfounded; yet, it does affect policy-making as the current conservative discourse on, and closure of European identity and the accompanying rightwing swing in national parliaments show.

The long-standing deadlock between Federal and State legislation, policy, and competences regarding Indigenous-Australian affairs is obliquely mirrored in Europe's current confederate tensions regarding immigration policy, which suggests that the latter should be dealt with in federal terms on a transnational level, and a common policy and legislation decided on what conditions immigrants may enter and stay. Yet, the Aboriginal plight also questions Europe's political thrust towards total assimilation into the mainstream by the imposition of monocultural sameness, denial of cultural difference and prevalence of a Christian morale, neoliberal individualism and capitalist management of common resources. Multiculturalism should be understood as a project of neither assimilation nor dissimilation, but as one of inter- or transculturality.

In sum, the Indigenous-Australian case strongly appeals for the universal application of human rights inasmuch this acknowledges the existence of, and right to cultural difference within the nation-space on the basis of respect for, and acceptance of the host culture. In Australia, European settlers have long ignored these rules of conduct, and the long Indigenous history of ethnic displacement, destruction and yet, survival and resilience as uncovered and recorded in recent reports, essays, articles and budding Indigenous arts and literature forward the message that (the will to impose) unilateral definitions of identity do little good in a world where cultures are bound to meet and share across difference.

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ⁱ Out of practical reasons, henceforth I will use Indigenous Australian and Aboriginal to refer to both subgroups.

ⁱⁱ Dirk Moses' volume *Genocide and Settler Society* (2005) provides a comprehensive discussion of the term genocide and its application to the Aboriginal plight in Australia, especially pp.3-48. See also Attwood 2005: 105.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reynolds specifies that Terra Nullius "means both a country without a sovereign recognised by European authorities and a territory where nobody owns any land at all, where no tenure of any sort exists ... European powers adopted the view that countries without political organisation, recognisable systems of authority or legal codes could legitimately be annexed. It was a case of supplying sovereignty where none existed" (2003: 15).

^{iv} The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007 proclaims that "Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law ... Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity ... Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development ... Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions" (*UN website* at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/en/drip.html>, accessed 16 Sep 2010).

^v Repealed were: "the powers to forcibly remove Aborigines to reserves and otherwise restrict their movement; automatic guardianship of illegitimate children from birth to the age of twenty-one; controls over Aboriginal earnings and property; and penalties for interracial sex. Aborigines in 'proclaimed areas' would now be granted 'drinking rights'" (Haebich 2000: 513).

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

^{vii} A local Aboriginal tribe.

^{viii} She published *Unna You Fullas*, about her mission life, in 1991 (Broome WA: Magabala Books).

^{ix} In eugenics, an 'octoroon' is of 'one-eighth' Aboriginal descent.

^x The official mainstream celebration of 200 years of British colonisation in 1988.

^{xi} He published a volume with his tribal elder and aunt, Hazel Brown, entitled *Kayang and Me*, in 2005.