

RACIAL MIXTURES AND DISLOCATION: RECONFIGURING FRAGMENTATION IN KIM SCOTT'S *BENANG*

EYONG BETEK ENOWMBI
The University of Maroua

ABSTRACT

Settler colonies within postcolonial spaces continue to expose a wide range of thematic preoccupations that re-interrogate the colonial experience as an unbalanced one. This paper aims to present how Aboriginal literature is visualised in the fiction of Scott, serving as a medium to expose the extent to which racial mixtures lead to the dislocation of the indigenes from their long-held culture and traditional beliefs. This could be depicted in the ways in which the presentation of Australia as a "Terra Nullius" endangered pre-colonial harmony that extends to a more refined postcolonial discourse. Guided by Postcolonial theory and new historicism, this study therefore probes into the confines of hybridity and cultural ambivalence as significant facets in locating Aboriginal literature in Kim Scott's *Benang*.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial, Hybridity, Race, Dislocation, Trauma, Aboriginal, and New Historicity.

BREEDING A SUBALTERN RACE

Kim Scott's *Benang* is a novel that re-interrogates the notion of breeding within Colonial Australia. Focus is made on how this paper probes into the controversies of the relationship that opposes the coloniser and the colonised. This paper looks at how white settlers try to implement a policy of preserving the White race by eliminating or eradicating 'aboriginal species' which they term 'darkies' or 'lower than-half castes.' The whole notion of breeding out colour brings an insight into the imperial agenda of the British Empire within its Australian 'Dominion.' Kim Scott's novel makes a critical appraisal into the sustainability of creating or maintaining a 'superior' race, as Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* aver that, "Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetus to draw a binary distinction between 'civilized' and 'primitive' and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types" (181). It is for this reason that various categorisations of races are mapped out: quadroon, octoroon, half-caste, quarter-caste, and placed within imaginary constructs of imperial ambiguities of

place and space. The above argument attests to the fact that, as much as Britain was interested in dominating the world, it therefore had as a motif the creation of 'new species' which could, in other words, become the main races to be found on the lands which they considered "Terra Nullius." Most Aborigines become victims of this policy in Scott's *Benang* as they are either excluded or dominated when they trespass racialised boundaries, especially those established within the constructs of class stratification.

Furthermore, the ambiguity of colonial categorisation of racial mixedness within Scott's *Benang* is underscored in Constable Hall's attention, which he gives in suppressing the Aborigines in the name of maintaining his title as protector of the natives. This is rather paradoxical because he serves as an ambiguous personality. This is like a Magistrate in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where the Magistrate equally faces the same paradoxical propensity of delimiting himself either as the coloniser or the colonised. Scott's *Benang* depicts the notion of going native in the process of trying to 'educate' the natives. This process is perceived through the activities of white Settlers within the colony. The reports they forward to the colonial body are reminiscent of their nature of the segregation policy. It is for this reason that they file reports that most of the time discredit the natives, especially those that have to do with trespassing associated with settlement camps. In other words, the space circumscribed by the coloniser on the native is defined by the pigment of his skin or the whiteness, or more still, the closeness to that of the white master.

In like manner, Scott's *Benang* depicts the process of ambivalence in this whole notion of racial differentiation in the sense that most white imperialists who are sent to operate in the colony as administrators, rather find themselves involved in sexual promiscuity. This brings out the whole idea of the Empire and sexuality as one of the prime factors of British imperial policy, even though it was concealed. As Joy Damous in *Depraved and Disorderly*, in the words of Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane, noted in 1822 registers:

A certain number of women might be useful employees in light field work, such as hand-weeding, pulling of corn, scotching of flax, and other occupations, as might thereafter render them more useful members of society, if they should become settlers' wives, and... he added that "gave the strictest orders to the superintendent and those acting under him to prevent all improper intercourse between the men and women and to employ them separately under different Overseers (1).

It is for this reason that Australia was considered a *Terra Nullius*, which is why ex-convicts were deported in large numbers to start their own 'nation' there. Put simply, the notion of breeding leads to the calamity of subalternism and dehumanising the

natives, especially those who are not 'similar' or do not 'resemble' the white master, after what they term 'mating' to breed new species. Mating here becomes a bestial terminology associated with the sexual relationship that opposes people of two different races, to produce a half-caste. It could be noted that the process of breeding becomes like the process of cloning a new species, which ends up being an in-between or hybrid. This is reminiscent of the narrator Harley, who believes that his movement in search of truth is a traumatic experience because not only does he have to get facts from orature, but he is also predestined to visualise photographs of his family genealogy to attach himself to a particular location. He says, "Photographs. As before, I shuffled idly through them. I was careless...There were families grouped according to skin colour.... Captions to the photograph: full-blood, half-caste (first cross), quadroon, octoroon" (28). The photographs speak for themselves because it is equally responsible for reminding Harley that he is a half-caste caught in a psychological imbroglio. This is because he is unable to identify himself with a particular race. His quest to get to know the truth could be visualised as a metaphor of the ambiguous colonial project to define racial specificities within the fictional Aboriginal society that Kim Scott presents in *Benang*. As Sonja Kurtzer in 'Wandering Girl: Who defines 'authenticity' in Aboriginal Literature?' argues that "When Aboriginal people contribute to the discourse on Aboriginality they do not do so from a 'free' space. Previous discourse constrains and defines the indigenous responses" (7-8). Harley's fragmented narrative also highlights the difficulty he has in putting facts together to create an identity for himself. This is why while searching for his girlfriend's roots, he notes, "and it was in the subsequent search for the biological family of one of my girlfriends that so much trouble began and led me to reconsider who I am" (21). The idea of who I am becomes primordial in postcolonial discourse as Scott presents the difficulty that the main character has in locating his own roots. The search for his girlfriend's biological family becomes an avenue and a journey through which he registers the fact that he, too, needs to be identified. This reiterates the paradox of the imperial agenda that displaced and effaced the authenticity or originality of the natives in Scott's *Benang*.

From a similar perspective, the reason why race breeding becomes significant stems from the fact that aborigines are segregated depending on the nature of their colour after colonial breeding. The policy is underscored thus: "Breeding Up. In the third or fourth generation, no sign of native origin is apparent. The repetition of the boarding school process and careful breeding... after two or three generations, the advance should be so great that the families should be living like the rest of the community" (28). Accordingly, Breeding meant for animals becomes an institutionalised policy of the colonial project that has as its objective to

create a new specimen of 'human beings' who can better associate themselves or integrate with whites of the Imperial Order. The narrator justifies "the need for both biological and social absorption. Dilute the strain" (29). This consideration is seen in how the imperial officials establish a policy of selective mixed marriage to create the half-caste specimen, which it is believed will easily 'pass' unnoticed since it could be asserted and accepted as a specimen close to that of the superior race in which the 'True born Englishman' belongs. This is evident in Harley's search and eventual knowledge as he discovers that he is more of an experiment carried out by his grandfather to create a new specimen of 'lower white men.' This depicts the idea of the mutability of species within Darwinian undertones. Harley underscores:

The whole process- my family history, as it turns out, appealed to Granddad's sense of himself as a scientist who with his trained mind and keen desire to exert his efforts in the field investigating native culture and in studying the life history of the species, supplies and aid to administration. He just got lost along the way (30).

Harley's Granddad's experiments serve as a bone of contention and express Harley's discontent with his Granddad and himself. This is because this creation of a new race has rather made him an in-between. After all, he has difficulties in identifying himself. His frustration is equally corroborated by his grandfather, who avers, "What have I done to deserve all this?" (32). Harley's Granddad underscores his failure to create species that will resemble his race, reasons why his illness becomes a metaphor of the satire, presenting the limitations of Europe and its punitive, dehumanising agenda. Harley notes, "My Grandfather used to listen, awaiting the entrance of his younger self as I read to him... The old man's speech came slow and croaking. He told me nothing new, and there was no comfort in any of it" (32). The posture of binary oppositions between the Aborigine and the British imperialist is established and exposed as a conflictual concubinage of dissenting views. Both factions exhibit an ambivalent attitude towards each other because, at a certain point, they are unable to reject or accept each other. After all, they are oppositional binaries. John Brannigan's *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* concurs that "it is important to see Literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions and contradictions of history" (4). This is primordial in the fiction of Kim Scott, as he tries to rewrite his own story in *Benang*, he exposes the extent to which racial mixtures and fragmentation were inherent in native Australian society.

In like manner, fragmentation is visualised as Kim Scott in *Benang* presents situations in which the sense of displacement is characterised by a lack of knowledge of who Harley seems to be. Harley's journey is a fragmented to-and-fro path that he

takes in the novel. His failure to comprehend his ancestor-grandfather is also a means through which his fragmented self is exposed. He believes he is of Nyoongar culture and at the same time a descendant of the White race, even though he belongs nowhere. He underscores:

Nyoongar language culture... I thought of all the things I did not have. Unsettled not belonging- the first white man born. I let myself drift. I gave up, and drifted... As far as the joints. I looked my toes beneath one and stayed. I thought I was the only one. I thought it was just me. A solitary full stop. Or a seed. I know now there are many of us, rising like seeds, we move across and dot the day time sky. More and more of us, like the stars we make the night sky complete (111).

Harley's predicament is representative of the fact that most Aborigines like him have undergone racial transformation and eventual fragmentation in the process of breeding to create an advanced race of natives. Harley's psychological difficulty is seen as he is unable to create a link between the Nyoongar culture and the British culture to which he is a product. His solace is seen as a healing practice that he undertakes to give meaning to his life. Harley's life, as he espouses, is representative of the numerous Nyoongars who have undergone this process of breeding instituted by the British imperial policies.

Harley's predicament as a colonised is inherent in postcolonial discourse that looks at how Australia was regarded as a "Terra Nullius" chosen for British expansion policies vis-à-vis ex-British male and female convicts who were regarded as social misfits within British society. Thus, the consideration for class stratification intertwined with racial lines and the creation of 'imaginary homelands' attest to the claim that the colonial project also had sexual undertones. It is for this reason that children born to mixed marriages, notably an Aborigine and a white, generally led to rejection from the white father if the child did not have the necessary skin colour, which was socially accepted by British colonial hegemony in native Australia. Ern's trauma is explicit in that, "At home, sometimes noticing the baby, Ern worried that perhaps he had been too ambitious, perhaps he should have married someone lighter, some other, quadroon" (116). Ern regrets that his baby is below the required racial standards of a mixed-race marriage. He thought his blood could dominate that of his Nyoongar wife Kathleen, but to his greatest dismay, the child resembles its native parentage rather than the British. Ern even goes to the extent of believing that he should have taken someone lighter than Kathleen as a wife. This brings out the fact that the notion of marriage is perceived from two distinct poles of understanding within postcolonial discourse and, more precisely, Aboriginal literature, in the sense that marriage between both races is based on convenience and acceptability within

racial lines. As Ann Curthoys in 'An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous' writes:

In Australia there have been for a longtime two distinct yet connected public and intellectual debates concerning the significance of descent, belonging and culture. One revolves around the cleavage between indigenous peoples, and especially the status of indigenous claims deriving from a history, of colonization. It is about land, health, heritage, housing, intellectual property, identity, education, stolen children, and much else as well (21).

The narrator reading Ern's words underlines, "Look at Harriette's son, Will. You would hardly know. Not when you saw him dressed up, at places where you would not expect any native to be" (116). This shows the consideration Ern has for his child, and he believes Harriette's son is of a superior breed than his child. He underscores his intention of self-effacement as he notes that Will could 'pass' for a white if he wore long sleeves or clothes that exposed just his face. This, according to him, will make it difficult for other people to identify Will as an inferior breed or a native. Accordingly, Harley's journey to understand himself equally leads him to understand the ambiguous adventure in which the colonised finds himself. Also, in trying to breed a new race, the colonised becomes dehumanised because of the failure to satisfy the colonial project for the child, as depicted in how he has less regard for it. He considers it to be a failed experiment. This is averred thus: "Poor Ernest. Yes, although it came as a surprise to him, there is no need to delay the truth any longer. He did not mention his realisation to Kathleen and tried to dismiss it from his mind" (116).

Ern's trauma is perceived as an emanation from his discontent with the experimental specimen his wife has given birth to. He tries to conceal his dissatisfaction, even though internally, he cannot bear it. As a white working for the imperial government, he knows the ideals which he preaches have been jeopardised by himself because he is not able to have a good breed. Ern's dissatisfaction is purported thus:

But once trying to help his wife, the child slipped from his arms and cracked her head heavily on a stone steps. Harriette and Kathleen carried the child around for days. She became flushed and histless, and her hands became loosely, like a rag doll's (116-117).

The above highlights Ern's neglect and dissatisfaction with the child as he takes no time when he wants to carry her, which leads to the somewhat tragic accident. That is why when the child fell, "Ern saw that they could do no good for her, it was something beyond their resources. He reasoned that it was not his child anyway" (117). Ern's behaviour towards the child's accident could be seen or

considered as an act of dehumanisation and rejection of the inferior race because it did not yield the expected outcome of a superior native.

In other words, the imperial agenda in *Benang* is explicit in the objectification of the native as the subject and the peripheral 'Other.' Ern's act also depicts a two-sided currency of disgust and disgrace on his part because the specie, which he is father to, is a social misfit. This is more of the reason why "Ern drove her to a hospital in another town, at the terminus of the rail network, and abandoned her with a note explaining her condition and that the father was a policeman. He gave no name, and no address" (117). As a peripheral being, Ern's daughter is ejected to the suburbia of power within postcolonial discourse in Aboriginal literature with a focus on Kim Scott's *Benang*. Ern's apocalyptic act extrapolates the cataclysm and extent to which the colonial agenda was based on domination, oppression, and dehumanisation of the native. As a force of law and order, he rather oppresses the aborigines, for which it is said he is the protector. In like manner, Ern works to conceal the identity of the child because it reminds him of his failure, reasons why he does not conform to identifying himself as the father of the child or giving any address that may help to later identify or trace the child's parentage in the future. Much still, the notion of representation of the subaltern is speechless because they are oppressed and silenced by the coloniser rather than because they are represented by imperialists. As to that which Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* concurs "and there one lies body to body with one's blackness or one's whiteness, in full narcissistic cry, each sealed into his own peculiarity with, it is true, now and then a flash or so, but these are threatened at their source" (31). Put simply, the notion of the cosmology of the family is re-interrogated in Scott's *Benang* with the absence of parental love. This absence of parental love blurs the racial link that the British imperial order tries to establish in the process of breeding 'natives' with 'whites.' Ern's unruly behaviour equally highlights the colonial metaphor raised by postcolonial discourse in explicitly categorising the imaginary homeland as oriental spaces which need to be filled with the presence of the 'Mission Civilisatrice' or the Colonial Enterprise.

RACIAL LINES

From another perspective, Kim Scott's *Benang* recounts the notion of racial boundaries erected within Gebalup to prevent inferior natives from trespassing town. He underscores within his fiction that these settlements in Gebalup are specifically attributed to white settlers and natives of a superior breed. This is because the white settlers consider most of these inferior breeds as social misfits, not only because they

are an unfulfilled project of colonial transformation but also because they are in-betweens, who have lower qualities imbibed in their behavioural patterns than those which could be linked to white hegemony. The narrator underscores:

Ern insisted that Topsy, like Kathleen should not leave the confines of his yard except to go to school. Ern knew that Harriette would not be allowed in most towns. But here, she, Kathleen, will and Topsy...Ernest expounded his progressive views to some of the individuals in wary town. The mother, the little girls; they are not like those others. See how Topsy does at school. It's the white blood. Such a shame about the measles, the weak constitutions, such a shame that more of their descendants had not survived. But there were never many here anyway. He sighed, and was gathering a reputation as something as a soft-hearted expert (116).

The presentation of white superiority complex is registered in the excerpt above as Ern justifies Topsy's intelligence to the white genes which are part of her, and at the same time, he relates clumsiness and measles to breeds that do not have more white blood. Ern's behaviour towards his mixed-race family is like the disdain or the reserve he has for the other natives whom he is supposed to protect. He considers the women he keeps as his sex partners rather than his protégées. Even though he had once pretended to refute the fact of being part of the imperial sexual agenda, as Harley notes:

I once put it to Ern that he married Kathleen, and tried to keep Harriette, as some sort of display. His watery eyes goggled at me, and I heard uncle will coming so I did not pressure him any further. He wished to keep her as a display as him domestic as a tamed tribute to Himself (115).

Harley's proposal to Ern is influenced by the way he has seen Ern behaving towards Kathleen and Henriette. Harley understands that Ern needs a sexual partner who is of superior breed, and at such, Kathleen could be his wife; meanwhile, Henriette could serve as a tool for sexual satisfaction or as a substitute when Henriette is not available. Harley's stream of thought is significant because, as a hybrid, he can easily understand the functionality of the coloniser's mindset as he purports, "But I know best and I also have to work right through this white way of thinking, it is the only way to be sure (114)." Harley's justification of knowledge equally places him at the centre of agency within postcolonial discourse because he is the omniscient sufferer who can represent the diction of the hybrid as the 'Self' and the 'Other' from ambivalent perspectives.

Similarly, the traumatic experience of natives in Scott's *Benang* explicates the predicament that the natives have when they get married to whites, most especially when native women of superior breed get married to white men. It results

in suppression and regret because of the difficulty in resisting white patriarchal considerations that seek to preserve the white skin in its perfect state. Ern's refusal to let Kathleen go out of his house attests to the fact that she and her baby are oppressed by Ern because he is afraid the baby will develop dark skin if tanned by the sun. The narrator underscores:

It was easy, after all, for Kathleen to keep the child indoors, since Ern refused to let her leave the house except to hang out washing or some such thing. He allowed her a small garden which she and Topsy tended in the early mornings and evenings...he gave Kathleen gloves to wear (114).

The identification process is concealed by Ern here. As a police officer, he does not want his neighbours to understand that Kathleen and Topsy are not white settlers. He registers the blow that his profession and life might receive if he is interrogated by other whites. It is for this reason that he confines Kathleen and Topsy indoors at hours when they are supposed to be outdoors. As Bob Connell concurs:

The number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women. Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige, and the right to command (Quoted in *Empires and Boundary*, 43).

The link between patriarchy and hegemony is established in Ern's behaviour in trying to suppress his concubines. As both a man and a white, he can implement an oppressive schedule for both Kathleen and Topsy.

In like manner, the colonial project in Scott's *Benang* depicts the oppressive praxis that juxtaposes race and place. Most characters of native origins are forbidden to trespass within white settlements. This explains the extent to which reports are filed to remind the administration of natives who try to cross racial limitations. The 'Extract from the file of Sandy Masson' purports:

Mason in my opinion, has the appearance of a half-caste, but is certainly lighter in colour than usual. He is a man of about 40 years of age, tall and very thin. His hair is completely white, and he has quite a refined appearance, although he looks like a sick man, and this may account for his lightness in colour. He lives in an ordinary house, which from outward appearance is in good order, but no attempt is made to cultivate the ground surrounding the house...I could not question Mason as to his antecedents, and try as I would, I could not turn the conversation to the matter of his family connections (43).

The above excerpt elucidates the extent to which the colonial project goes as far as getting relevant information to determine who is of a lower breed or of an upper

breed, and the position that each of them should be located. Kim Scott's presentation goes further to depict the racial classification of mixed faces. Mason's description registers the propensity of the imperial project to exclude Mason from the neighbourhood if he does not belong to the same racial stratification as his neighbours. The narrator explicates the difficulties of asking questions connected to Mason's family because he underscores how sensitive it is. It is for this reason that he relies on the report from Mustle, thus:

Mustle, who seemed to know quite a lot about Mason's sisters at Gebalup and their children, told me that Mason claims to be quarter-caste, and that he had never heard him make any reference to having Maori blood. Mustle talked quite freely, and I requested him not to make any mention to Mason of enquiries being made about him, which he promised to refrain from doing (44).

The inquiries made to know more about Mason have an agenda to exclude him from the settlement because he is more of a half-caste and imbibes Maori blood. Also, the inquiries that C-proud makes with the help of Mustle are geared to appease discontents with the influential benefits that Mason profits from because he is considered a quarter-caste. The oppressive agenda of colonial policy is seen in the displacement of the natives to fit ascribed constructs that determine racial boundaries. Most of these boundaries established in the form of settlements are instituted by Auber Neville, who opens the first Native settlement to oppress and exploit them. However, the white imperialist, Auber Neville, justifies this establishment as a possibility of determining an ideal space for natives. He says:

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

Accordingly, the excerpt is the crux of colonial paradoxes as far as relocating the natives is concerned. Auber believes that the segregation of natives will work for their personal benefits. This rather becomes ironic to the intentions and arguments he raises to justify this claim. Considering that the natives had been living in distinct locations and belonging to more minute, specified ethnic groups, their regroupings rather suppress the cultural diversity that these specificities represent within Aboriginal space. Auber contradicts the prior objective of erecting these settlements when he tries to compare it to 'An ideal camp,' because the camp only serves as a 'home' to ex-British convicts who now operate as officials. On the contrary, the

camps symbolise forceful displacement and re-placement of the natives because even though they are within Aboriginal Citizenship, they are ‘unhomed’ since they cannot identify themselves with the neo-imperial location created as specified for them by white superiority policies. As Elizabeth Webby in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* writes:

The arrival of the British at Sydney Cove in 1788 initiated a series of processes which, in various ways and to different degrees in different regions, brought death, displacement, and severe cultural disruption to Aboriginal peoples. Waves of frontier violence and disease decimated Aboriginal populations; welfare authorities took Aboriginal children from their families; missionaries banned traditional languages and ceremonies; and white landholders locked Aboriginal people off their country. Indigenous oral knowledge systems were thus seriously jeopardised or destroyed outright (19).

Again, Auber’s statement justifies the British colonial policy of divide and the erection of the first settlement in 1915. This view is re-interrogated by Peter Sutton in “Stanner and Aboriginal Land Use,” who avers “Some Australians thought, rather simplistically, that the connections between Indigenous people and their lands were so intrinsic to their identity, and to their spiritual life, that they would not contemplate such a change and its potential for severance of the people from the country” (169). Sutton looks at relocations of indigenes as a policy that deprives the natives of their land. On the contrary, Auber underscores the need to have the ‘fondling lot’ that could serve as the labour force whenever the need arises. The consideration Auber has for the natives could be linked to the subaltern connotation the imperialists have for the Aborigines. He considers the Aborigines to be a ‘child race’ that needs to be groomed in order not to become a nuisance to ‘the mother neighbour.’ It is about this that Auber reiterates as an imperial panacea that will lead to ‘Absorption’ and ‘Assimilation’ of higher breeds closer to the white race.

RACIAL FRAGMENTS

More still, Aborigines are subjected to seclusion within their settlements, which leads to more problems of dehumanisation. Scott’s *Benang* presents the fragments consequential of racial mixtures. Jack Chatalong’s request is to be promoted to a better local by the side of other natives who are of superior breeds. It is premised on this that Jack Chatalong requested to be granted a lease permitting him to move to other places in Gebalup. Jack Chatalong writes:

In regards of the Aborigines, the Act has it I am a half-caste and I don’t mix up with the Blacks, and I work Hard and earn a living the same as a white man

would. My mother was a black woman, and my father was a white man and I can read and write, but I have now been barred from going into a pub and having a drink because I have got no permit so could you do anything in the way of granting me a certificate of exemption (64).

Jack Chatalong's exemption is based on the assumption or presumptive racial acts that forbid people of his calibre to trespass or infringe on white settlements. Jack expresses his need to be given a particular status by the imperial administration because his constitution and the services he has been rendering reveal qualities that could be attributed to his white heritage. Also, the imperialist has taught Jack, like many other natives, to reject his entire 'Self' because he wants to satisfy colonial strictures of whiteness. This depicts the extent to which the negro has been mis-educated to look at himself as a subaltern. Fanon has noted that "The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth. He is in comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he encounters someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises" (163). Again, Jack is estranged in the way in which he lives. It is noted, "Chatalong lived there, but had no tease. He kept himself apart, believed he kept his independence" (64). This presents Jack's life as a synopsis of perpetual self-effacement and cultural alienation from his fellow natives. The intentions of getting a permit rather led to Jack's frustration. The Under Secretary in charge of Aborigines responds thus: "With reference to your letter of 26th October last, applying for a certificate of exemption under the Aborigines Act, I am directed by the Chief Protector of Aborigines to advise that your application cannot be granted..." (67).

This corroborates the colonial intention of British oppressive acts to continue in the oppression of the natives, no matter how hard they work to be assimilated or absorbed into white settlements. Jack is not granted any permit for recognition reasons. He wants to know why he is not eligible to receive the permit, even though he believes he has undergone all that it takes to be granted a favourable reply; he is rejected. It is for this reason that Jack rather resists the Protector's decision by writing back thus:

On the twenty sixth of last October, I applied for a Certificate of Exemption and received a letter stating that my application cannot be granted and another thing I would like to know am I under the Aborigines Act or am I not and if I am under the Aborigines Act I don't think it is right that I should be under the Aborigines Act because I do not mix up with them nor live with them and I am always with white people (68).

Jack's ambiguity and trauma come from the fact that he is unable to understand the internal constitution of the Aboriginal laws for which he has consecrated his

entire life, to achieve imperial recognition. It is for this reason that he regards the Aboriginal act as double jeopardy because it is ambivalent and paradoxical, given that it has rather projected him as an in-between, given that he does not belong to either the coloniser or the natives, whom he has been regarding with much disdain and disgust. Jack believes that he ought to be given preferential treatment, which is why he writes the above rejoinder to the protector of Aborigines. However, the response he equally receives is not different from the previous letters. This is concurred thus:

Sir, in reply to your letter of the 17th ultimo, I beg to advise you that the reason you have been refused a certificate of Exemption under the Aborigines Act is that insufficient evidence has been submitted to show why the privilege should be granted to you. Being a half-caste, you come within the provisions of the Aborigines Act, though half-castes are not specifically referred to in every section. In this connection, however, I would point out that there is a penalty for supplying liquor to Aborigines or half-castes (69).

The protector reiterates the reason for the refusal to grant a certificate to Jack and even threatens him by informing him of the penalty he could be subjected to if he insists on having this certificate of exemption subsequently. Jack's frustration could be perceived as a microcosm of the malaise that characterises racial mixtures of his calibre. This is because he is culturally estranged and alienated from both cultures.

CONCLUSION

Postcolonial fiction continues to be informed by how the unbalanced relationship between the coloniser and colonised is depicted in fiction. Scott's *Benang* espouses the colonial situation that opposes the white settlers and the Aborigines. It is for this reason that this paper had as its objective to present how racial mixtures propagated by breeding in the novel lead to fragmented and in-between breeds that struggle to reconfigure their identities themselves which rather harnesses their traumatic symptoms.

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