

*Tracking precarious lives in Stephen Kinnane's Shadow Lines*

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**Abstract:** Stephen Kinnane's *Shadow Lines* (2003) pertains to the genre of Indigenous inter-generational life writing in which the younger generation of Indigenous writers substitutes white editors in recording the lives and memories of their own families and community elders, thus seizing a greater amount of control over the representations of Australian Indigeneti. Kinnane extends the genre by appropriating the tools of colonial domination, most notably the archive, and by inscribing, in a self-reflective way, his own subjectivity in the text. As a result, *Shadow Lines* is a multilayered narrative that presents a functional and contented interracial marriage and family life of Kinnane's grandparents, as a way of counteracting the close regulation and policing of Aboriginality in the early twentieth-century Western Australia. In addition, Kinnane juxtaposes the archival materials to other sources of information, mostly the orally transmitted memories of relatives and friends, thus reclaiming the agency of his ancestors and providing a truthful representation of their lives and the lives of the local Indigenous community.

**Keywords:** *Shadow Lines*; Stephen Kinanne; Indigenous inter-generational collaborative life writing; interracial marriage; appropriating colonial archive;

The genre of Indigenous life writing has a rich and diverse history in Australian literary production. Auto/biographies of individuals, extended families and whole communities have often provided forms of counter-history—a sound alternative to dominant narratives of the process of Australian nation-building—and have also functioned as acts of remembrance, resisting historical amnesia connected to the violent history of Aboriginal dispossession. Foundational life-writing projects, often authored by Indigenous women,<sup>1</sup> dominated the period between the 1960s and 1980s and focused on reclaiming Indigenous family and kinship, survival and continuity, as well as on the continuing oppression of these families and kinships by state intervention and racial segregation. Formally, these projects were constructed, as well as interpreted, mostly as

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<sup>1</sup> For the complex reasons behind women authors' domination in the genre of Indigenous life writing in Australia, see, for example, Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (42) or Bain Attwood, "Learning About the Truth: The Stolen Generations Narrative" (198).

socio-historical documentaries with both political and personal investments. However, more recent life-writing narratives, while still retaining a strong sense of the politics of unsettling the settler Australia's conscience, have also turned to elaborate narrative structures, ambivalent tropes and imaginary returns to the past.

One of the arenas to vocalize such strategies has been the subgenre of inter-generational collaborative life writing. Multiple voices from past and present combine to tell not one authoritative narrative of Aboriginal suffering and survival, but rather multiple stories of many kinds of sufferings and survivals. As the younger generation of Indigenous writers takes on the role of recording the lives and memories of their own family members and community elders, substituting white researchers and seizing a greater amount of control over the representations of Australian Indigeneity, they also begin appropriating, for their own purposes, the tools of colonial domination, most notably the archive, as will be examined later. In addition, these writers have also engaged in various kinds of collaborations, inter-generational and communal, not only functioning as biographers but also recording their own subjectivities and implications in the transgenerational trauma of colonization.<sup>2</sup> Their narratives expose, in a self-reflective, sometimes even metatextual way, intricate dynamics and interrelations between one or more generations of Indigenous people. Ground-breaking inter-generational collaborative narratives, such as *Auntie Rita* (1994) by Rita and Jackie Huggins and *Kayang and Me* (2005) by Kim Scott and Hazel Brown,<sup>3</sup> provide valuable insights into diverse perspectives on Indigenous lives a generation apart, focusing as they often do on exploring the slippages and spaces in between formalized and institutionalized regimes of living, and thus deliberately work in ambivalences, reflections, uncertainties.

This article seeks to look more closely at both thematic and formal strategies and at innovations in one of the more recent inter-generational life-writing projects. Stephen Kinnane's *Shadow Lines* (2003) turns to the contested ground of interracial relationships in the early twentieth-century Western Australia under the close regulatory attention of A. O. Neville's Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Kinnane steps into the role of a chronicler who records the lives of his maternal grandparents—Jessie Argyle, an Indigenous woman from East Kimberly who was removed at the age of five from her

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<sup>2</sup> It may be illuminating to relate these recent developments in the genre of Indigenous life writing to the broader context of anthropological and ethnographic writing which displays a relatively long tradition of subjective and self-reflective mode of writing, often registering the observer's/biographer's selves *in* their texts. In addition, the confluence of autobiography and ethnography has been examined by a number of scholarly studies, Françoise Lionnet's *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989) among them. Another prominent genre to be noted here as a point of reference is the so-called *ego-histoire*, originating in the French stream of historiography developed by Pierre Nora in the 1980s, which also writes the author's self in the text, sometimes up to the point of writing an autobiographical narrative.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of narrative transgressions and the politics and poetics of inscribing "dual voice" in both *Auntie Rita* and *Kayang & Me*, see Martina Horáková, "Indigenous Collaborative Life Writing: Narrative Transgression in *Auntie Rita* and *Kayang & Me*" in *Alternatives in Biography: Writing Lives in Diverse English-language Contexts* by Stephen Hardy, Martina Horáková, Michael M. Kaylor and Katerina Prajznerova (Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2012, pp. 93-138).

Aboriginal family and community in 1906, and Edward Smith, an Englishman who fled London and migrated to Australia in 1909 as an eighteen-year-old youth. *Shadow Lines*, as the title suggests and Kinnane himself confirms towards the end of his text, is a story about transgressing the “hard, inflexible boundaries that are laid down by narrow definitions of race, nationalism and religion” (378). Kinnane the biographer sifts through archives, diaries and letters, interviews both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contemporaries of his grandparents and their descendants, and travels through his grandparents’ homelands. In his pursuit, he not only imaginatively re-constructs the narrative of Jessie and Edward’s union in all its complexity and, as mentioned previously, provides another story which forms an alternative to the panopticon of Western Australian regulation of Aboriginal lives, but he also writes himself in this narrative. He does this through exposing his quest to re-trace the story of their lives together; through reflecting on his own sense of Indigeneity and his relationship to the land and its people; through providing commentary and a detailed historical context; through interweaving the lives of his ancestors with his own. I will argue that Kinnane presents a functional and contented interracial marriage and family life as a way to counteract the close regulation and policing of Aboriginality in that particular time and place as well as the trope of dysfunctional family that is still very current. Further, I will suggest that by appropriating the archival materials to do this and juxtaposing them to other sources of information, mostly the orally transmitted memories of relatives and friends, Kinnane reclaims the agency of his ancestors, providing a truthful representation of their lives and the lives of the local Indigenous community.

### **Relating “kin-fused” stories**

The context of interracial relationships and the ways in which they have shaped Australian history reveal the network of variously administered and disguised policies of separation, biological absorption and assimilation. While there is no doubt that some of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women were voluntary and with the consent of both parties, as is the case of Kinnane’s grandparents, it is, however, the haunting narrative of illicit and mostly abusive sexual relationships of white men and Aboriginal women that continues to be a painful reminder of broken familial and kinship ties and of the racial and patriarchal subjugation of Indigenous women. In her recent interrogation of the socio-historical role of white settler men “who enforced segregation by day and pursued Aboriginal women by night”, fathering a population of the so-called “half-caste” children who were later subjected to severe regulatory policies under the Aboriginal Protection Boards, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey discusses these interracial relationships in terms of “public secrecy” and “white closets” (“White Closets” 57). Drawing on Michael Taussig’s concept of “public secrecy” as well as on W.H. Stanner’s description of the structural “indifference” of European settlers towards the Aboriginal fate, she argues that the complex web of simultaneously perpetuating/known about and not acknowledging the interrelatedness of settler and Aboriginal families has, in fact, been indirectly endorsed and cultivated by the authorities in the name of biological absorption and the enhancement of whiteness as a structural power in establishing race relations in settler Australia (58). *Shadow Lines* offers an interesting illustration of such arguments: the politics of interracial relationships is unfolded through several aspects that together articulate a counter-narrative to the dominant account of creating a racially homogeneous nation. These aspects, examined in the following analysis, include: Jessie Argyle’s background of being the daughter of a white father and Aboriginal mother; the interracial marriage between herself and Edward Smith, a relationship that was both forbidden and secretly

desired by the authorities; and finally, the larger historical narrative of interracial relationships in times of strict racial segregation—a feature that *Shadow Lines* employs through depicting a network of both friendships and sexual relationships between Aboriginal people and white settlers, on the one hand, and between Aboriginal people and African American soldiers in Perth during and shortly after the Second World War, on the other.

Echoing Probyn-Rapsey's biopolitical examination of the national "public secret" and the ways in which a number of Aboriginal life-writing narratives contribute to exposing it, *Shadow Lines* reveals that Kinnane's grandmother was herself a result of the unacknowledged "sexual traffic" between white men and Aboriginal women (Stanner qtd. in Probyn-Rapsey, "White Closets" 59). Thus Jessie Argyle is the daughter of a white pastoral entrepreneur, a pioneer in the Western Australian cattle industry and the head of an influential clan, M. P. Durack, who, as was common at the time, did not recognize her as his daughter (Kinnane 26; 31). Therefore, Jessie was named Argyle, after the station where she was born, and later forcibly removed from by the local police. This subnarrative forms part of a larger body of similar accounts by Indigenous people that contribute to disrupting "the Great Australian silence" (Stanner 189). For example, Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) offers, amongst the many silences and forms of "non-disclosure" (Muecke 128) preserved in the story mainly by Daisy Corunna, a performative act of power through actually naming the white father—in this case another prominent pastoralist, Holden Drake-Brockman. This was an act that must have disturbed settler Australia, provoking a reaction epitomized by the book-length response of Judith Drake-Brockman in *Wongi Wongi: To Speak* (2001), in which she defends her father in the face of allegations exposed in *My Place*.<sup>4</sup> In another example, *Born a Half-Caste* (1985), Marnie Kennedy does not/cannot name her white father but implicates him in the problematic history of both policed and endorsed miscegenation: "My father was an unknown white man—the rat—making me one of the many sunburnt babies to roam our country. I am neither white nor black but of a new breed, to be punished along with our mothers for what we are" (Kennedy 3). These examples demonstrate, on the one hand, the trauma of being excluded from the discourse of the "national" family and from what Probyn-Rapsey has aptly termed the "kin-fused reconciliation" ("Kin-fused" n. pag.); but, on the other hand, they also demonstrate the subversive power of the children of mixed parentage to disturb and shame the "founding fathers".

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the family saga of the Duracks, *Kings in Grass Castles* (1967), M. P. Durack's daughter Mary Durack, a well-known Australian writer, presents her father as a benign carer of both the land and Aboriginal people. Curiously enough, it is the daughters-biographers, not the sons, who set out to celebrate, in one case, and defend, in the other, their fathers and heads of the family clans in the face of potential criticism and/or a straightforward shaming and allegation. It may be argued that these daughters somehow continue the complex legacy of white women in the pastoralist industry whose position in the carefully constructed hierarchy of the station relations has been always intriguing: on the one hand they were obviously racially privileged (standing above Aboriginal stockmen and domestic workers) but simultaneously subject to predominantly patriarchal environment and, for example, largely powerless to prevent the interracial sexual relationships, watching their husbands and fathers sneaking out at night, and often aware of the children begotten from these liaisons.

While relatively few Aboriginal life-writing projects bring forward white fathers or white relatives (Probyn-Rapsey, “Kin-fused” n. pag.), *Shadow Lines* is exceptional in the sense of having the interracial marriage of Jessie Argyle and Edward Smith at its centre.<sup>5</sup> Kinnane manages, with attention paid to the minutest detail, to reconstruct their life together in its entirety and complexity, providing a plastic portrayal of both the benefits and pitfalls of a union that was under the constant surveillance of respective authorities and a threat of incarceration or removal. Indeed, one wonders how this relationship—doomed to fail from the beginning, it would seem—could survive against all odds. Kinnane makes it clear that the permission for the marriage that the couple had to ask of A. O. Neville’s Department was not granted randomly or perfunctorily. On the contrary, in his interpretation it fit a very carefully designed plan, one that fulfills, in a perversely immaculate way, all the parameters of a biopolitical experiment in eugenics. Kinnane speculates:

Mixed marriages were rarely condoned, so why did he [A. O. Neville] approve Edward and Jessie’s marriage when the Department had worked for ten years to try to keep them apart? I believe the decision was due to his growing interest in the ideas of biological absorption as the means to physically assimilate the Aboriginal community into the white community of Western Australia. He was formulating plans to manage men and women like my grandparents, black and white, as a means of breeding Aboriginality out of the Aboriginal community. Gradations of skin colour, calculations of caste, imagined portions of ‘native blood’, and hard-line assimilation policies were to be tools of his proposed absorption. I believe Mr. Neville allowed them to marry as a means of testing some of the new theories he was about to launch upon the public. (223)

What followed in the lives of Jessie and Edward Smith is, in Kinnane’s account, a testimony to the dominant power but also, paradoxically, a demonstration of the failure of the same power to control the subjects of the new policy. While the authorities expected Jessie, by marrying a “respectable” white man, to “sever connections with her Aboriginal family and friends, act white and fade into the suburb” (230), the exact opposite occurred: the house of the Smiths on Glendower Street in the then poor part of Perth became a haven for both the Aboriginal community and later even the white

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<sup>5</sup> Narratives that do focus on interracial relationships and white relatives who were, to a greater or lesser extent, integrated into extended Aboriginal families have been, of course, published before. These include, for example, the classic in the genre, Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (1987). Even though white relatives may be in some texts presented in a positive light, e.g. in Alice Nannup’s *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), most of these earlier portrayals are rather negative, e.g. in Marnie Kennedy’s *Born a Half-Caste* (1985). Recently, however, younger authors have begun to reclaim their non-Indigenous ancestors in an attempt to work through the complexities of this heritage. Examples include, among others, Kim Scott’s life-writing project *Kayang and Me* (2005), or Fiona Wirrer-George Oochunung’s *Double Native* (2012).

neighbourhood, “another black-white meeting place in the city” (229). It was thanks to the local close-knit community, including Aboriginal friends, white neighbours and even some police constables who offered support and covered for each other, as well as to a sophisticated series of strategies of dealing with the Department’s interventions that the extended family survived. Kinnane’s reconstruction of the correspondence between the Department and Edward and Jessie Smith shows how, in spite of the power concentrated in the hands of the Chief Protector, the Department was in fact helpless to prevent the comings and goings of an increasing stream of people, including taken-in children, abandoned women, relatives from rural areas looking for work in the city, and later friends, visitors and soldiers, both black and white, seeking entertainment, liquor and a game of cards (Kinnane 229-30).

While Jessie Smith became the centre of the household and the matriarch in the urban Noongar community, her husband’s presence remains intriguingly overshadowed in the narrative. Edward is portrayed as a rather shy introvert, an impression enhanced by his handicap of severed vocal chords as a result of diphtheria, which left him only whispering (Kinnane 108). To a certain extent he is an outsider in Australia, a loner whose family is left behind in England, a young man who came, like many other before him, to re-invent himself in a distant exotic land, with vague “dreams of starting up a farm” (75), dreams which largely failed. By marrying Jessie Argyle, he was adopted not only into an extended Aboriginal family, but also into a minority subjected to racial ostracism. In this sense, he might be thought of as a liminal figure: on the one hand, as a white person (and an Englishman) he is most likely to be on the side of the dominant power and Kinnane is not blind to his complicity in the process of Indigenous dispossession, most notably when Edward becomes employed as a “second boss” in the notorious Moore River Native Settlement:

[Edward] might have been a pushover, but he was still a white man in a place where white equaled boss equaled power. Even if he was a second boss ... he was still a boss. Edward might have had to defer to the superintendent, to the first boss, and he might have only spoken in a whisper, but the trackers didn’t need more than a whispered instructions to act (157).

A similar reflection is articulated in another recent work of inter-generational life writing, *Kayang & Me*, in which Kim Scott examines his Noongar ancestors’ histories, foregrounding their complex negotiations between resistance and complicity, and between the two cultures. On the other hand, Kinnane’s narrative, although it focuses predominantly on the Aboriginal community, is instructive in outlining the biography of a white man who, by marrying into an Aboriginal extended family, also experienced the precariousness of their lives. In their household, Edward functions as a shield against constant threats from the authorities; but, at the same time, he is held responsible by the Department for not being able to prevent his wife from “suffering” Aboriginal people in their home, and is himself subjected to bullying and to the threat of incarceration. One may wonder whether someone like Edward Smith, who “did not have his own sense of community then” (159), who had to learn to accept and respect a radically different worldview (rather than impose his own on his family), might have at least approximated a process of becoming at home in the new land, and whether the Aboriginal kin could have provided him with an alternative sense of belonging. “Edward had entered into histories that most white people manage to avoid their entire lives, Aboriginal histories, and I believe he left transformed by his experience” (163), concludes Kinnane, and it

may be argued that it is precisely the liminality of Edward that leads to his transformation and perhaps even to a qualitatively different kind of “kin-fused reconciliation”.

In terms of the politics of interracial relationships in late 1930s and early 1940s Western Australia, perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of Kinnane’s narrative (certainly for non-Australian readers) is his outlining of the level of racial segregation and the heavy regulation of Aboriginal people’s lives by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. However, he also shows that the reality was sometimes very different. The Smiths’ house on Glendower Street became an important hub of black and white interaction, including not only relationships between men and women but also friendships between black and white men initiated during the service—an antithesis of the widely adopted policy of racial segregation. Kinnane’s research meticulously records the gradual changes in the Department’s policies regarding interracial relationships, pointing out that while before the war Neville’s main preoccupation was to monitor (and prevent) the “half-caste” girls’ relationships with both white and “full-blood” Aboriginal men, during the war years the Department became obsessed with policing relationships between Aboriginal women and the African American soldiers who were stationed at the Submarine Base at Fremantle.

This shift in management and focus of control can be explained in terms of an increasing emphasis on the ideology of biological absorption. Katherine Ellinghouse argues that “[f]ar from an earlier moral concern to prevent ‘miscegenation’ between white men and Aboriginal women, by 1936, according to the government, ‘the best thing that [could] happen to a half-caste [was] to marry a white’” (191). Ellinghouse goes on to explain that “[w]hile government rhetoric often indicated an implicit acceptance of interracial sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women, it remained adamant in its condemnation of relationships between men of other ethnic backgrounds and Aboriginal women” (192). Although Ellinghouse’s analysis concerns mainly Asian and Torres Strait Islander minorities, it can be applied to the almost schizophrenic situation that is depicted in *Shadow Lines*: Perth became “paranoid about black American servicemen” interacting with both whites and Aboriginal people, while African Americans were welcomed at Aboriginal card games as they “had more money, they were charming, and they were black” (309). Again, Kinnane’s narrative exposes and celebrates these spaces of limited freedom, of crossing the boundaries set up between the races, between public and private domains, and shows how Aboriginal people could effectively move in between these spaces.

### **Appropriating the archive**

The concept of the archive has become an important device in contemporary Indigenous inter-generational life writing. Rather than referring to a specific, material institution, the archive, especially in the context of colonial governmentality, points to “the entire epistemological complex for producing a comprehensive knowledge within the domain of the British Empire, and its subsequent legacy in the governance of the recently federated states of Australia” (Brewster n.pag.). The legacy of the colonial archive in relation to the Indigenous population of Australia is highly ambivalent. It stands primarily as a symbol of the power to categorize, with scientific precision, people’s lives. As their subjectivities were reduced to anonymously written files administered by metropolitan bureaucrats, Indigenous lives became objectified and dehumanized. In addition, the discourse of the archive relied on a coded language and systems of references in order to prevent those un-authorized “others” from accessing it. Indeed,

much Indigenous life writing that integrates or draws on colonial archival materials emphasizes the difficulties that occur while accessing, working with, and interpreting the archival discourse. In *Shadow Lines*, Kinnane describes his experience of the archive when studying the files about the removal of his grandmother and her brother: “It was all matter-of-factly noted in the Police and Aborigines Department files. The lean sentences, tidy phrases and abbreviated words of bureaucracy were used to begin their story. A simplistic system was in place to decide their future. Although the sentences might be spare, reading these records is like deciphering a code” (18). The sense of the inaccessibility of the archive is voiced in other Indigenous life-writing narratives; for example, Jackie Huggins, who also researched archival files kept on her mother, is very critical of the archive’s “gatekeepers,” demanding that the archival documents be returned to Indigenous communities as “[her] people’s inheritance” (Huggins 132). In most cases, the archive constructed Indigenous identities in the sense that it had the power to determine people’s lives by classifying them within certain categories, especially racial ones: whether people were categorized, in official bureaucratic terminology, as “full-blood,” “half-caste” or “quadroon” had a severe impact upon their lives and what they could and could not do. So, the intervention of the public sphere into the private one has become a fact of life for many Indigenous people.

Today the archive represents multiple meanings. In the context of the Stolen Generations, it may serve, paradoxically, as a means of anchoring the identity of people who were forcibly removed and who lost connections to their country, families and communities. In this ironic twist, the archive has come to substitute traditional genealogy, placing oneself in a larger system of kinship. For some Indigenous people, the archive may remain their only source of written information about their ancestors; for example, some families may turn to the archive to obtain birth certificates or other documents in order to substantiate their connection to land or a particular community within Native Title. Therefore, the archive has become a very important tool for articulating their sense of belonging in space and time, as well as for their personal reconciliation. Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata summarizes the role the archive plays in contemporary Indigenous lives in the following way: “The historical archive plays an important part in our own internal processes of reconciling the past and the present and in many cases this internal reconciliation has to precede, or at least parallel any reconciliation with others” (n. pag.). Nakata further argues that the archive has also shown to Indigenous people the complexity and extent of “government legislation, missionary practice and various commercial interests” in a broader, nationwide perspective. In other words, it made Indigenous people aware of the systematic (and, indeed, global) nature of assimilationist policies, where they might otherwise have been persuaded that such policies were local and marginal. While the archival materials are certainly offensive, confrontational and painful for most Indigenous people, they may also be personally rewarding in the sense of providing an impulse for intellectual engagement in productive analyses and creative work (Nakata n. pag.). Kinnane himself is aware of the colonial archive being “double-edged”: “These [the files] are not the voices of Aboriginal history, but they hold clues to our history. ... If they did not exist, then I would not have access to this information that has helped me piece together my grandmother’s story” (127).

Contemporary Indigenous life writers, such as Stephen Kinnane, Kim Scott or Jackie Huggins, employ the colonial archive by appropriating it for their own purposes. In the words of Amanda Johnson, who includes Kinnane and Scott among the group of contemporary writers of historical fiction, they “dramatis[e] out of the archival

fragment, gleaning the important presences and absences that the fragment ... can sometimes yield” (13). While earlier life writers, such as Doris Pilkington or Alice Nannup, used the archive mainly as a source for linking up families and kin, and for reconstructing Indigenous lives damaged by state intervention, Kinnane not only draws the picture of the extended family tree but he also employs the archive in an imaginative, lyrical way, such as when he takes an archival record (for example, a police report or a letter sent by the Chief Protector) as a starting point and creates a story around this document. He fictionalizes the account, imagining how his grandparents could have responded and how their life stories must have been impacted by decisions over which they had no or very little control. In a sense, his technique could be thought of as a process of *unarchiving* his grandparents’ lives and the particular time period by breathing new life back into the fragmented stories already neatly packaged and stored in the files. The examples include a wide range of strategies, such as when Kinnane provides almost a filmic projection of the Wild Dog Police Station in East Kimberly, which was instrumental in removing Jessie Argyle in 1906: “As I leaf through the documents of the archive, I can see the police station in my mind. Rusty corrugated iron flapping loosely in the hot dry wind. Old tins and powdery remains of cold camp fires blow about the station when the morning winds begin...” (18). Or, Kinnane integrates transcripts of the correspondence between Neville and one of the police constables who was pressed by Neville to “keep a close watch” on Jessie and Edward’s house in Perth, in order to “put a stop” to the continual stream of Aboriginal people coming and going (256) but who is persistent in his reporting that “the Smiths are law-abiding citizens” and that he “cannot find anything to uphold the complaint” (257). Kinnane adds wryly that, unknown to Neville, the same police constable was one of the white neighbours to regularly visit the house for a game of cards and, in a rebellious gesture, refused to denounce the Smiths (257).

The archive is appropriated yet in another way in *Shadow Lines*. By pointing the spotlight back to the archive, rather than just using it to illuminate dark corners of Aboriginal and settler histories, Kinnane foregrounds its constructedness and ideological framework—no longer is the archive an innocent, harmless and objective source of history. Kinnane himself becomes the researcher, “building [his] own files on the people who entered [his] grandmother’s life” (92), undermining the firmly embedded account in which Indigenous people were always only *subjects* of someone else’s research. Now it is A. O. Neville, his Department, the Aboriginal Protection Board and, by extension, the settler culture itself that are in the spotlight, and this spotlight is by no means favourable. This process has been conceptualized by the Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith as “researching back”: Smith uses the term as an analogy to “writing back” or “talking back” (7)—a process by which Indigenous people “have openly challenged the research community about such things as racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research, sounding warning bells that research can no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter” (9). Kinnane uses the archive to point out how it was misused to harm his community and uses his own knowledge as a researcher and historian to draw attention back to the archive. For example, he provides a detailed account of how Neville manipulated evidence in the 1934 Royal Commission into the Treatment of Aborigines to present a favourable picture of his Department’s activities and to justify its existence. Kinnane comments: “Now that we have access to these same departmental files that Mr. Neville was using, it is easy to see that he was misquoting his own evidence, misrepresenting the actual number of children removed from their families and, in particular, misrepresenting his style of administration” (252). This is an

example of researching back in the literal sense, but Kinnane also “researches back” in more metaphorical ways when, for instance, he draws parallels between the “official” photographs taken and filed by Neville, photographs in which Indigenous people are “being ordered to line up and look into the camera”, and photographs taken by Aboriginal people themselves, which betray “the calm and relaxed moment with friends that you *want* to record” (259, original emphasis). If we were to place these two sets of photographs side by side, a “re-signification” of a kind would occur and the ideological framework of the first set would be fully exposed. Through these examples, and many others, Kinnane delegitimizes the power of the colonial archive and diminishes its authority. He presents, in Tuhiwai Smith’s words, “views that are held and articulated ‘by the other sides’” (8), and materializes another, Indigenous knowledge-based archive which establishes a fragile dialogue with the colonial one.

### **Writing himself in**

Apart from providing a complex representation of interracial marriage, the racially mixed community in Perth and alternative Aboriginal histories, *Shadow Lines* also enriches the genre of Indigenous life writing in terms of its form. Kinnane’s text is not a conventional (auto)biography. Although the main narrative focus is on Jessie’s and Edward’s life stories, *Shadow Lines* resonates with the fragments of other lives—relatives, friends, community leaders. Kinnane integrates recorded and transcribed, both first-person and third-person, memories of his own mother Betty—Jessie and Edward’s only child—as well as those of Jessie’s Aboriginal women friends and post-war Aboriginal activists, such as Helena Clarke and Thomas Bropho, Jessie’s brother. The result is a collective biography of the Western Australian urban Aboriginal community whose lives revolved, involuntarily, around the Moore River Native Settlement and later around wartime and post-war racially segregated Perth. This collectiveness and relationality is a recurrent feature (though not exclusively) in most Indigenous life writing that rarely focuses solely on the chronological progress of an individual’s life as we know it from conventional Western literary auto/biographies. Arnold Krupat, focusing on North American Indigenous life writing, uses the notion of synecdoche for describing the individual’s sense of self as perceived “in relation to collective units or groupings” (212). This is not to say that non-Indigenous life writing does not present accounts of the self-in-relation-to-others, but it is rather about the extent to which the synecdochic self, as a means of personal representation of a collective entity, is privileged and preferred in Indigenous life writing. Krupat discusses the reasons for this tendency and argues that because early Indigenous life stories were communicated orally and often performed in public for the immediate community of listeners, they were experienced through a collective effect (216-17). Therefore Krupat draws the conclusion that this process of communicating a personal life story in an oral, dramatic, performative and public manner is more likely to “privilege the synecdochic relation of part-to-whole than the metonymic part-to-part” (217). Again, although it is important to avoid essentialising claims about the character of *all* Indigenous life writing (and certainly critical discussions of Aboriginal life writing in Australia have witnessed complex debates about more individualistic approaches to representing Aboriginal lives), the analyses of particular narratives tend to confirm this thesis.

One of the most significant narrative innovations in *Shadow Lines* is the way in which Kinnane writes in his own subjectivity. As opposed to earlier, foundational life narratives, authored in many cases by Indigenous informants, who provided the content via their memories, in collaboration with non-Indigenous editors, who transcribed and edited, with various degrees of intervention, the final account, Kinnane adopts a

different approach. He deliberately and self-reflexively exposes his role in the whole process of researching and producing the narrative, describing in great detail his quest to piece together his grandparents' biographies, his feelings and doubts when confronted with multiple stories, both oral and archival, the benefits and pitfalls of gathering materials, of meeting people involved, of travelling to relevant places. Ultimately, it is a story as much about him and how the knowledge of his ancestors' life stories might shape his own path, as it is about his grandparents.

Kinnane integrates fragments of his own autobiography, for example, when his vivid depictions of Jessie and Edward's first house on the Glendower street and his mother Betty's first years of life there are interwoven into his own memories of growing up with his siblings in a similar house in suburban Perth. His recollections echo those of his mother's childhood: he is aware of a "sense of community", "shared history", a "collective of aunties, uncles, foster-brothers and neighbours" (235). The narrative itself opens with a chapter titled simply "skin", which consists of mosaic-like fragments of the past and the present that eventually fit together. Importantly, Kinnane begins this section with a spatial history of the Miriwoong country. Following the traditions, he *places* both Jessie Argyle and himself in relation to the people and the land, acknowledging their skins (11). The history of the place which has been submerged, both literally and metaphorically, beneath the waters of Lake Argyle, is followed by a filmic cut to the present, in which Kinnane travels to his grandmother's country to reconnect with extended family. It is a journey important for his project, but it also shapes his own sense of identity and belonging, as "it is a return" of "a southern city fella" (16): "This place, my skin, has become my starting point, a place from which I am linked and claimed. Being my grandmother's beginning point also, there's an important symmetry, a reconnection to her belonging within country that was disrupted with her removal" (17). It is the metaphor of tracking—a resonant and recurring trope in the history of Aboriginal representations—which Kinnane employs throughout his search to reveal the tangible links that exist between painful history that has been almost forgotten but is being reclaimed in the present, because "cuts leave scars. Scars leave tracks. Tracks can be followed" (12).

The author's voice has yet another important function in his account: apart from being a biographer and occasional autobiographer, he also adopts the role of a historiographer. As was already suggested, Kinnane is a historian and experienced researcher, and, as such, he holds the privileged position of someone who has the cultural capital and education to intervene critically in dominant discourses (such as the history of Australia). He takes advantage of this opportunity in a way that is comparable to other Indigenous authors of the younger generation who in their more recent life-writing projects often take on the task of outlining a larger historical context, which itself frames the life stories of their ancestors and family members. The tone of such passages is frequently informative, educational or academic. It is this combination of personal life stories and historiography, I would suggest, that has contributed to establishing the genre as a powerful medium of interrogating perceptions of Australian history and helped shift public opinion on Aboriginal issues and racial discrimination in Australia. Thus Kinnane patiently and in much detail recounts historical events from the Indigenous point of view, events that are shown to have had important and often devastating consequences for Aboriginal lives. Examples include analyses of changing legislation, such as the 1905 Aborigines Act, as well as instances of "suppressed" history, such as the narrative of Aboriginal men going to war, the community's strategic alliances with African American soldiers or the history of card games and house parties

as a subversive gesture. In these instances, Kinnane is careful to outline the context leading to such legislation—such as the 1904 Roth Royal Commission, the results of which contributed significantly to the mentioned 1905 Aborigines Act (34-35). This context is, of course, necessary for a full understanding of the choices that Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal people had (or rather did not have). Kinnane's role here is that of a mediator, someone who has a deep understanding—even though being a “city fella” (16)—of the significance and functioning of Aboriginal families but also someone who is efficient in contextualizing historical facts and juxtaposing them to collected oral histories. Therefore, the effect of imaginary placing *Shadow Lines* side by side with the “File No. 126/21—J. Argyle Personal File”, which is itself “as thick as a telephone book” (127) is still, even in the twenty-first century, astounding: it dawns on the reader that the extent and impact of the governmentality and biopolitical experiments on Aboriginal population has been enormous. The file, assessed by Kinnane as “Mr. Neville's narrative of my [Kinnane's] grandmother's life” (126), is then overshadowed by the narrative recounted in *Shadow Lines*.

In conclusion, *Shadow Lines* presents an extensive life-writing project which links several issues and provides a number of insights into the lives of the Western Australian Aboriginal community mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. Its main objective, it seems, is to reclaim the agency of voices that were mostly silenced under the colonial regime and represented only through the one-sided and inevitably distorted view of the colonial archive. Kinnane restores the dignity of the precarious lives under scrutiny by empowering them, by re-telling individual life stories, as well as by providing a wider historical context through relating the individual memory-work to the state and the process of nation-building. Kinnane's writing style and narrative strategies, as indicated, refine the genre of Indigenous life writing in Australia. They collapse the problematic boundaries between autobiography and biography, between life writing and history writing, and dissociate themselves from earlier, colonial, largely monologic portrayals of Indigenous lives. In addition, by integrating fictionalized elements based on archival materials, the narrative transcends the category of a social documentary or historiography, and demonstrates a desire for explicitly dialogic structures and multiple voices in order to create a more complex and credible representation. Although a single-authored text, it is a narrative that integrates multiple voices, subjectivities and perspectives and as such can be arguably perceived as a collaborative project. Jane Danielewicz, who examines the issue of agency and pragmatic action in double-voiced autobiographies written through the technique of “re-voicing”—two first-person voices in a single-authored text—argues that agency is “enabled by voice in the text” and “voice signifies presence” (277). Her discussion, although in relation to a different narrative technique, can be relevant for my analysis of *Shadow Lines* in its insistence on the pragmatic action the narratives provide: the author and the participants are transformed by the project, and, in the case of *Shadow Lines*, so is the reader. The narrative cannot, of course, turn back time to repair the lives damaged by colonial usurpation, but it has the power to reclaim and celebrate the network of Indigenous kinship for contemporary generations of Aboriginal people in Australia.

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