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Between two worlds: The identity dilemma and paradox of assimilation in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the racial construction of Aboriginal identity in Thomas Keneally's novel The Chant of *Jimmie Blacksmith*, exploring how colonial Australian society produces and sustains racial hierarchies. It focuses on the character of Jimmie, a half-caste Aboriginal man, whose fractured identity highlights the contradictions of assimilation in late nineteenth-century Australia. Jimmie's struggle serves as a prism revealing systemic mechanisms of exclusion masked as opportunities for inclusion. Using close textual analysis grounded in postcolonial theory, the study draws on Erving Goffman's concept of stigma to show how Aboriginal identity is marked as other, and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to interpret Jimmie's liminal position between colonizer and colonized. The findings demonstrate that assimilation, although promoted as a path to equality, is blocked by structures preserving white dominance, transforming hybridity into a source of alienation rather than inclusion. Jimmie's experiences reveal the tension between imposed racial classification and cultural belonging, illustrating the psychological and cultural impact of assimilation policies. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that assimilation functions not as a bridge to equality but as a mechanism of marginalization that reinforces colonial hierarchies and denies Aboriginal agency. By foregrounding the intersections of stigma and hybridity, the analysis shows how Keneally's historical fiction critically engages with colonial discourse and resonates with contemporary debates about race, assimilation, and systemic inequities in settler-colonial societies.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the profound and enduring white racism against Aborigines in Australian historical novels. It examines the manifestations of white colonialists' manipulation of Aboriginal identity formation by transferring racial stigma to Aborigines and characterizing Aborigines with a tainted identity in colonial Australia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity formation is a fluid and evolving process shaped by cultural, social, and historical forces. In colonial settings, external powers often impose identities rather than allowing individuals to define themselves. Racial hierarchies dictate social positioning, limiting self-determination. In Australia, colonial narratives have deeply influenced the construction of Aboriginal identity, reinforcing exclusionary racial classifications. When British settlers arrived in 1788, they established a racialized system that positioned Aboriginal people as inferior, embedding

hierarchies that continue to shape contemporary debates on identity. As Australia grew, its struggle in constructing a national identity was caught up in its colonial history, its relationship to the British Empire, and its treatment of Aboriginal peoples. These tensions continue to dominate the arguments on race and belonging up to the present day.

Literature has traditionally been a key element in social identity formation, allowing individuals to learn more about their heritage and identity. Australian literature has traditionally expressed Aboriginal identity and colonial experiences within a white European context, thereby reproducing racial subordination and limiting the agency of Aboriginal peoples. Although modern criticism attempts to deconstruct these colonial texts, historical fiction remains a complex genre, as it can reveal historical injustices but also reinforce racial stereotypes of the Aborigines. Through engagement with Australia's colonial past, historical fiction provides a critical platform through which racial constructs continue to influence Aboriginal identity.

Among Australian authors addressing these themes, Thomas Keneally is the author who critically examines the racial hierarchy of the colonists and the influences on the Aborigines in colonial Australia. His historical novel (Keneally, 1972) provides a powerful commentary on racial identity construction, especially the paradox of assimilation for mixed-race people. The main character, *Jimmie Blacksmith*, a man of both Aboriginal and European descent, finds himself at a loss trying to reconcile his cultural duality. Encouraged to assimilate into the white-dominated world, he assumes the white values, marries a white woman, and works hard for his white employers. Both the white society and his Aboriginal tribe reject him despite his attempts. His later resort to violence and revenge against his white employers highlights the inability to assimilate into the colonial system that was built to maintain racial exclusion and forestall the possibility of the Aborigines achieving a sense of belonging.

This study explores how *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* criticizes the racial construction of Aboriginal identity by using the concept of stigma by Erving Goffman and the theory of hybridity by Homi Bhabha. According to Goffman (1963), stigma is a social marker that isolates individuals and supports the marginalization of individuals based on perceived differences. Jimmie is a "half-caste," which alienates him in both his Aboriginal and white communities, further demonstrating how the colonialist system enforces racial hierarchy through the racial stigmatization of the Aborigines. Jimmie's liminality can also be attributed to the hybridity theory proposed by Bhabha (1994), which leaves him in an in-between space where neither group is willing to accept him. His identity crisis reveals the contradictions of assimilation, in that it highlights how colonial discourse constructs racial hybridity as an exclusionary process rather than an inclusionary one.

Although previous research on this novel has focused on violence, history, or style of narration, the paradox of assimilation and its role in the construction of Aboriginal identity have received little attention. This paper fills that gap by showing how Keneally's novel presents assimilation as both an inclusive promise and an exclusionary tool. To elaborate this argument, this paper initially presents the theoretical background, then examines Jimmie's fractured identity and the paradox of assimilation through textual analysis, and concludes with the implications of the argument in the context of the study of Aboriginal identity in postcolonial literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the British settlers arrived in Australia in 1788, approximately 600 Aboriginal tribes lived on this continent and maintained their tribal cultures, traditions, and ways of life for 50,000 years. However, upon their arrival, white settlers deprived the ancestral land of Aboriginal people, forcing them to the margins of society and out of mainstream historical accounts. As the British settlement grew, the Aboriginal tribes were increasingly dispossessed, and their appearance in Australian literature declined. Non-Aboriginal authors either omitted Aboriginal perspectives entirely or characterized them with racial stereotypes.

Australian literature of the 19th century depicted Aboriginals as the inevitable victims of European civilization. Numerous literary works portrayed them as an inferior race that would soon be extinct, perpetuating the myth of Aboriginal extinction. When Aboriginal characters were introduced into literature, they were presented as passive

characters living in a Eurocentric world that legitimized colonial expansion. These narratives erased the agency of Aboriginals and diminished their identities to racial stereotypes that served the interests of colonialists.

In contrast, *In The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith(1972)* Thomas Keneally breaks these conventions and paints a very humanized and complex Aboriginal protagonist. The novel is based on the true story of the Jimmy Governor murders and manhunt at the turn of the 20th century, and it explores racial identity as a place of systematic exclusion, focusing on the futile efforts of Jimmie, a mixed-race Aboriginal who tried to become part of the white world. Through the Aboriginal Jimmie's perspective, Keneally reveals the mental and social issues of a mixed-race person in a racially divided Australia. The novel condemns the mistreatment of Aboriginal people, examines historical violence, and undermines colonial discourses. However, Thomas Keneally's vivid portrayal of racial conflict in this novel also leads to controversy.

In 1972, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* was published and received polarized reviews. It has been praised by some critics as historically rich, psychologically insightful, and complex in narrative, but criticized as paternalistic or excessively violent. Aboriginal activist (Foley, 1972) dismissed the novel as an example of "well-meaning Uncle Tomism" (a willingly submissive attitude of the Black participants in a given interaction and a benevolent but patronizing attitude on the white participants), arguing that it reinforced rather than dismantled colonial narratives. In contrast, Sturm (1973) considered it Keneally's most powerful work, highlighting its unfiltered critique of white oppression in colonial Australia. Similarly, Pierce (1995) and Kiernan (1972) also recognized the novel's radical portrayal of racial violence as a crucial challenge to the "white myth" (narratives that have constructed the national identity by romanticizing or justifying white settlement while often erasing the history of Aboriginal peoples). However, Jones (1972) and Beston (1974) argued about whether Keneally's depictions of violence ultimately reinforced the racial stereotypes he intended to subvert.

Beyond debates on violence and representation, some notable scholars have critiqued *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* for framing Aboriginal identity within a white perspective. Shoemaker (2010) has categorized Keneally as a writer of "concerned conscience"; thus, the novel was driven by guilt and remorse rather than a genuine Aboriginal voice. Reynolds (1981) admitted the progressive intentions of the novel but stated that it was still within the confines of the colonial mindset concerning race and history. Healy (1978) also argued that Keneally had lapsed into the pitfall of liberal racism, where white authors purported to speak on behalf of Aboriginal people instead of amplifying their voices.

In spite of these criticisms, other scholars such as Tiffin (1978) and Lattas (1992) have presented a more sophisticated interpretation. Tiffin recognized the complexity of the novel in the way it deals with race, history, and morality. In *Primitivism, Nationalism, and Individualism in Australian Culture*, Lattas (1992) explored the way that Keneally uses Aboriginality to establish a sense of cultural authenticity, as well as a means of negotiating white Australian identity. He claimed that Keneally's characterization of Jimmie reveals a pattern in Australian literature, where white authors try to tackle Australia's colonial history but end up reaffirming racial hierarchies. In 2021, the award-winning journalist Stan Grant also expressed a critical note about this novel, stating that by portraying Jimmie as a self-loathing character, Keneally overlooked the chance to portray the Aboriginal resistance in a white-dominated society that denied their humanity, equality, or identity. Grant combines literary criticism, self-reflection, and philosophical insight to probe the novel's implications for race, representation, and Australian history.

3. METHODOLOGY

Postcolonial literary studies have examined the novel through various theoretical lenses, yet few have explored it in relation to racial stigma and the theory of hybridity. The concept of hybridity proposed by Bhabha (1994) can be used to explain why Jimmie exists in a liminal state between white settlers and Aboriginal worlds, and the theory of stigma advanced by Goffman (1963) explains how colonial society manipulates racial classification to exclude

Aboriginal people. These insights can provide a better understanding of how Keneally criticizes racial hierarchies and reveals the impossibility of assimilation policy in colonial Australia.

This study combines the theories of Goffman and Bhabha to posit that Jimmie's identity crisis is more than a personal issue; it is the result of colonial systems that refuse to recognize the possibility of hybridity as a legitimate identity. While earlier studies have questioned the ethics of Keneally in his representation of Aboriginality, this paper will focus on the structural critique of racial exclusion in the novel. By examining *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* as a literary interrogation of colonial power, this paper emphasizes how the novel deconstructs racial identity as a social construct shaped by systemic oppression in Australian literature.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding Aboriginal identity in Australia requires exploring the colonial history of Australia. Prior to the concept of identity becoming popular, the struggle to define the self began with the opening of the first prison on this newly discovered land. White Australians have searched for their national identity since European settlement in 1788. The early European settlers in Australia were convicts and admiralty troops, who carried the stigma of their criminal records. Their penal history made them feel that their home country had forsaken them, and this deep-rooted ancestral stigma persisted over many generations of white settlers.

Additionally, these early settlers viewed the land as primitive, mysterious, and hostile, which further enhanced their sense of displacement and loss of identity. Lacking a strong feeling of belonging, they projected their identity anxieties onto the Aboriginal peoples, treating them as outsiders in this new land. In their endeavor to develop a new and stable identity, they stigmatized Aboriginal tribes, perpetuating racial hierarchies that have persisted in Australian history.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith examines how colonial discourse shapes racial identity and places mixed-race people, such as Jimmie, in a state of perpetual exclusion. To explore this identity crisis, this paper utilizes the concept of stigma developed by Goffman and the theory of hybridity by Bhabha, which serve as critical lenses for examining the fractured identity of Jimmie and his failed assimilation. According to Goffman (1963), stigma is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3), which places individuals in a disadvantaged position in society. Stigmatization is not only used at an individual level but also as a systemic colonial tool that strengthens negative stereotypes and institutionalizes the exclusion of marginalized groups. In the novel, Jimmie's "half-caste" identity positions him as an outsider, and no one can accept him into the white settler society or any of the Aboriginal tribes. His racial identity is not merely a biological fact but a colonial classification designed to keep him on the fringes, denying him full participation in either culture.

While Goffman's theory identifies the ways in which stigmatization functions, the concept of hybridity, developed by Bhabha (1994), exposes the contradictions of the processes of colonial identity formation. Bhabha claims that hybridity is the product of colonialism and exposes individuals to a liminal state that renders them neither the colonizer nor the colonized. In this novel, Jimmie's life indicates a kind of hybridity; his attempts to integrate into white society only serve to further marginalize him. Bhabha argues that hybridity fails to reconcile the differences but only reveals the contradictions of colonialism, where the colonized subject is urged to adopt the customs of colonizers but cannot be fully accepted by the colonizers. This paradox is mirrored in the tragic life of Jimmie: even though he has assimilated the values of white settlers, he is still marked by his Aboriginal roots, preventing him from belonging where he desires. His descent into violence is not a sign of his return to Aboriginal identity but a reminder of how alienated he is under colonial rule. His life is a testament to how colonial racial hierarchies ensure that hybridity does not result in integration but rather displacement.

By integrating Goffman's concept of stigma with Bhabha's theory of hybridity, this research reveals that the identity crisis of Jimmie is not his personal failure but rather a consequence of the structural process of racialization of colonialism. His failed assimilation is not a failure on his part but a system that renders Aboriginals as the opposite

of whiteness. This study, with a close textual analysis, contends that *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is a critique of racial exclusion and demonstrates that assimilation is an impossible ideal in a colonial system sustaining racial boundaries.

5. DISCUSSION

The discussion section focuses on how *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* explores Jimmie's identity crisis and the paradox of assimilation within a colonial framework that enforces racial boundaries. Drawing on the concepts of stigma proposed by Goffman and hybridity by Bhabha, this discussion examines how Jimmie struggles to navigate both his Aboriginal tribe and white settler society, only to be rejected by both communities. His attempts to become an assimilated person reveal the strict borders of the colonial system, in which whiteness is an unattainable goal. The rejection and alienation faced by Jimmie when he tries to fit into the white settler society only serve to strengthen his liminality, as he struggles to internalize the prejudices of colonists. His eventual rebellion does not reclaim his Aboriginal identity but rather emphasizes his entrapment in colonial violence. This discussion critically examines how Jimmie's fragmented selfhood reflects broader mechanisms of racial classification and exclusion in colonial literature, demonstrating the impossibility of true belonging in a system designed to marginalize hybrid identities.

Kiernan (1972) argues that the six white characters in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* symbolize the emergence of a white Australia, where each "needs the half-caste to fail to confirm his expectations and sense of superiority." In this dynamic, the powerful white settlers asserted dominance by stripping Aboriginal people of their identity, framing themselves as a superior race with a mission to civilize the Aboriginals. Through this assertion of power, former outcasts who, from the Aboriginal perspective, arrived as invaders redefine themselves as legitimate Australians. That undoubtedly aids them in surviving their identity crisis. This newly constructed identity helps them overcome their historical stigma as convicts and social outcasts. The settlers not only claim superiority but also transfer their own ancestral stigma onto Aboriginal people, using racial stereotypes to cement their dominance. By labeling Aborigines as a "barbaric, uncivilized, and degraded dying race," white settlers erase Aboriginal cultural pride and impose an identity rooted in inferiority and racial stigma.

Nandy (2009) expands on this theme, arguing that mainstream Australia has sought to sever ties with its early history of convict stigma and self-doubt. By projecting their own discarded insecurities onto Aboriginal people, white settlers effectively externalize their self-hatred. This strategy of transferring stigma not only perpetuates racial discrimination but also fuels hostility toward Aboriginal tribes. The white settlers, now redefined as members of a "civilized" culture, reinforce the notion that Aboriginal people embody a racial inferiority marked by what Nandy describes as a "black stigma." Consequently, Aboriginal people are systematically marginalized, excluded from the white-dominated society, and relegated to the fringes of society.

The psychological burden of this imposed identity causes many Aboriginal people to feel alienated and desperate. They are trapped in a colonial system that undermines their existence, and they are unable to find acceptance, no matter how well they adjust to the expectations of the whites. This dynamic is vividly depicted in Keneally's novel, where white Australians continue to stigmatize Aboriginal people as social pariahs even though they have endeavored to assimilate. The novel exposes the inherent contradictions of colonial assimilation. Aboriginal identity is stigmatized, and any efforts to assimilate into white society are ultimately rejected. This highlights the impossibility of genuine belonging for people like Jimmie, whose existence reveals the racial hierarchies that uphold colonial Australia.

5.1. The Identity Dilemma: A Half-Caste Between Two Worlds

In this novel, Aboriginal tribes are forced to live in an environment of racial stigmatization. Due to the increased oppression by white colonists, a sense of powerlessness and fatalism became prevalent among Aboriginal tribes, and widespread demoralization ensued. Many Aborigines find themselves in a vicious cycle of hopelessness and start to

live up to the very stereotypes that white settlers impose around them. They resort to drinking, gambling, and fighting, not because they are flawed, but because they have been beaten down so much by the system that they have lost all sense of morale. Self-hatred is a result of the last phase of colonial subordination in the novel, as some Aborigines call themselves "rubbish" or simply think that they are inferior to white settlers. According to Goffman, Aboriginal identity is disintegrated through this internalized racial stigma, which causes massive psychological and social breakdowns.

Confronted with what Nandy (2009) refers to as "the rape of the soul" or the profound psychological toll of stigmatization in Goffman's concept, many young Aboriginals are trying to escape their doomed fate. Similar to Jimmie, they reject racial markers of Aboriginal identity, attempting to integrate into white society to protect themselves against the same discrimination endured by their parents. They pursue relationships or marriages with lighter-skinned Aboriginals or white people in the hope of changing their social status and escaping their inherited marginalization. However, all their attempts are in vain. White Australians still view them as the Aborigines with racial stigma. Meanwhile, they are regarded as traitors by their own tribes because they have renounced their heritage. These people are trapped in the middle of two worlds, and they, like Jimmie, are alienated from both white and Aboriginal communities.

Jimmie's experience in the novel exemplifies this tragic paradox. He endeavors to assimilate into the white world, but all his attempts deepen his exclusion and reinforce his identity as an outsider. Rather than achieving upward mobility or social acceptance, he becomes emblematic of the contradictions of the colonial system. Instead of gaining social acceptance, he becomes emblematic of the contradictions of the colonial system. The novel portrays how the racial hierarchies sustained by white settlers do not allow for hybrid identities. Rather than providing a way of achieving integration, a colonial society places people in an improbable situation, where assimilation actually results not in acceptance but in further isolation, and ultimately, in self-destruction (as in the case of Jimmie).

5.1.1. Stigma and Racial Hierarchy: Jimmie as a Marked Half-Caste

The plot of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is set in a period when interactions between white settlers and Aboriginal people are frequent but highly unequal. White racism is not only ideological but also permeates everyday life and influences all aspects of social interaction. In Goffman's notion of stigma, white Australians project their ancestral stigma onto the Aborigines as a way of supporting a racial hierarchy that legitimizes white dominance in colonial Australia. Deeply entrenched in Eurocentrism, white settlers are not willing to treat Aboriginal people as equals but rather reduce them to racial stereotypes that validate colonial superiority.

Jimmie, an ambitious half-caste, becomes acutely aware of his racial stigma through the influence of a white missionary, Rev. Neville. As a child, Jimmie excels in Neville's mission school, standing out as a model student who embodies the virtues the missionary deems "civilized." Neville takes pride in shaping Jimmie's ambitions, instilling in him a European sense of property, discipline, and self-worth while simultaneously making him conscious of his racial stigma. Through years of missionary education, Jimmie's tribal identity eroded. Keneally (1972) describes this transformation: "Jimmie's black soul had been most undermined" (p. 8), and "his black core" steadily eroded by "Neville's ceaseless European pride."

As Jimmie internalizes white values, his personality shifts. He adopts an ambitious, calculated demeanor, reminding himself to be "severe with himself and long-suffering" (p. 14). He becomes opportunistic and eager to conform, adjusting his behavior to align with "white commercial moods" (p. 19). In the process, he loses both his Aboriginal innocence and his cultural belonging. Oblivious to the consequences, Neville replaces Jimmie's tribal instincts with middle-class European ideals: hard work, property ownership, social status, and unwavering discipline. Yet, these expectations prove unrealistic, even for the white settlers who impose them. White employers recognize their own moral failings, greed, exploitation, hypocrisy, and racial violence, yet they maintain a facade of moral superiority when dealing with Aboriginal people.

Jimmie's struggles intensify when he works for white people. White employers demand submission while resenting any sign of competence or equality from Aboriginal people. Healy, Jimmie's first white employer, embodies this contradiction. Harsh, miserly, and uneducated, Healy expects Jimmie to fail. However, Jimmie builds a flawless fence, meeting Healy's standards. Rather than appreciating Jimmie's skill, Healy feels threatened, disappointed that Jimmie does not reinforce the stereotype of Aboriginal incompetence and uneasy because Jimmie's diligence exposes his ancestral stigma. This exemplifies Goffman's concept of stigma. Healy, like many white settlers, relies on reinforcing Aboriginal stigma to affirm his own superiority. Since Jimmie's work ethic undermines this dynamic, Healy resorts to antagonism and stigmatization, reinforcing his dominance by ensuring Jimmie remains subordinate.

Jimmie's encounters with white employers illustrate how colonial society constructs racial identity to sustain power. Settlers like Healy, burdened by their own convict heritage and personal failings, cling to their racial status to validate their position in Australian society. They transfer their own historical stigma onto Aboriginal people, using racial hierarchy to mask their insecurities. Through Jimmie's experiences, this novel exposes how colonialism not only marginalizes Aboriginal people but also entraps white settlers in an endless performance of superiority, one that depends on the systematic oppression of Aboriginal people.

5.1.2. Internalizing Stigma: Jimmie's Rejection of His Aboriginal Self

Repeated encounters with white employers force Jimmie to recognize the racial stigma attached to his Aboriginal identity. He begins to view this stigma as an insurmountable barrier to assimilation, triggering resentment toward his own race. When he visits Verona, a degraded and marginalized Aboriginal camp, his reaction reveals his internalized conflict. Keneally (1972) describes his turmoil: "Jimmie seemed taken over by an evil spirit, lassitude and submission he could not account for. Obsessed, he spent time in Verona, frightened by the obsession. Moreover, Verona frightened him too. It seemed that an eye God's eye had ceased to see Verona squarely. The image ran like an ulcer at the edges" (p. 24). To Jimmie, Verona symbolizes the entrenched stigma and degradation of his tribe. Rather than seeing it as part of his heritage, he perceives it as a source of racial stigma, reinforcing his desire to distance himself from his tribe and fully embrace white values.

Determined to escape his racial stigma, Jimmie actively rejects his Aboriginal roots in pursuit of acceptance within white society. He believes that assimilation requires him to sever all ties to his tribe and adopt the ambitions, behaviors, and mindset of white culture. As Goffman argues, his disdain for his own tribe intensifies, and he projects his frustration onto them to cast off his stigma, blaming them for their perceived failures. He scorns their drinking, gambling, and self-indulgence, and condemns their lack of adherence to traditional rituals, accusing them of dishonoring their totems and humbling themselves before white settlers. He directs his anger at their "chaos of black-white meanness" (p. 26), despising their vulnerability and submission. In an ironic twist, Jimmie begins to embody the prejudices white settlers hold against Aboriginal people. His hatred grows so strong that he adopts the colonizers' practice of denigrating his people, despising "as many people as he could" (p. 27).

Jimmie's internalized stigma reaches its peak when he collaborates with white authorities. As a police tracker, he eagerly assists in capturing an Aboriginal man accused of murder, seeing it as an opportunity to prove his alignment with white society. Instead of showing solidarity with his tribe, Jimmie relishes his role, reminding himself to be "savage, a regular vengeance" (p. 37). He directs his resentment toward his own race, punishing them for what he perceives as weakness. His role in the manhunt serves as an act of retribution against his tribe, reinforcing his belief that their inferiority justifies his rejection of them. Drunk on the power of his new role, he feels "lordly drunk" (p. 38), indulging in the same sense of superiority that white settlers use to stigmatize Aboriginal people.

By turning against his tribe, Jimmie embodies the destructive effects of racial stigma in Goffman's notion. His self-hatred drives him to align with the very forces that marginalize him, mirroring white prejudice and oppression. He believes that surrendering his tribal identity and embracing the ideals of the whites will help him to avoid the tragic fate of his parents, but all his attempts to do so make him even more alienated. This novel vividly demonstrates

how colonialism forces Aboriginal people into impossible choices to assimilate at the cost of self-destruction. The tragic fate of Jimmie demonstrates the destructive power of internalized stigma and systemic racism, revealing how colonial ideology can corrupt identity and self-worth.

5.1.3. The Paradox of Assimilation: Jimmie's Failed Pursuit of Whiteness

In this novel, in order to impress his white employers favorably, Jimmie works tirelessly all the time. Yet, no matter how well he behaves, white people still perceive him through the lens of racial stigma. Jimmie attempts to fit the white ideals and break racial stereotypes, which makes him a threat as opposed to an equal. The white employers, as Goffman argues, do not recognize the potential of Jimmie and humiliate him to affirm their superior status and transfer their ancestral stigma to Jimmie every chance they get. Jimmie, however, fails to recognize this deliberate suppression. Instead, he internalizes his failures, attributing them to his black stigma and inadequacy. Believing that self-improvement will grant him acceptance, he pushes himself harder to conform to white values.

As he navigates the white world, Jimmie's frustration and resentment intensify. He grows increasingly aware of his dual identity, caught between the Aboriginal tribe he despises and the white society that refuses to accept him. Having worked for several arrogant white employers, he begins to resent himself for acting superior toward his own tribe while remaining subservient to whites. He yearns for the freedom to "hate, discredit, debase as an equal" (p. 52), but instead, he endures their mockery and condescension. While he finds satisfaction in hearing "that Jimmie, he is not like any other black I saw" (p. 49), he simultaneously feels angry toward his tribe for tolerating white men's exploitation of their wives and accepting racial degradation without resistance. Conflicted and increasingly disillusioned, Jimmie realizes that white society will never fully accept him. When Newby, another white employer, dismisses his dream of assimilation, he delivers a crushing truth.

But it does not matter how many times your descendants bed down, they'll never get anything that doesn't have the tarbrush in it. And it'll always spoil them that little bit of something else (Keneally, 1972).

Hearing these words, Jimmie finally understands that white society will never see him as one of their own. He can no longer endure playing the role of the "willing nigger" (p. 62). Yet, instead of abandoning his dream, he becomes even more determined to erase his Aboriginal identity. Convinced that breeding out his blackness is his only path to acceptance, he seeks relationships with white people, believing this will elevate his status and break free from his racial stigma.

This desperate strategy leads him to marry a white pregnant servant, despite lacking any real affection for her. He sees this union as a stepping stone to a "decent" life, one where society will address him as "Mr. Blacksmith" and treat him as an equal. He clings to the illusion that his assimilation is within reach, refusing to acknowledge that no amount of effort can override the racial barriers imposed upon him. Jimmie is so desperate to become white that his desire to distance himself from his tribe is a tragic paradox because the white world will never accept him completely.

5.2. The In-Between Existence: Jimmie's Struggle for Identity

Jimmie's aspirations of assimilation into the white world finally shatter when his white wife gives birth to a white child, which proves that even his offspring are being untouched by his Aboriginal roots. This fact is a fatal blow to his dream of becoming white. His personality changes drastically as disillusionment sets in. He no longer has a burning desire to prove himself to white society, nor does he harbor resentment toward his own tribe; instead, he falls into a state of confusion and despair. His repeated failures in the white world make him doubt everything about his ambitions and his identity in society.

When his maternal uncle moves in with his family, Jimmie is shocked by the extent to which he has lost all connection to his Aboriginal roots. He has long since separated himself from his tribe to the point where he recognizes that he no longer fits in with his tribal people. Unlike his half-brother Mort and his uncle, he has lost all sense of his Aboriginal heritage. However, irrespective of his denial of being an Aboriginal, the white society still does not accept

him. Jimmie is in a state of identity dilemma and feels isolated and trapped between two worlds. He has sacrificed his tribal ties in pursuit of whiteness, only to find himself alienated from both cultures. He belongs to neither group. This vividly exemplifies the "in-between" space in Bhabha's hybridity theory. The certainty that once drove him has eroded, leaving behind only resentment.

His disillusionment deepens when he learns that Miss Graf, a figure representing white moral authority, is working to destroy his marriage, his last fragile link to the white world. If she succeeds, she will strip away his final hope of assimilation. The realization enrages Jimmie, fueling his fury toward the white-dominated system. He sees clearly now that racism will always define the social order, with whites maintaining dominance and Aborigines relegated to subjugation. His anger reaches a boiling point, pushing him to embrace vengeance:

Jimmie felt close to a mandate to heap coals of fire on Newby's head. Newby must be tested tonight… given the cruelties he had suffered from Healy, Lewis, Farrell, Newby, the shearer's cook, he had a license to run mad (Keneally, 1972).

This moment marks a turning point in Jimmie's struggle for identity. No longer torn between appeasing white society and rejecting his Aboriginal roots, he shifts toward the instincts of his tribal heritage, fighting back against the oppressive system that has rejected him. Embracing resistance gives him a renewed sense of belonging, finally pulling him out of his identity crisis. Though contradictions still exist within him, his path now demands certainty. To act with purpose, he must adopt a clear, oppositional stance: white versus black, oppressor versus oppressed. In choosing defiance, Jimmie finds the resolve that had long eluded him.

5.2.1. Imagining a New Self: Jimmie as a Tribal Hero for Justice

Betrayed and stripped of everything and dreams of a better life, Jimmie finally embraces violence as both an outlet for his rage and a fleeting grasp at power. In the act of rebellion, he momentarily breaks free from the chains of white stigmatization in Goffman's concept. Holding his rifle against Newby's gut, he feels triumphant, as if the bullet itself represents his ambition. The novel captures this transformation.

He was in a fever for some definite release. When he put his rifle against Newby's gut, triumphant, Newby then seemed as if that bullet were his ambition. Jimmie had shown his native malice (Keneally, 1972).

Yet, Jimmie realizes that killing Newby is not enough. His real desire is to eliminate Miss Graf, the self-righteous schoolmistress who embodies the moral authority of white society. More than anything, he wants to strip away her power and challenge the white-dominated system she represents. Miss Graf, determined to keep Aborigines and whites apart, solidifies her position as a figure of moral superiority, reinforcing the racial divide. In the novel, Keneally presents her as a symbolic representation of Australia itself. Jimmie's thoughts vividly capture his descent into vengeance.

In our world, the delusions that killers let into their bloodstreams are the stuff of newsprint and videotape. A reader should be spared. Enough to say: Jimmie admitted to his body a drunken judgmental majesty, a sense that the sharp-edged stars impelled him. He felt large with a royal fever, with rebirth. He was in the lizard's gut once more (Keneally, 1972).

Though Jimmie's actions reflect the brutal traditions of ritual vengeance, his rebellion extends beyond tribal instincts. He does not kill simply to satisfy an ancient blood feud; he frames his violence as an act of war against the white world, reflecting both the psychological pressures of internalized stigma and the contradictions of his hybrid identity. His actions reveal how systemic marginalization and in-between existence can manifest as resistance within colonial contexts. After experiencing "the ease of killing," he justifies his actions as part of a larger struggle.

He chopped Miss Graf leisurely between her hip and ribs, the rate at which dignity could be severed for temporary mastery under such a circumstance (Keneally, 1972).

Jimmie convinces himself that this is not merely revenge. By declaring war, he redefines his rebellion in terms of a tribal hero against the white system. He envisions himself as part of a universal uprising of the oppressed rather

than solely as an Aboriginal fighting against white supremacy. Ironically, this aligns with his earlier desire to erase his racial stigma, as he now seeks to frame his struggle in broader terms.

Embracing the rhetoric of war, Jimmie asks his white wife, Gilda, to inform the police. This act marks the beginning of his transformation into a tribal hero who challenges the oppressive white system by becoming a warrior of justice. To solidify this new identity, he casts himself as a victim-turned-avenger, determined to fight at all costs. His next killing of the Healys prompts his half-brother Mort to question the morality of his actions: "Healy deserves all this?" (p. 101). Jimmie offers no answer that could satisfy Mort, though he occasionally justifies his deeds with the language of the oppressed fighting against an unjust system. However, when the brothers seek provisions, they enter a house that does not belong to their enemies but rather to a struggling white family, one that reflects the kind of life Jimmie once aspired to. The novel highlights the irony of his journey: "A battler's house, not the house of the sort of man they made war with" (p. 105). This home represents the lost dream he once shared with his wife, Gilda the dream of owning land and earning the respect of white society: "About the land they would come to own and the people who would call them Sir or Madam" (p. 59).

Instead, Jimmie becomes a fugitive, hunted by a society that sees his rebellion as a mere criminal rampage. White authorities pursue him not as a tribal warrior but as a threat that must be eliminated to restore order: "The tangible world of search parties and town aghast by the dozen" (p. 113). Analogously, Jimmie desperately clings to his new identity one in which he dominates the fearful whites through violence and retribution. He wants to be a hero, waging a just war against white oppression.

However, the novel repeatedly reveals the tragic futility of his struggle. Despite his efforts to fight back, he remains an outsider, forever excluded from white society. No matter how hard he tries, all his efforts are in vain; the white world refuses to accept him in the end. By committing acts of violence and heroism, Jimmie tries to affirm this new identity to escape his identity dilemma, an example of the hybridity described by Bhabha. Despite his attempts to claim a place in the white-dominated world, the rejection he faces repeatedly highlights the precarious nature of his hybrid identity and the structural impossibility of full inclusion.

A grim paradox is revealed in Jimmie's final revolt. Through their rebellions, the powerless Aborigines invite their own punishment, as revealed in Jimmie's case. In the eyes of the ruling class, resistance is only a justification for further oppression. Jimmie imagines himself to be a tribal warrior to fight against white oppression, but his destiny is doomed. Like the struggles of so many Aborigines before him, his struggle is destined to end in tragedy, strengthening the very system he was trying to overthrow.

5.2.2. The Failure of Belonging: Jimmie's Alienation in a Colonial World

Jimmie's escape is not merely a physical flight but a desperate attempt to find self-justification and moral righteousness. He does not resolve his confusion but instead takes on the role of a tribal hero against the white oppressors. To create a new identity, he envisions himself in a life-or-death struggle against the unfair colonial system. In his quest for identity, he corrupts his half-brother Mort into a disciple of his cause. Nevertheless, Jimmie is also not immune to racial stigma. He creates a noble justification for his violence and tells Mort lies to make it honorable and necessary. However, inwardly, he is still in doubt. His identity dangles between the colonizer and colonized worlds.

As Jimmie's journey continues, his revenge urge is replaced by a surprising outpouring of love, a feeling that compels Jimmie to revalue his actions. He no longer feels like a warrior against the white world; instead, he realizes now that the real battle is in him. This revelation can help him leave behind the black-and-white duality that has defined his thinking so far. With unspent love, he discovers inner peace in his broken soul. He leaves behind his message of love to the ones he loves, including his white son. Most poignantly, he parts ways with Mort, his most loyal companion in his journey, to prevent his corruption. Jimmie realizes that he is consigning himself to a horrible

fate, but he does not want Mort to suffer from the same fate. Jimmie is caught between two cultures and eventually finds a certain peace that he needed to confront his upcoming death alone.

Jimmie's life is perceived by many as merely a political struggle, the story of the colonized Aboriginal man struggling against white oppression, but his transformation runs deeper. He doesn't just go from being a victim to being a rebel; he goes from being colonized to being a colonizer and finally to being a fragmented self. The novel presents these identities as competing forces, shaping and reshaping Jimmie's worldview as his story progresses.

At first, Jimmie embodies the colonized. White middle-class values erode his tribal instincts, severing him from his Aboriginal heritage. Yet, he refuses to accept total submission. He challenges his white employers' moral authority, exposes their ignorance, condemns racial injustices, and ultimately resorts to violence as a means of resistance. His actions follow the familiar arc of rebellion against colonial rule.

However, Jimmie also exhibits the traits of a colonizer. At times, he mirrors the very oppression he despises, directing hatred and disdain toward other Aboriginals. Before declaring war on the white race, he harbors a cruel desire to punish his own people: "A lust in him to punish the race" (p. 38). He despises them for their innocence and inability to master the clumsiness of white people: "Hating them for not being able to dominate the clumsiness" (p. 40).

When working for the white police, he manipulates the system to betray a fellow Aboriginal, deliberately leading authorities to a black murderer who has killed a white visitor. By turning against his own tribe, he distances himself from his Aboriginal roots, seeking validation through the same structures that oppress him. Just as white colonizers enforce their power by stigmatizing the "other," Jimmie achieves a fleeting sense of superiority by transferring his tribal stigma onto his race.

Nowhere is Jimmie's role as a colonizer more evident than in his relationship with Mort. During their escape, he carefully molds Mort's perception, convincing him of an inevitable racial war. To ensure Mort's loyalty, he deceives him, claiming he kills only white men, not women. He frames their violence as a necessary struggle for survival.

It is a war, he tells Mort. If *Jimmie Blacksmith* approached those who wronged him and asked for fairness like a gentleman, they would laugh. He tries to make Mort understand that white society only expects failure from black men (Keneally, 1972).

Under Jimmie's influence, Mort gradually adopts a rigid, dualistic view of black-and-white relations. He stops questioning the morality of their actions and instead accepts violence as an inevitable response to white oppression. When Mort kills a white pursuer, Jimmie feels an unsettling sense of satisfaction: "Seeing in it Mort's loss of innocence, he was indecently pleased" (p. 116). Jimmie clings to his newfound authority as a "priest and judge," using white society as a scapegoat for his own inner turmoil. However, he knows that this certainty built on confrontation and hatred will not last. The novel reveals his growing disillusionment: "He was furious with the wrong sort of fury" (p. 122).

Once Mort fully embraces the conflict Jimmie has imposed upon him, Jimmie himself begins to question the war he has waged. The imagined black-white antagonism no longer serves as a source of stability. Instead of feeling triumphant, Jimmie mourns his role in corrupting Mort: "He was inconsolable for corrupting Mort." With this realization, Jimmie shifts once again, this time, into a fragmented and uncertain self. He no longer fits within the frameworks of either colonized victim or righteous avenger. Rejected by white society and disillusioned with his rebellion, he turns back toward his Aboriginal roots. Suddenly, he longs for the cultural knowledge he once dismissed: "He was suddenly jealous for black secrets" (p. 146). Yet, he knows he can never fully reclaim them: "He could not claim the same native rights as Mort" (p. 147).

Suspended between two worlds, Jimmie becomes a man without a home. This embodies Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Jimmie's inability to integrate into white society or return to his Aboriginal tribe creates a "dangling" identity. The novel captures his existential limbo: "The state of a 'dangling self' leaves him unpolarized through

uneasy" (p. 148). As his beliefs crumble, so does his sense of certainty. Without a clear identity, he is left in a state of disillusionment, unable to reconcile the conflicting forces that have shaped his life.

Jimmie's story is not just about colonial oppression but the impossible search for belonging in a fractured world. His rebellion against white domination turns into a struggle with himself. The violence he once saw as an assertion of power ultimately reveals his own vulnerability. Ultimately, he is neither a triumphant warrior nor a tragic victim, but a man lost between hybrid identities, searching for a certainty that remains forever out of reach.

6. CONCLUSION

This Keneally's novel incurs a potent criticism of colonial identity and highlights the systemic racism of assimilation and even the psychological impact of racial hybridity. The case of Jimmie represents the paradox of colonial identity, where mixed-race people experienced cultural confusion as they did not fully fit in either the white settler society or the Aboriginal tribes. His life story, converting from initial acceptance of white values to his violent revolt and eventual disillusionment, remains a stark revelation of the structural limitations of assimilation and the fractures within colonial racial ideology.

The issue of identity crisis in Jimmie is not merely a personal struggle; it also reflects the racial hierarchy present in the colonial world, which perceives hybridity as a contradiction rather than a space for integration. This study explores the utility of Goffman's concept of stigma, providing insight into how Jimmie, as a half-caste, is defined by coloniality as an outsider, regardless of his own reactions. Similarly, the hybridity theory of Bhabha is demonstrated in this study, emphasizing that Jimmie cannot develop a strong sense of self due to his liminal identity. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse renders hybridity as displacement rather than reconciliation, a reality Jimmie experiences firsthand. His struggle reflects the contradictions embedded in colonial identity formation, rather than personal failure.

The theme of violence as resistance to repression and a manifestation of colonial oppression is also evident in the novel, considering Jimmie makes his journey from submission to rebellion. Critics maintain that Keneally states only the colonial stereotypes. However, some reviewers believe the depiction to be a subversive statement against the white ideology and the historical injustice in colonial Australia. This study employs a postcolonial critical lens to analyze *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* as a critique of racial exclusion, white hegemony, and the challenges of assimilation within a colonial context.

This study adds value to the debates on postcolonial literary criticism and Aboriginal identity by combining the concepts of stigma and hybridity. A further area to be investigated might be the comparison of other postcolonial texts in the way they represent racial hybridity, especially insofar as this expression of racial hybridity relates to Aboriginal resistance to colonialism and the contemporary works of Aboriginal authors. Moreover, future studies might investigate how contemporary Aboriginal writers contest or reinterpret white authors' narratives, such as Keneally's, by presenting counter-narratives that reclaim Aboriginal identity beyond colonial frameworks.

Ultimately, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is still an important but controversial novel in Australian literature. It prompts readers to consider how colonial racial hierarchies continue to influence the identity formation of the Aborigines. The novel deconstructs white narratives and reconciliation by exposing the psychological and structural barriers of hybrid identities. It also indicates that assimilation remains an unattainable goal within a system rooted in racial exclusion.

Keneally's portrayal of Jimmie's fractured identity and tragic fate highlights the enduring impacts of colonial stigmatization and the limitations imposed by racial identity. The novel encourages readers to reevaluate the roles of race and hybridity in postcolonial literature, challenging them to acknowledge the persistent inequalities that shape identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

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