

The Concept of Racial Identity in Anita Heiss's *Am I Black Enough for You?*

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Abstract—This article highlights the concise analysis of "Am I Black Enough for You?" by Australian Aboriginal author Anita Heiss as a crucial—yet unexplored—point in the public conversation around the judicial case. She is the author of historical fiction, non-fiction, poetry, travelogues, and social commentary. She also invented the novel commercial women's literature genre known as "Koori chick-lit," or "choc-lit," which focuses on urban Aboriginal women. Heiss, who is committed to social and political change, shares her experiences as an educator who works to advance Indigenous literacy and emphasize the importance of education as a requirement for combating racism and empowering Indigenous people throughout Australia. She specifically notes how African American politics and culture have impacted Aboriginal Australians, and she talks about how much she admires Oprah Winfrey as a strong and tenacious person. The social, political, and cultural ramifications of the court case—as well as the racial politics it brought up and the lessons it teaches about contemporary race relations in Australia—are all discussed and debated in this review, which develops into an important forum.

Index Terms—Racial Identity, relationship, cultural ramifications, social change.etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of a single "authentic" Aboriginal identity as imposed by colonial perspectives is frequently contested by Anita Heiss, an Aboriginal Australian author who fervently supports the complex and personal nature of racial identity, highlighting that it cannot be defined solely by blood quantity or external expectations but rather by individual experiences, family history, and connection to culture. Her work, especially "Am I Black Enough for You?" explores the challenges of navigating identity in the face of racism and societal expectations, highlighting the diversity within Aboriginal communities.

The gripping and profoundly moving book "Am I Black Enough for You?" explores relationships, community, family, and the intricacies of identity. This piece adds to Heiss's extensive body of work as a writer, educator, literary critic, public speaker, and proud Wiradjuri woman. In addition to writing historical fiction, non-fiction, poetry, travelogues, and social commentary, Heiss is the founder of the novel commercial women's literature genre known as "Koori chick-lit," or "choc-lit," which focuses on urban Aboriginal women.

The thought-provoking title, *Am I Black Enough for You?* indicates its focus on identity. By posing this query, Heiss encourages readers to pause, think, and reevaluate conventional and stereotyped ideas about Aboriginal identity. Heiss celebrates her many identities while being very much a Wiradjuri woman: 'I am an urban, seaside Blackfella, a concrete Koori with Westfield Dreaming, and I apologise to no one' (1). This self-defining act at the start of the memoir attests to its significance and relevance. Heiss asserts her connection to her land and community throughout her introduction chapter, challenging stereotypes about Aboriginal identity. She highlights the significance of self-expression and self-representation by analyzing phrases like "Aborigines" and exposing their problematic construction in relation to the history of invasion and dispossession.

She brings up her well-known lawsuit against conservative writer Andrew Bolt and his piece in which he accused Heiss and a number of other people of choosing their "Aboriginal identity" for both personal and professional benefit. Heiss, along with eight other plaintiffs, successfully sued Bolt for violating the Racial Discrimination Act. She questions prescriptive ideas about Aboriginal identity that sprang from imperial imagination and considers Bolt's prejudiced and false presumptions. Heiss's victory in the lawsuit against Bolt promotes

discussion about equity and responsibility while also making a substantial contribution to combating negative media portrayals of Indigenous people.

This work, which is written in an approachable, captivating, and occasionally hilarious tone, has political participation as a recurrent theme. Heiss's language is bold and conversational, allowing her varied audience to either confront their own preconceptions and assumptions or identify with her experiences. Heiss's feeling of responsibility, however, is among the memoir's most captivating features. She utilizes her writing career to empower her audience, confront difficulties in her community, dispel racial stereotypes, and promote unrelenting self-representation. She strives to inspire and uplift her readers from all backgrounds while acknowledging her own privileges. "To me, being active and political is what it means to be Aboriginal," she adds.

The memoir's central theme is Heiss's love for her friends, family, and community. She describes her early years in the first few chapters. She was raised in the eastern Sydney suburbs of Matraville as the daughter of an Austrian father and a Wiradjuri mother. From a young age, she encounters prejudiced presumptions and the difficulties of living in a strange society. Heiss describes her wonderful bond with her parents, their devoted marriage, and her siblings in especially poignant sections. She sees the marriage of her parents as a model of overcoming barriers and differences, or of true love that "knows no boundaries, least of all race." Heiss also tells the narrative of her parents, including how they first met and began a family. The chapter headed 'Being Elsie's daughter' features a poignant poem titled 'Ode to My Mother' in which Heiss displays her appreciation for her mother. In 'Joe-the-Carpenter', the following chapter, she recounts her father's narrative, detailing his Austrian upbringing and family. Heiss explains, in particular, how her mother, a Wiradjuri woman, and her father, a white immigrant from Austria with a lifelong accent, were occasionally left out of the concept of "Australianess."

Heiss, who is committed to social and political change, shares her experiences as an educator who works to advance Indigenous literacy and emphasize the importance of education as a requirement for combating racism and empowering Indigenous people throughout Australia. In her examination of

education and curriculum, Heiss criticizes historical erasure and national amnesia and makes the case that the history of massacres, invasion, and the Stolen Generations should be taught as part of the national Australian history curriculum under the heading of "Australian history" (101). Her historical fiction about the Stolen Generations, *Who Am I?* reflects her interest in recovering history. 'Writing Us into Australian History' is the title of the chapter in which she explores *The Diary of Mary Talence, Sydney, 1937* (2001). She says that she authored the book "to give voice to those who are without one," reinforcing her position as a politically active author.

Heiss's 'Koori chick-lit' adds urban Aboriginal women to the canon of Australian literature in addition to historical fiction, poetry, and social criticism. An insightful chapter titled 'On Being Koori Bradshaw' delves into Heiss's rationale for penning commercial women's fiction, including *Not Meeting Mr. Right*, *Avoiding Mr. Right*, *Manhattan Dreaming*, and *Paris Dreaming*. His characters are 'urban, educated, articulate, career-minded women' with hopes, desires, and challenges. Heiss creates a new genre with metropolitan Aboriginal women and gives them energizing traits. Above all, they are clearly politicized, complex, and engaging people that challenge one-dimensional, tokenistic literary depictions and promote "the common bonds we all share," as Heiss puts it.

Heiss's experiences as an academic and a writer interacting with scholars and researchers are also recounted in the memoir. The need to re-center academic discourse that is dominated by racism and elitism is reflected in Heiss's desire to pursue a PhD in Aboriginal literature. She states: "I wanted researchers and students to read the voices of Blackfellas discussing our own writing, not the voices of white academics who had written about Black authors after doing desktop analyses of what other white academics had written about Black authors." She criticizes of whiteness and entitlement is especially evident in sections that describe interactions with white scholars who identify as "Aboriginalists," or authorities on Aboriginal matters, and researchers who use photographs and oral histories for their own professional advancement without the consent of the communities. Heiss highlights the 'decades of appropriation and exploitation of Aboriginal cultural material in the

arts' and demands greater accountability, challenging white dominant narratives.

After being asked to present at the Pacific Epistemologies Conference in Fiji, she makes the decision to quit academia. She muses during the conference about how academic terminology used to describe and analyze Indigenous people is alienating. Heiss' critique, which focuses on the absence of practical involvement among academics or "academics talking purely to other academics," emphasizes the necessity of increasing the accessibility, inclusivity, and political engagement of academic knowledge. She draws a comparison between Aboriginal principles of accountability, community, and collaboration and western civilizations' perception of education as a consumer good based on competitiveness, individual gain, and rights. In light of this disparity, Heiss highlights the significance of education for Indigenous people as a way to define them, plan their political strategies, and recover their rights.

Heiss's travels provide another significant theme in the book, as she places her conversation in global contexts. As a renowned author and public speaker who frequently attends conferences and book tours in addition to researching her books abroad, Heiss interacts with global perspectives on Indigenous Australians and exposes myths propagated by Hollywood and Tourism Australia. Above all, Heiss highlights the need of transnational partnerships among Indigenous people, who share common struggles against cultural erasure, exploitation, and appropriation. She specifically notes how African American politics and culture have impacted Aboriginal Australians, and she talks about how much she admires Oprah Winfrey as a strong and tenacious person.

Heiss utilizes her work to combat racism, strengthen communities, and regain the right to self-definition since she is acutely aware of the lasting repercussions of colonialism. This well-written, approachable, yet extremely personal memoir is an engaging read that will appeal to a wide range of readers, especially educators and students from many fields and settings. The memoir, which views self-representation as a fundamental human right, is a testament to the author's tenacity, commitment, and—above all—inspiring hope.

II. CONCLUSION

With her head lowered and her eyes up in skepticism, Anita Heiss presents a clear challenge on the cover of her 2012 book, *Am I Black Enough for You?* As a result, the reader is drawn into the repugnant racial and cultural politics that shape the lives of many Aboriginal Australians. It challenges the reader's preconceived notions and attitudes regarding Aboriginal Australians while enhancing their understanding of Aboriginal Australian culture and people. Before the court case, the autobiographical project that became "*Am I Black Enough for You?*" was commissioned. It was published in April 2012, about seven months after Justice Bromberg's ruling was made public. Heiss had remained quiet in the months that followed, pushing her most recent chick-lit book while avoiding comment on *Eatock v. Bolt*, with the exception of a brief statement announcing the triumph. *Am I Enough Black?* reflects Heiss's articulate and persistent approach to the situation. A story that blends political manifesto and family history is told in five brief segments that detail Heiss' role in the trial. *Am I Black Enough for You?* Heiss is well-known in the Australian public eye thoroughly lists all of her contributions as an author, activist, and scholar. She is most recognized for her commercial women's fiction, or "choc" lit as she jokingly refers to it, which incorporates friendships from *Sex and the City* and *Bridget Jones* humor into the lives of sophisticated and self-assured Aboriginal women.

Admittedly, *Am I Black Enough for You?* is an extreme case. It is situated at the intersection of a distinct and unheard-of series of occurrences in Australian political, legal, and literary history. From the private reader to the prime minister, it implicates a remarkable array of characters. The way it is received reveals the country's complex racial politics, which include both strong ties of friendship and hostility. However, Heiss' memoir's weaknesses are also highlighted by the same elements that make it appealing as a case study of racial politics in the digital literary realm and beyond. The topic of how typical a case study it is and how relevant any findings gleaned from it may be is given weight by its dramatic origins in Andrew Bolt's writings and subsequent court case, its provocative title, and the controversy surrounding its reception. While valid,

these doubts are deceptive. They disregard the power of a single book to spark and reignite a discussion about the rights of individuals to identify with their cultural, racial, or ethnic heritage, freedom of expression, and protection from defamation.

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