

Response to the CfP

Proposal for a paper for the 2023 biennial conference of the German Association for Australian Studies

“Australian Mobilities”

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Title:

Foot Notes in the Work of Kim Scott

Abstract:

While Indigenous mobilities have worked to perplex and unsettle the coloniser, they have also been instrumentalised to aid and abet genocidal practices. Earlier, Indigenous ‘wandering’ was essentialised as signalling a lack of fixed habitation. Later, structures of protectionism and assimilation demanded that Indigenous wandering be contained and controlled. However, mobility has proven to be essential to Indigenous life ways. As Lynette Russell puts it: “This travelling through and across territory creates country.” In contemporary Indigenous-authored narratives, the action of bipedal gait – of Indigenous characters walking the land – becomes an enactment of law making, an assertion of enduring Indigenous sovereignty. This paper seeks to extend previous research into the action of walking in Indigenous narratives via an examination of the trope of the foot and of walking in the work of Noongar author Kim Scott. Interestingly, in Scott’s 1999 novel, *Benang: From the Heart*, the narrator-protagonist Harley, is *not* depicted as walking the land. He hovers above the ground for most of the novel, signalling a lack of grounded connection to place. However, in *That Deadman Dance* (2010) and *Taboo* (2017) characters walk through Noongar territory, past and present, either to assert or to reaffirm Indigenous sovereignty over land. What might be identified as a shift in Scott’s work from hovering, to dancing, to roaming protagonists, in the action of the foot on the land, indexes a parallel shift towards stronger, more-sustained assertions of sovereignty by Indigenous voices across Australia over the last two decades.

Bio:

Geoff Rodoreda is a lecturer in the Department of English Literatures and Cultures at the University of Stuttgart, Germany. He grew up in Sydney, Australia, studied politics, media theory and journalism, and worked as a journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Adelaide and Darwin before moving to Europe in 1996. He completed his PhD in English literature in Stuttgart in 2016. He is the author of *The Mabo Turn in Australian Fiction* (Peter Lang, 2018), and the co-editor (with Eva Bischoff) of *Mabo’s Cultural Legacy: History, Literature, Film and Cultural Practice in Contemporary Australia* (Anthem, 2021).