CHAPTER 4

NO SUCH TERRAIN ANYWHERE

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SALLY MORGAN'S
MY ABACA
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NO SHELTER ANYWHERE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY IN SALLY MORGAN’S MY PLACE

Yesterday is History,
’Tis so far away--
Yesterday is Poetry,
’Tis Philosophy.

Yesterday is mystery--
Where it is Today
While we shrewdly speculate
Flutter both away.

--Emily Dickinson

The social scenario of ethnic differences that the Aboriginal people face in Australia has a meaning beyond that of marginalised and victimised subjugations and suppressions. There is a subtle presence of uprooting, for this ethnic difference lead to the question of survival. The atmosphere of exploitation is everywhere in the life of these Aboriginal people. When the discussion is about the race, that is, a hybridisation of the black and white, the inferior and superior — the complexities of race and colour are much harsher and cruder. The mixed race feels more deeply about the uprooting of their origins. They have an emotional inferiority for they think neither close to their Aboriginality, nor do they have an attachment and affinity towards the white race. The complicated ethnic differences uproot them in such a cruel manner that the adoption to the white world seems a rare dream as well as shedding their originality, a rare possibility. The trauma of caught between such feelings of belonging has been captured in a portrayal of reality in Sally Morgan’s My Place, published in 1978.

Sally Morgan makes a great effort to explore time and delve into history, into incidents and happenings. She doesn’t sound like most authors do, when they deal with their past life. Her work My Place is beyond nostalgia and memorabilia. It is an experience of her hidden origins and background, and a
quest for identity. It tells the story of her self-discovery, through reconnection with her origin and background, and its culture. Sally Morgan expresses her feelings and sentimental attachment for her land and its life. *My Place* is imbued with the spirituality of her culture, telling her own story, discovering her roots and reclaiming her history-- and in the process, defining her identity.

*My Place* is a story about a culture and a time where the author is trying to place her own racial roots within a given social scenario and finally unravel a different way of life for her own people-- the Aborigines. It is the story of hundreds of young Australians who may have been in a similar predicament-- a quest for a cultural identity. Morgan's story unfurls with details of the lives of the natives-- the Aboriginals-- in that country. The title of Sally Morgan's Aboriginal autograph might seem to an uninitiated audience deceptively simple, if not reductive --a phrase indicative of the personal quest for individuation that determines identity designating one's unique place in the universe. *My Place* tries to solve the enigma of her roots that had surrounded her family, which gradually deepens with the passage of time and is finally solved bringing serenity to her entire family, which they were hoping for a long time. It is also a story of a little girl growing up, nurturing the love and confinement of a family that manages to keep itself together despite several problems of existence-- a story that moves with three generations of women-- Daisy Corunna, Gladys Milroy and Sally Morgan.

*My Place* is a story of these three Aboriginal women, who explore their past and discover their future. It is a story about finding their aboriginal roots, and returning to their cultural heritages.

"Gladys: It's a bit of an Aboriginal trait, because when you look at any family there's always the mother and grandmother there. Sally: It's a matriarchal society, and also, from that we can see going back, all the women in our family have been strong characters in different ways. [An Interview With Sally Morgan: 5]\(^2\)

Daisy Corunna is the head of the family in which Sally Morgan is born. She is the grandmother of Sally. Everyone in the family calls her as "Nan" with love and affection. But her Aboriginal name is Talahue. She had a sister named,
Lily. As the white domination did not allow the child of an Aboriginal mother born from a white father to be with her; so Talahue was taken away from her mother with false promises that she would be given a proper education. But the white people did not take her to any school instead she worked as a servant for the white family --Drake-Brockman. Talahue told her granddaughter, Sally, that she must include this in her story, which she was writing. Talahue said:

"They told my mother I was goin' to get educated. They told all the people I was goin' to school. I thought it'd be good, goin' to school. I thought I'd be somebody real important. My mother wanted me to learn to read and write like white people. Then she wanted me to come back and teach her. There was a lot of the older people interested in learn' how to read and write then.

Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin' out of their promises. My mother wouldn't have let me go just to work. God will make them pay for their lies. He's got people like that under the whip. They should have told my mother the truth. She thought I was coming back.

When I left, I was cryin', all the people were cryin', my mother was cryin' and beatin' her head. Lily was cryin'. I called, 'Mum, Mum, Mum!' She said, 'Don't forget me, Talahue!'

They all thought I was coming back. I thought I'd only be gone a little while. I could hear their wailing for miles and miles. 'Talahue! Talahue!' They were singin' out my name, over and over. I couldn't stop cryin'. I kept callin', 'Mum! Mum!' " [Morgan: 411]\(^3\)

It didn't take Talahue to realise that she wasn't going to school and that she wasn't going back to her family either. The warehousing of the unwanted children was one of the greatest crimes of Australian colonialism, as half-breed mixed offspring desperately sought a place in a world that refused them social refuge.

The bond between mother and child was treated casually and broken with insouciance by the overloads anxious to dispose of the physical evidence of their own lascivious slippage. The mixed race must constantly be exploited and then gotten rid of -- consigned to an historical memoir. Then a narrative is produced that obliterates personal responsibility and leaves the cast-off remnants of desire to remain outcast by a social system that refuses to own, remember, or acknowledge its sexual, paternal and filial responsibilities to
mixed race offspring. From the subject position of the father-less child, paternal absence seems a painful and perplexing mystery. Gladys told Sally that being a mixed race girl living in an orphanage, she used to implore to God every night for a father's protection. She always felt both confused and betrayed by the father. She had also felt that the saviour has failed to rescue her from the bitter isolation and from the cruel taunts of her fellow inmates that she confronted always in that orphanage. Talahue told Sally about her bitter confrontations in her childhood:

"At night, I used to lie in bed and think 'bout my people. I could see their campfire and their faces. I could see my mother's face and Lily's. I really missed them. I cried myself to sleep every night. Sometimes, in my dreams, I'd hear them wailing. 'Talahue! Talahue!', and I'd wake up, calling, 'Mum! Mum!' You see, I needed my people, they made me feel important. I belonged to them. I thought 'bout the animals too. The kangaroos and birds. And, of course, there was Lily. I wondered if she had a new boyfriend. I missed her, I missed all of them.

Alice kept tellin' me, 'We're family now, Daisy.' Thing is, they wasn't my family. Oh, I knew the children loved me, but they wasn't my family. They were white, they'd grow up and go to school one day. I was black, I was a servant. How can they be your family.'" [Morgan: 412-413]

All of her life, Talahue's daughter, Gladys, wondered if she had a sister that she had never known. Gladys believed inside her that she did have a sister, but Talahue or Nan felt too much hurt whenever the discussion of her sister arose. Later even Sally asked her grandmother about this concealed fact:

"I felt, for Mum's sake, I should make one last effort to find out about her sister. So a few nights later, when Nan and I were on our own, I said, 'There's nothing I want to ask you. I know you won't like it, but I have to ask. It's up to you whether you tell me or not.' Nan grunted. 'Ooh, those questions, eh? Well, ask away.' 'Okay. Has Mum got a sister somewhere?'

She looked away quickly. There was silence, then, after a few seconds, a long, deep sigh.

When she finally turned to face me, her cheeks were wet. 'Don't you understand yet', she said softly, 'there are some things I just can't talk 'bout.' ..." [Morgan: 431-432]

The story of the second female protagonist-- Gladys Milroy or "Glad" is a very different one. Unlike her mother, she spent her young life at school in
Parkerville Children's Home. Sister Kate and Sister Sarah from the Anglican Order established this residential school in 1903 --the 'Sisters of the Church'. This was a teaching order established in 1870 with the special intention of furthering education in the colonies.

Both Sister Kate and Sister Sarah had arrived in Fremantle in 1901 with twenty-two young children aged between six and ten, whom they had brought from English institutions as the State's first official child migrants. While others of the Anglican Order set about the establishment of founding a Church School (now, known as Perth College), Sister Kate and Sister Sarah began what was called the 'Waifs House' at Parkerville in the beautiful hills district. From the start it was a home for destitute children, and in 1904 the first of the 'cottages' was built. The children lived in these houses, under the care of a House Mother, in groups of about sixteen boys and girls of varying ages. 'George Turner' cottage where the young Gladys lived was a gift from the Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association in 1929. When Gladys was there, this cottage was under the House Mother, Miss Moore. One cottage, 'Babyland', was given over to the care of all the children of kindergarten age and younger.

As Sally Morgan writes in her *My Place*, children at Sister Kate's were initially...

"... sent to her by the Western Australian government authority responsible for Aborigines."...[Morgan: 316] 6

It may be that it was only the fact that Gladys remained at Parkerville. This allowed her to escape the rigid policing of her life and affairs by the Department of Native Affairs. This was the norm for most of the children who were Aborigines and part-Aborigines. Gladys says:

"When I was still quite young, Sister Kate left Parkerville and took a lot of Aboriginal children with her. I was very sad, because I lost a lot of my friends. There were a few lightly coloured Aboriginal boys left and they kept an eye on me. I don't know why I wasn't sent with Sister Kate, maybe it was because of the Drake-Brockmans, I don't know." [Morgan: 316-317] 7
Whatever the reason may have been, Gladys had escaped the stigmatisation of being classified as an 'official' half-caste by being left out of the group, which was taken to the cottages of Sister Kate's. This would have made it possible in her later life to avoid being publicly recognised as one of the Aborigines. As the Aborigines Act, later renamed as Native Administration Act since 1936, was very acrimonious on the control of the Aborigines, the escape from the stigmatisation could have never occurred had she been sent to the 'Aboriginal' home. This germinated the seed of overwhelming fear and worry first in Daisy Corunna, and later in Gladys that their children would be taken away if they were found out to have a white father.

Sally Morgan grew up very much on the borders of a reconstructed racial and cultural identity in a household, controlled by the women who had the fear of being recognised as a descendent of white. Her mixed-race mother, Gladys Milroy, and half-caste grandmother, Daisy Corunna, diligently reconstructed a racial counter-fiction of pure Indian ancestry against the reality of hybridised biological origin. One day Sally asked Gladys or "Glad" what their ancestry was? Why did she tell her they were Indians? The Milroy children had been growing up believing they were foreigners in their own land. Gladys enjoined her bewildered progeny, whose schoolfellows constantly questioned the dark-skinned family's right to belong in white Australia:

"...What do you mean, 'Where do we come from?'
'I mean, what country. The kids at school want to know what country we come from. They reckon we're not Aussies. Are we Aussies, Mum?'
Mum was silent. Nan grunted in a cross sort of way, then got up from the table and walked outside.
'Come on, Mum, what are we?'
'What do the kids at school say?'
'Anything. Italian, Greek, Indian.'
'Tell them you're Indian.'
I got really excited then. 'Are we really? Indian!' It sounded so exotic.
'When did we come here?' I added.
'A long time ago,' Mum replied. 'Now, no more questions.
You just tell them you're Indian'. "[Morgan: 45]"
Throughout her childhood, Sally grew up with this identity of being related to an 'exotic' culture. The fantasy of Indian origins was, Gladys later explained, a covert narrative of resistance -- a fabrication meant to protect the rights and happiness of her mixed-blood offspring from white Australian disdain for miscegenation. This well-intentioned parental deception was a white lie geared to alleviate her children's inevitable sense of cross-cultural and interpersonal confusion in a shockingly bigoted world. But later this fabrication was revealed through Nan, when she discovered that she heralded a new cultural identity of being an Aboriginal.

Sally tried to unfurl the roots that were veiled with a sense of vulnerable fear. In the process of unravelling, she discovered that her mother had tried to conceal a brutal reality from her children. The painful and torturous life that Gladys went through made her behave the way she did. For her, telling the children they were Indians and passing herself off as a white person, was her way of a tactful survival. First, she took on white, middle class values, but she did so only to escape oppression. Its not that she wanted to be a white, but she just wanted to be treated like a human being. Second, Gladys was surrounded by an innate fear that the officials of the government might take away her children if they knew she was a single Aboriginal mother raising her kids from a white parentage. She knew it very well that if she died Nan would not be allowed to keep the kids and they would be taken away. She knew it very well that Bill Milroy's white parents wouldn't have adopted the 'dark-skinned' children as their own progenies. So they would be definitely sent to an orphanage, or the kids would all be separated from each other and might have to lead a struggling life for their survival. Gladys could never imagine such a thing happening to her own kids for she knew the pangs of separation and the agony of dislocation.

But Sally Morgan's story as a protagonist is very different. Her story is tinged more with a quest for cultural roots, a search for an identity, and a journey from 'exotic' to brutal realities. In *My Place*, she not only tries to probe into the gruesome reality that her family underwent, but she tries to uncover her relationship with the rich heritage of the Aborigines. At the very outset, the
discovery of her cultural identity shows with a sense of self-abomination, and an abhorrence towards her mother and grandmother. But gradually with the lapse of time, self-abomination turns into self-determination and self-discovery, and the feeling towards her mother and grandmother changes into an essence of sentimental attachment—a sense of belonging brings the pride of being from such a rich cultural heritage.

Sally, however, wears the ill-fitting cloak of racial conformity with instinctive disease from her childhood. She senses that she is inexplicably liminal in white bourgeois society not only because of her integumentary hue but also by virtue of her poverty, her willingness, her familial solidarity, and her passionate love of her nature and ecological sensitivity. From the dawn of her youthful consciousness, she is inadvertently caught in ushering in the split and oppositional halves of a bifurcated cultural identity. Racial métissage bequeaths a legacy of concealment and bewilderment, of uncomfortable disguises and perplexing white mendacity, which represses the rich, cultural heritage that neither Gladys Milroy nor her offspring can comprehend. Haunted by ubiquitous signs of racial prejudice, they embrace the roles assigned by assimilationist strategies without even uttering a defying voice of protest. The subaltern surrenders to white hegemony by mimicking the values of an alien, apparently superior culture of aggression and subjugation. Constructing a socially acceptable Indian identity, she risks losing racial and historical specificity and, through patterns of amalgamation, forfeits ancestral roots that burgeon in communal meaning.

*My Place* foregrounds a search for identity, a desire for a place within the history of Australia, which does not discuss the communal hegemony and/or assimilation of the children born between the borderlines of racial and cultural identity. Morgan portrays the condition of the half-castes in a manner that they have been entrapped between the white monolith of superiority and the black inferiority. History has led the conditions of these half-castes to such extremities that they are neither being considered as the whites, nor do the blacks accept
them. Their struggle is more than identity—it is a war of creating a psychological space in the human mind amidst the two significant races.

Morgan builds the life-stories of Daisy, Gladys and Sally, as well as Arthur, in such a manner that they become striking contributions to counter history. In true sense, the psychological space that Morgan wants for these people has to germinate somewhere. She says:

"...I want to write the history of my own family...there's almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it's like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything. There's a lot of our history that we can't even get at, Arthur. There are all sorts of files about Aboriginals that go way back, and the government won't release them. You take the old police files, they're not even controlled by Battye Library, they're controlled by the police. And they don't like letting them out, because there are so many instances of police abusing their power when they were supposed to be Protectors of Aborigines that it's so funny! I mean, our government had terrible policies for Aboriginal people. Thousands of families in Australia were destroyed by the government policy of taking children away. None of that happened to white people...." [Morgan: 207-208]

Arthur Corunna, Sally's uncle, asserts a similar desire to make his history known for he too feels that the entrapment is not just a historical evidence but more than that. It is a struggle to create historical space in the human mind:

"...I tell you how I look at it, it's part of our history, like. And everyone's interested in history. Do you think you could put my story in that book of yours? ...I want everyone to read it. ...Do you think people will read that? ...Aah, I been wantin' to get this done all my life. Different people, they say, 'Arthur, we'll write your story', but none of them come back to see me. Aah, I'm better off without them. It's better your own flesh and blood writes something like that. ..." [Morgan: 208-211]

By acknowledging her use of the Battye Library and the appropriation of official documents in researching her own life story, Morgan highlights the interconnectedness of history and autobiography:

..."It's a history library. Western Australian history. I wanted to read up Aborigines. ...I found out that there was a lot to be ashamed of. ...Aborigines were considered as sub-normal and not capable of being
educated the way whites were. You know the pastoral industry was built on the back of slave labour. Aboriginal people were forced for work, if they didn't, the station owners called the police in. I always thought Australia was different to America, Mum, but we had slavery here too. The people might not have been sold on blocks like the American Negroes were, but they were owned, just the same. ..." [Morgan: 192] 

In My Place, Sally Morgan confronts the injustices to her ancestors and publicly exposes the repeated atrocities that Aborigines have been subjected to, providing examples of imperialist hegemony. Paternalism is one such injustice. Paternalism relies on a sense of being superior and therefore possesses the right to look at those "sub-normal and not capable" [Memmi: 10] human beings, who cannot even look after themselves. Paternalism ensures that the government and its representatives manage the country and its people, as would a 'father'. Individual responsibility and freedom to make at least a limited number of possible choices about one's lifestyles are consequently usurped.

Paternalism takes on a dual meaning for many Aboriginal people and specifically for the Corunnas. White station owners had control of what was historically Aboriginal land. They were deemed to be protectors or caregivers--this 'care' often extended to fathering the children of Aboriginal women. On the basis of a belief in white superiority, children --of 'half-caste', 'a white blackfella', 'not a real white', 'not a real black' --were taken from their parents and raised in institutions.

..."They took the white ones off you 'cause you weren't considered fit to raise a child with white blood. [Morgan: 415] The institutionalisation of these children was not on the basis of their abilities or intelligentsia, but because they had white blood in them. They were trained and educated so that they can get themselves adopted in the white culture. Such children of the institutions were also denied the right to co-habit with or visit their family and even to speak the language of their Aboriginal members. The stories of Arthur Corunna, whose Aboriginal name was Jilly-yung, and Daisy Corunna, or Talahue, have several instances of this denial.
In *My Place*, white people, such as Howden and Alice Drake-Brockman, the police, the missionaries, and the educators are seen exercising political, legal and economic control. Daisy, Arthur and Gladys Corunna were coerced into accepting white assessment of themselves as 'inferiors' and therefore portrayed as subordinates in contrast to the whites. The exercising of white power in the lives of the Corunnas is pervasive throughout all facets of their lives-- the sexual use and abuse of their bodies; the enforced denial of family rights; restricted use of their language to English and restricted communications with their Aboriginal family members.

Morgan's grandmother, Daisy, was born on Corunna Downs Station, in the North of Western Australia. Daisy's mother was Annie and her father (as the text indicates) was Howden Drake-Brockman --the station owner. It is also implied that Howden Drake-Brockman also fathered Daisy's daughter, Gladys. However, the illegitimacy of the child was not only denied by Howden, even Alice, the daughter of Drake-Brockman, also denies the existence of any illegitimate siblings from their ancestors. For Daisy, as for many Aborigines, sexual violence of cultural codes was constitutive of being part of a subjugated people. There were no forms of protection from such a personal violation. There was no social or legal recourse to protect their personal rights or their sense of personal dignity.

Arthur and Albert were also indicated as children of Howden Drake-Brockman. Along with Daisy, they were named or designated as half-castes, through their white paternalism. As a result of this process, Daisy was taken from the Aboriginal camp but instead of the usual practice of sending half-caste children to a missionary school, Daisy went to work in the station's main house. Within the structure of her white family, Daisy was given no status of daughter, rather the paternalistic status of servant to white daughters, so called 'sisters':

"...From behind her back, Alice pulled out a black topsy doll dressed like a servant. It had a red-checked dress on a white apron, just like Mum's. It had what they used to call a slave cap on its head. It was really just a handkerchief knotted at each corner. My mother always wore one on washing days..." [Morgan: 328] 14
Through the status of half-caste, and subsequent removal from their Aboriginal communities, these children from the white father were precluded from participation in ceremonies even in Aboriginal community. Through his removal from the station, his Aboriginal elders denied initiation rites to Arthur. At the same time, he was denied access to white society in terms of acceptance, education, and rights to inheritance. His removal to the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission forced Arthur into a 'no-man's land'. He was 'ab-originated'. History again becomes brutal that he is neither a part of the whites nor the blacks accept them. He is in fact alienated in a corner of the society where he has the same conditions that prevailed prominently in India before independence as untouchables.

This strategy of alienation is evidenced through the experiences of Arthur and his brother Albert, who had restrictions placed on their use of Aboriginal language. They were forbidden to talk as 'blackfella' did, after Arthur and Albert were given English Lessons. During the time of Arthur's childhood, the whites were segregating the half-caste, (even quarter-caste) children and taught them to speak English. But the whites never taught their parents the construction of being in the white hegemony. This enforcement of the dominant language compelled the Aboriginal children to lose their links to defined Aboriginal community status. The white language designations 'half' or 'quarter'-- also disqualified them from membership in the dominant or the white discourse.

In his story, the male protagonist, Arthur Corunna talks about not only such linguistic discrimination but also gives a vivid portrayal of the economic exploitation:

"Men teased me when I bought the farm, they didn't want a blackfella movin' in. ... (A) bloke wanted to buy it. Jack Edwards was his name. He already had other farms and he wanted mine as well. You see, the white man gets greedy, he wants to take everything." [Morgan: 260]

A sense of inferiority complex was impinged into the minds of these natives and Arthur was just one example of the innumerable Aborigines who suffered the
same way. Blatant kidnapping and abduction to a white mission have of course, compromised Arthur's Aboriginality. It is not only the desire to possess all the materialistic assets but to control and dominate every thing that the Aborigines live with. The economic supremacy was one of the important traits that the whites acquired. They never tried to comprehend the politics of the mode of life that the Aboriginals led. The whites simply wanted to control them and their land too:

"There's so much the whitefellas don't understand. They want us to be assimilated into the white, but we don't want to be. They complain about our land rights, but they don't understand the way we want to live. They say we shouldn't get the land, but the white man's had land rights since this country was invaded, our land rights. Most of the land the Aborigine wants, no white man would touch. The government is like a big dog with a bone with no meat on it. They don't want to live on that land themselves, but they don't want the black man to get either. Yet, you find somethin' valuable on the land the Aborigine has got and whites are all there with their hands out." [Morgan: 266] 16

In My Place, Arthur claims rightfully that white people have had land rights ever since this country was colonised in 1788. Land has been given to the white farmers, it has been bought from white Australian government and it has been usurped. This fundamental right to land has often been denied to Aborigines. Land has become a commodity that has been captured by the colonisers, a commodity which has reinforced inequalities and denied any other concepts of ownership, which indigenous people who do not 'own' may feel or believe in. The Arthur Corunna's Story in the text is a powerful expression of an oppositional viewpoint that portrays the cruel picture of colonisation through inequality.

In My Place, Sally Morgan at first appears to have embarked on a traditionally male Odyssean quest for the lost father, the paternal figure valorising one's subject-position vis-à-vis the law and word of the father --the social place determined by bloodline and inheritance. Sally's own biological father, Bill Milroy, is present in the mode of absence; he is an obscure figure of mental illness and inebriation whose domestic role as paternalism has been de-
authorised as impotent, if not invidious to domestic harmony. The father(s) of both Gladys and Daisy Corunna have been erased from personal history and must, in turn, be sought, named, and returned to the family memoir before the children of unknown progenitors can forgive paternal and colonial transgression.

Daisy's father is exposed, it would seem, as Howden Drake-Brockman, the indomitable station owner of Corunna Downs. The mystery of Daisy's own (perhaps a forcible sexual encounter) mating lies at the heart of Sally's story and function as the empty centre of a complex, maternally decentred narrative. In searching for an unnamed white grandfather, Sally is left forever longing for a progenitor who refused to own or acknowledge his progeny. By the end of the story, the reader knows and also does not know the place inhabited by that central patriarchal and colonial figure deliberately exorcised from Daisy Corunna's liberated story of historical resistance.

*My Place* is the story of Sally's family and their experiences of colonisation. It challenges the colonial history by bringing to the fore, issues such as paternalism and the family's relationships, land and language rights and the suppression of history post-1788. The relationship of history and *My Place* is further highlighted when one considers the nature of autobiography, a genre that combines the functions of both the historical and literary textual discourses.

The notion of ownership is intriguing in the text, as it is always used in two contradictory ways. On one hand, the term signifies appropriation and slavery --an unrightful, outrageously demeaning attempt to keep in one's service the labour and resources of another human being. Slavery is a word rarely associated with the treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia. On the other hand, the word "ownership" connotes the bond of blood and spirit between parent and progeny, father and child. Sally's mother and grandmother are both tormented by the ambiguity of their ancestry, the undecided factors of the name and law of a father who refuses to own or acknowledge his offspring.

Literary conventions allow for the emotional elements of experience such as love, suffering, displacement, the search for meaning and identity, while
the historical function of autobiography produces discourses to counter existing histories. Autobiography is thus a powerful tool for constructing, what are called 'counter-histories'. The question is bias --political, emotional --that may arise in the case of biographies or official histories do not appear to be highlighted when autobiography is in question. So Morgan's choice of the genre has definitely brought the results that her inner voice desired for. As Stephen Muecke, a transcriber of Aboriginal writings, points out, autobiography makes the job of the critic or reader difficult:

"Are we to ignore the generic constrictions of events and character, the rhetoric of the fiction, in favour of interpretation of the text as straight history? And if we question the motives of this or that character will our comments be taken as criticisms of real people? This is still more difficult to deal with when juxtaposed with a presumed amount of personal courage in the narrator's effort to express the unsayable, to tell the risky story of oppression. [Muecke: 6-7]

When it is an autobiography of a person from a minority group, questions of political and emotional bias are still more difficult to deal with. For literature written by minority groups is often a site of contestation, a cry for legitimacy and therefore acknowledgement as a counter-history. However, *My Place* welcomes a deconstructive reading as one that highlights the covert use of these devices in the writing of all histories.

Sally Morgan has definitely written this text not only for her own culture, also to reach beyond that. She has aimed her *My Place* also for non-Aboriginal readers. The language of the novel is engaging and accessible, while some unorthodoxies of spelling and grammar are retained to create a sense of oracy in the written narrative. It has characteristics of both oral and written narrative; it is factual account that includes many features generally associated with fiction. The audience of oral narrative interacts with the narrator, develops a relationship with the reader that affects the telling of the story. In *My Place* the reader cannot be present in the scene of story-telling. Sally herself plays the role of interactive audience to her relative's narratives. The reader is thus invited to join Sally in the intimate relationship she entertains with the other narrators --a relationship of confidence, emotional involvement and identification.
Without working through a complex theoretical structure, Sally Morgan has given the world a deconstructed postcolonial narrative. The autonomous subject, with its narcissistic ego, is deliberately decentred – erased from the centre of the text and present mode of absence, as the perpetual quester or Odyssean adventurer in search of the history of a family whose roots have been plundered and whose historical genealogy has been virtually obliterated. Hence Morgan’s unusual frame of autobiography as well as oral history: she chooses to adopt a nonlinear narrative mode of Aboriginal storytelling.

*My Place* is a very carefully structured story. It is more like a novel than a historical account. It contains elements of a number of fictional genres, such as the detective novel, the quest romance, the battler genre and the foundling story. The reader’s involvement in the fictional aspect of the text is more imaginative, motivated by a search for truth as a sense of design, linguistic patterning and narrative closure.

The insistence on truth that Morgan punctuates in her book leaves little room for even cautious objections that its autobiographical structuring owes more to narrative logic or to Aboriginal and communal notions of truth than to historical accuracy as perceived by white culture. In *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*, Mudrooroo Narogin, another Aboriginal writer, responds to the narrative technique of Sally Morgan:

"*My Place*, on one level, details Sally Morgan's search for family and community. It is written in Standard English as this is her everyday discourse, but when she uses the methods of oral history to tape-record the voices of three members of her family, and introduce them into the text, the English blackens. Although the Aboriginal discourse has been edited, this in no way detracts from the authenticity of the story. In fact, it makes it more accessible to many more readers, both Black and White." [Narogin: 162]  

Mudrooroo paints another position of a reader—the white reader of black texts. The very loud silences of such readers testify to the difficulty of communication across cultural boundaries.

The distinction between silence and speech also works to structure the narrative terms of gender. Arthur Corunna is the only male storyteller and the
first to tell his story to Sally. He doesn't wish to preserve the silence about his Aboriginal experience, and his tale is self-consciously public. Whereas, Gladys and Daisy had to be coaxed out of their silence; they were reluctant storytellers, unwilling to part with the painful secrets of their past life.

*My Place* is mostly a story about lives of women, and about matrilinear family bonds. The white fathers come to stand for the sins perpetuated by the white Australia on its black inhabitants. In order to look forward to a new life unblemished by the shame of the past, the narrators must edit out the sins of the fathers. The life stories of *My Place* are, told by women to a woman, except Arthur's story. They all focus on individual selfhood, and they emerge in a context which, through the interaction between the narrator and the narratee evolves. Such a technique of the ‘narrating self’ is also used in Kim Scott's *Benang*.

Beside these technicalities, the timing of publication of the book is also very noteworthy. Morgan's text emerged in the year the Federal Government of Australia established the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which found out that well over half of the prisoners who died in Western Australia died in those missions. This led to the establishment of the Stolen Generation Inquiry in 1997 to probe into the reasons as to why and where the Aboriginal children got lost. Fremantle Arts Centre Press editor, Ray Coffey said:

"... I was very sceptical about the publishing of the text for I was acutely aware that Morgan might be surrounded in controversy. ... But it turned out to be a publishing ploy for me. It has sold over 70,000 copies as the very first year of publication." [An Interview With Sally Morgan: p. 4] 19

Regarding the publication, historian, Tom Stannage says:

"... [Morgan] has poked an impudent finger into the hornet's nest marked as "white family secrets" with the publication of her book."

*An Interview With Sally Morgan: p. 3* 20

Sally Morgan tentatively offers her multicultural audience a glimpse of Aboriginal culture --a world of spiritual wholeness, of family relationship, and
of respect for the land. The autobiographical search for individual identity suggested by her title incorporates three oral histories that broaden the space of her narrative. It has yielded a more expansive consciousness alluded to in the book's epigraph, where the title My Place is transcended by a larger, more communal sense of Our Place—an awareness of awareness of recovered history poised on the verge of extinction. Sally's own cultural location and position are finally determined by the complex web of tribal, historical, and interpersonal relationships, revealed by the deployment of new strategies for self-definition. The psychological space is more important than anything what Morgan feels. She thinks that firstly, people around the society should accept the half-castes as human beings, and then the struggle for identity can begin. Otherwise, they would be marginalised psychologically. Such a marginalised self, exploring frontiers and pushing back racial boundaries, must nonetheless take sustenance from a people as a whole in order to survive as an integrated, purposive, and creative subject in the complex world of the twentieth century society. This can also be seen in India among the Dalits—the subjugated race trapped between inferiority and development. Their mode of literary expression has also portrayed their struggling conditions and survival techniques in India.

In fact, this book of Sally Morgan has made Aboriginal life reach every nook and corner of the world. Everyone has given a thought about the oppressed and subjugated natives of Western Australia. Mudrooroo Narogin, the well known Aboriginal writer, says:

"... Sally Morgan's book is a milepost in Aboriginal literature in that it marks a stage when it is considered O.K. to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black. It is an individualised story and the concerns of the Aboriginal community are of secondary importance. ..." [Narogin: 149] 21

It is very important to struggle to survive. Morgan's second book, Wanamurraganya: The Story of Jack McPhee, is about the life story of an Aboriginal man, who also faces similar confrontations of discrimination and is victimised in the name of race and colour as in My Place. It rather very clearly portrays that if one is a 'white blackfella', one has no shelter--either in the white
culture or in the Aboriginal community. The so-called 'white blackfella' can easily relate to both the cultures but unfortunately none of them can correlate back to him/her. The fellow neither exists in the white realm nor can be categorized in the framework of Aborigines. This is the tragedy of our post-colonial societies and their culture.

Today when post-colonial culture and criticism are proliferating interests among readers and critics, Morgan's book *My Place* confirms the split between those critics who call for a powerful and authentic voice for marginalised groups or minorities; and those who, on the other hand, seek to deconstruct the discursive formations through which such marginalisation has been authorised. In an interview with Victoria Laurie, Sally Morgan says that the way she has been deprived from a sense of belonging to a minority and a quest for the cultural identity gave rise to *My Place*...

"... Because we had been deprived of that crucial knowledge as children and I didn't want my own children to be deprived I felt that it was a record for them. ... A sense of displacement brought within us a sense of emotional bondage to this minority. ... This book has definitely given a sense of pride to my family."...[An Interview With Sally Morgan: 7] 22

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