CHAPTER 1

RUTHLESS SURVIVAL

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ALEXIS WRIGHT’S
CLAIMS OF ARMINA
CHAPTER # 5

RUTHLESS SURVIVAL: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ALEXIS WRIGHT'S PLAINS OF PROMISE

My man took off yesterday
with a waagin.*
He left me and the kids
To be something in this world
Said he was sick of being
black, poor and laughed at
Said he wanted to be white
have better clothes, a flash car
and eat fancy
He said me and the kids
would give him a bad name
because we are black too
So he left with a waagin.

Charamine Papertalk-Green.

...have already seen in the previous chapters that the sense of
ent of the Australian Aborigines sowed the seed of hatred towards the
race and color, and a similar sense of hatred was born in the white
regime too for this inferior race. Among the Aboriginal people, such hatred had
borne the quest for identity, which changes into an exploration of the cruel and
brutal realities. It is very clear how this portrayal of the gruesome reality
became the norm of expression when a struggle began not only for existence
--but also for space, culture, identity, and several other things that are an innate,
significant part of survival. This had already been discussed in detail in the

*waagin= East Coast word for "white female", basically derived from "white
gin". It seems that the word reveals a meaning of woman being compared to
gin.
In this chapter the focus will be on the portrayal of the Aborigines by their own selves. It has been a traditional characteristic of the Aboriginal authors to encapsulate the inexorable reality of inhumane color discriminations and racial differences. To read literature written by the Aboriginal people as history, it is necessary to take into account the ways in which the dominant white discourse makes a clear distinction between historical and literary texts. These distinctions are generally based on the assumption that history is factual, and so it is authoritative. But literature produced by these so-called 'subhuman' people is fictional and therefore has no trace of reality. Whatever the severe interpretations of the non-Aboriginal critics may be, the reader employs different reading strategies, interpreting and making value judgments of the literature produced by the Aborigines. Literature of Aborigines written by the Aboriginal authors demonstrates the interconnectedness and disjunction of their own oral history. In *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* (1995), as Howard Pedersen while appreciating this oral tradition of the Aborigines, writes on the book basically based on the idea of Banjo Woorunmurra:

"...the Bunuba oral testimonies were fundamentally important to a book which draws primarily on information contained within reports, diaries and journals written by the invaders. These written sources cannot and have not been taken at face value. Interpreting them as sources of historical explanation would have been impossible without the Bunuba oral history." [Pedersen: p. 10]³

The literature of Aborigines of Australia produced by the Aboriginal themselves has been able to create a picture of international acclaim. It challenges the reality of a white portrayal of the Aborigines. It is dissociative, and so compels the re-thinking of the totality of a central and unified Australian
identity. This literature opposes history as a linear account of the white regime of Australia.

The Aboriginal writing of Australia by the aborigines themselves seems peculiarly adventurous because it is often emphatically conversational, and apparently discursive. It also seems that their writings are linguistically distinctive and sometimes entail the spiritual and the day-to-day life in the same reality. This literature portrays the violence and deculturation to which Aboriginal people have been subjected, but which has been omitted from the literature of the whites about them.

The Aborigines producing their own literature, is such a portrayal that embodies customary modes of communication and belief. Not surprisingly such writing is sometimes tagged 'magic realism', which might be adequate to describe its effect on white readers, but does not acknowledge the cultural complexity being expressed. Gillian Whitlock, in her essay Autobiography and Resistance (2000), says:

"...Too often the assumption is made that speaking in terms of subjectivity and constraints denies 'the other' a place to speak. In fact, the opposite is the case. It should not surprise us that the writings by people who are violently and forcibly 'othered' in an oppressive society will most readily encourage a reconsideration of the literary and social conventions of selfhood within which autobiographers are expected to work ..." [Whitlock: p. 163]

Of course, the colossal number of non-Aboriginal readers for the literature of Aborigines of Australia has, with the passage of time, increasingly understood this concept of 'other cultural reality'.

The past two hundred years of Australian history has been dominated and formulated by a network of white discourses. Especially, the cohesive existence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies have been written by the colonisers. The official constructions of history of Australia were totally controlled by the domineering whites. Their creations became the picture of these Aboriginal people and the brutal reality was never encapsulated in the literature of the country.
It took several decades to change the conceptual notions of these natives and their culture. Until the natives themselves formulated their oral literature into a written form, their portrayal was regarded as "nothing better than animals". Hence the responsibility of the handful of writers of the Aboriginal people and their culture was much more than it was thought to be. Establishment of their literature and culture in an international canvas of thoughts and criticisms, appeared as a crucial enterprise of the writers.

Alexis Wright, one of the reputed Aboriginal writers of Australia, reaped lots of critical acclaim. In her much talked about novel, Plains of Promise, the reader gets a feeling of togetherness with reality, and is alienated from the notions that the readers usually have about the Aborigines belonging to a different culture from his/her. This helps to establish a rapport not only with the literature but also with the culture and the society. Alexis Wright becomes successful in creating a certain space that was very necessary for the Aborigines to survive. The sense of belonging and the essence of displacement got a proper representation in the world of literature through the publication of this novel. Her desire to be a writer was borne with her from her childhood days. In an interview with a journalist of Alice Springs News, Kieran Finnane, Wright says:

"...I wanted to write from a very early age. I never had any encouragement from the school that I went to - they never expected Aboriginal kids to do well or to do anything! I never felt that the education being offered was directed towards me. The poetry, plays, fiction I heard at school intrigued me but the story-telling mostly comes from my grandmother. I had a lot to do with her from a very young age. I listened to her stories and the family talk for all the very early years of my life. That created my imagination - it was full of superstition and also a longing for the traditional homeland. ...My grandmother's still very close to me but now she's very, very old. She taught me a lot in life... "

[Finnane: p. 1]

A highly suggestive book that makes one dream of Australia and the plains of the Northern Territory, that makes the reader participate in the highly emotional experiences of the characters and that makes us question our conscience about how could something like that possibly happen. Plains of Promise is the second book from the eminent Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright;
highly talked about by all critics. When published, it was even paralleled to the magic realism in the Latin American context.

*Plains of Promise* is a powerful example that reinforces the political and social regulations into one another. Since the Aboriginals are "sub-human", the Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to them. Wright traces this very vividly in most of her works. Since the natives have no rights, they are simply abandoned without protection to inhuman forces. She brings in the colonial praxis to explain the brutal weapons of the colonialists that categorise them, so that victimisation becomes an easy apparatus for these whites. Even Jimmie, the protagonist of Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* faces similar victimisation. On the basis of this idea, Wright defines in her book two sorts of individuals—the first are those for whom privileges and humanity are the same by exercising their rights, and terms themselves as "social human beings". And the second are those, for whom denial of rights sanctions misery, chronic hunger, ignorance, can never exercise their rights or, in general, designates to be nothing better then "sub-human". Robyn Davidson, another Aboriginal writer of international reputation and belonging to the same place Alexis Wright comes from --Alice Springs, says in her *Marrying Eddie* (2000) that:

"Quite by chance I had arrived in the Alice juts ahead of the first shock waves detonated by the Land Rights Act, under which untenanted stretches of desert in the Northern Territory could be claimed by Aboriginal clans, provided they could prove before a white tribunal that their 'ownership' was authentic. Suddenly the town was invaded by 'southern do-gooders' --young, urban, left-wing teachers, lawyers, doctors, anthropologists, linguists, artists, who had come to lend their skills to the Aboriginal cause. The Central Land Council, a little grassroots organization, had been set up to administer the Act. Tiny bureaucracies began to form around specific issues --health, housing, education, communications." [Granta70: p.56]

If the history of the country is explored, it can be distinctly seen that in 1901 Australia was empowered by Britain "*to legislate in relation to any race except 'aboriginal natives'". It was advised that 'aboriginal natives' should continue to be excluded from that law, as they remained "creatures of exotic
under the jurisdiction of the Department of Flora and Fauna. It was not until 1967 that Aborigines were awarded citizenship.

Wright's *Plains of Promise* is an example of the integration of the real and the spiritual world of the Aborigines that has never been portrayed so correctly before. Another Aboriginal writer from Port Lincoln, South Australia, Iris Burgoyne also believed in the spiritual knowledge that the Aboriginal people possess. She thinks that she had:

"...gained ancient spiritual knowledge and wisdom and a rare insight into Aboriginal rituals and Law from relatives ascending to her great-great grandparents. While on the mission, I had regular contacts with elders who lived in camps on the outskirts of Koonibba mission. These people refused to set foot on the mission and defended their independent and self-sufficient way of life. They shielded me and many other young Aboriginal people, from the destruction of Aboriginal culture in the face of civilization and christianization. I often feel about young generations of Aboriginal Australians who suffered loss of identity because of the absence of the lessons on tradition". [Burgoyne: p. 55]

While reading *Plains of Promise*, one engages with a voice that is familiar and yet alien. The voice seemingly appears that of a psychologically complex story-teller, who unravels a terrible history of the struggle for survival of the Aborigines.

Alexis Wright has also tried to portray 'the complex relationship of the white-black world of Australia' 14. Her *Plains of Promise* has encapsulated 'the horror of a sad chapter of Australian history' 15. Her work facilitates an understanding of the relationship between the Aborigines and the white Australian society. She portrays the brutal reality being legitimised by the white dominance that leads to the subjugation and marginalisation of the Aborigines. She defies the white portrayal of the Aborigines that was either savage and sub-human or exotic and romantic. Wright, very vividly, pictures the legitimisation of the white regime and the atrocious conditions of the Aborigines in her novel.

*Plains of Promise* is essentially the story of a stranger who, arrives in an isolated community in the grip of a cruel regime. The novel is primarily set in Wright's own traditional country around Lawn Hill in the Gulf of Carpentaria.
She tries her best to represent her Waanji tribe from the highlands of the south of the Gulf:

"I wanted to write a novel set in the Gulf country which is where my family come from. I was living in Melbourne at the time, feeling a long way from home and it seemed that it was never going to come to an end. ... I guess the novel is in some ways my attempt to come to terms with my separation from the country, not that it's a story directly about me or my family. I also thought, when I started, that it was a way of bringing some attention to the area. Then it was one of the more neglected and isolated parts of Australia although nowadays it's always in the papers because of where the negotiations have led in the past two years. Because of my family circumstances I'm not able to live up there and apart from that we don't have any access to traditional lands, we still don't. Not just my family but most Waanji people because the lands are all owned by the powerful whites." [Finnane: p. 2]

This characteristic of retreating to one's roots can also be seen in the works of the Aboriginal poet from Derby, Tasmania, Daisy Utemorrah. In her *Do Not Go Around The Edges* (1990), the poetry is filled with memories and experiences of pathos and sadness for leaving her tribal lands back in Kunmunya, in Kimberley. She has often wandered in her dreams to go back to her homelands whereas in Sally Morgan's *My Place*, the protagonist, Sally, has represented this quest for the roots in details.

Alexis Wright's book explores the past and present Aboriginal situation through a matrilineage, the history of mothers and daughters who take us across the second half of the past century. *Plains of Promise* is a story of mothers and daughters, of despairing, anguished, enduring love in the face of systematic, legalized inhumanity. The relative bondage between two female protagonists, Mary and her daughter, Ivy, has been depicted in the intricacies of symbolism. Even the protagonists of Sally Morgan's *My Place*, Daisy, Gladys and Sally have been dealing with such intricate symbolism that has been clearly explained in the fourth chapter. Sally Morgan uses the trope of fear and disclosure of racial identity through the incident of the whites fathering children of the blacks making situations more complicated. The racial terror that encapsulates both these female protagonists has a different form of representation. If the daughter
describes the inhuman conditions of the circumstances of incomprehensible horror and trauma correlating the race and colour. The mother unwraps an awful, dispassionate environment where survival is impossible, but with her acts of courage and inspiring responsibility she overcomes every circumstance of life. Thomas Keneally in his novel *To Asmara* (1989), deals with such a valorous woman who eradicates the limitations of survival from trauma to betterment only for her children.

The female protagonist, Mary, perceives the world in a very different way. Her death, after her child is taken from her, is the first in a series of deaths suspected to be suicides. A cover-up by authorities leads the clandestine Council of Elders to conduct their own investigation. The results are inconclusive and the stranger's child is made a scapegoat. The plains that Wright portrays in the novel justify life, which inexorably renews itself despite all the painful obstacles put in its path, and the myriad deaths experienced along the way. Its endless cycles of renewal are in harmony with the world of spiritual existence that enlivens the land with beauty and terror. Thus the stranger is driven to her death:

"Alone she saw the blackness of the night and the men who came, small and faceless creatures. They slid down the ropes from the stormy skies, lowering their dirty wet bodies until they reached the ground outside the hut while she slept. There in silence they went after her..."  
[Wright: p. 17]

One of the important aspects of Wright's *Plains of Promise* is the question of how the novel presents female characters, and how it positions its readers in terms of gender. Feminists often comment on the uses made of gender in post-modern fiction and post-structuralism theories. Wright also argues with the Feminists that her usage of specific metaphors does not preclude a specific positioning of the readers in terms of gender. It is seen that in narrative theory, the equation between sexual and textual intercourse is a critical commonplace. Sally Morgan's *My Place* has been also depicting such a narrative pattern, where the protagonists have to lead a life of subjugation and discrimination. Henceforth, Wright portrays her characters in such a way that
she neither supports the female subjugation nor male dominance. Mark Henshaw's novel *Out of the Line of Fire* (1988) also frequently draws examples on such parallels.

The male protagonist, Elliot, who has been portrayed as a traveler to the country where people were all strangers, almost dies while travelling at the center of the dry Great Lake, surrounded by thousands of dead pelicans, like him deceived by the mirage of water. He lies unconscious, entombed in a web of grass. Elliot returns back to senses when the rain pelted upon his body. With fright, he jumps and in a flash of lightening he sees that the water ebbing against his outstretched legs. After the rain finally stopped he notices the greenery of the land in the daylight, but as the darkness approached the nature revealed a different reality:

"At night the dead returned, marching over the flat land. This time they feigned their identity as mosquitoes, unrecognisable in their sameness as the stars in the sky. Their living relatives were safe from the retaliations of this battle, where lost spirits fought each other individually. The arms and hands of fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters protected their own: Elliot, a messenger of his people's spirits....

...Slowly, painfully Elliott awoke. His tomb a sanctuary of dead clanspeople who left as soon as they felt the renewal of life in the heat he began to generate. They were no longer necessary; relieved of the urgency of family obligation, they could return to fighting one another." [Wright: pp. 81-82]

If probed properly the male characters seem to be incredibly violent towards women. All the men are characterised like this in various degrees -- white and black -- except for one poor man. Lawrence, who gets his neck broken when he tries to speak out for the injustice to the women world. He rebels against the excruciating acts that the masculine world always thrusts upon the weaker world of femininity. When Elliot thrashes his wife, Ivy, thinking that the women are 'the scum of the earth', Lawrence comes forward with a helping hand for Ivy:

"One day Lawrence overstepped the mark with Elliot. Elliot released the grip on Ivy, and flung her towards that crowd that had gathered, so that she almost landed in the camp-fire. 'Where's that
mother-fucker?' Elliot's eyes were protruding out of their sockets and a froth of saliva ran from his mouth. 'Here! Come and fight with a real man!' Lawrence challenged him. ..." [Wright: p. 153]²⁰

But such a violent trait has not been portrayed in the male characters of Morgan's novel My Place. Arthur was not very brutal like Elliot. Neither other male characters, like Albert or Howden Drake-Brockman, have been violent like Elliot.

This saga of Alexis Wright, uncovers the Aboriginal myths and legends but more truly their reality which is alive and still part of their every day life. So, it is not magic-realism that we find in the book, but an intricate symbolism that will lead us to the discovery of a different reality, that will allow us to take a glimpse to their world but that will not give us the key to fully understand it. The subtle gap between reality and magic reality has been covered with the absurd world of surrealism. Keneally's The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith unveils such a surrealistic world, where Jimmie wants his own world beyond the exotic portrayal of these indigenous people by the white superiorities.

Wright represents the scenario with a touch of truth and reality. She neither supports the realm of masculine tyranny nor does she deny the fact of the submissive nature of the feminine world. She rather thinks that contemporary situations and circumstances formulate the mode of conduct of any gender. In an interview by Kieran Finnane of Alice Springs News, Wright blames the circumstances and also the contemporary ruling government for that:

"If all the men turned out that way, I don't know how that happened except to say that the characters that I created weren't based on my feelings or perceptions of people in general. But the characters as they developed in the book were true to the characters I was trying to create, they developed in those ways. There was no attempt on my part to make women good and men bad and that's not how I see the world in general anyway. The type of communities created under state laws - missions and reserves - weren't pleasant places for people to live on, whether they were Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Any race of people would have suffered badly under those laws and the way those laws were applied to people." [Finnane: p.7] ²¹
The human drama of Wright's story is fascinatingly amplified in this way throughout the first section of the novel, under the title—The Timekeeper's Shadow. By its conclusion the stranger's child, Ivy Koopundi, has all but reached the end of her journey. Wright also portrays those realities that seem to be never dealt with such fineness. It seems that the torturous life that Ivy leads, she brings painfully alive the phrase "the Stolen Generation" in a very tragic manner. After years of sexual abuse at the hands of her "protector", she bears his child at just 14 years of age, who is taken away from her before she even sees her. The portrayal of the life that Ivy spends is quite despairing and dismal. Even Suvendrini Perera in her essay Of Love and Phobia in a Time of War (2001), describes this and according to her, Alexis Wright's Plains of Promise is a "historical novel of stolen generation. Here a succession of indigenous women forcibly separated from their daughters go up in flames one by one in an agony of longing, loss, despair and love". According to Wright this happens to:

"...A lot of people, a lot of Aboriginal people. If you're really an unlucky person, nothing good comes except for what you can make of your own inner world. I'd like to think that that doesn't happen in real life but I think we haven't heard a lot of the stories yet of the people who have been taken away and I think those stories may be more horrific than what I've got in the book. People think: "Oh, they connected back

As Tom Stannage, the famous historian, says that the Stolen Generation is a generation of successive children stolen away (in most cases by the government), of wealthy white men who disowned them. It is a generation of dispossession and denial of the rights of survival. This stolen generation basically suffered from a sense of displacement that the dominating whites have impinged into them.
with their mother or their families after they've been taken away for all those years and it's a happy story", but I wonder is it happy? Has it been a satisfactory reunion? And sometimes I don't think so. I guess I don't have much faith that there's going to be positive outcomes in life for everybody." [Finnane: p. 9] 24

Wright wants to protest against the misuse of the Aborigines Protection Act 1911, which was introduced by the government to give the natives their rights to survive because many people were unable to empathise with them as the oppressed, displaced one. Even today the Aborigines are considered as "sub-human... variants of primitive man... and are only subjects of anthropology". 25 Plains of Promise is a voice of that inner thought whose importance was to give the right words for this protest of the misuse of the Act.

After the first part of Timekeeper's Shadow, Ivy has been married off to Elliot who passionately loves a woman promised to someone else. He vents his rage on Ivy, who in any case is the whipping character for the entire community. From this point, Ivy drowns in madness, with only an occasional glimmer of hope or pleasure in her life but with more insensitivity, injustice and crushing solitude than any one individual should ever have to bear. To a certain extent, Plains of Promise starts to mark time too. The first section has moved along apace, weaving many lives together in a communal tapestry of profound resilience, passion and despair.

Now there seemingly appears a chronology of much lesser density. In the second part of the novel --Glimpses of Distant Hills --a search for one's own identity becomes of so much importance that one crosses the borderline of sanity.

Ivy stays for long years in a mental asylum --the Sycamore Heights Mental Health and Research Institution --and over there belly-dancing therapy was used upon the inmates. To this Wright reacts quite intensely:

"That's a bit of a send-up really of schemes applied to Aboriginal people. They come from great ideas from governments or churches, from
non-Aboriginal people and sometimes from Aboriginal people themselves. People can be sucked in and some weird and wonderful things might even work but when they fail, Aboriginal people are blamed for them, they're left high and dry and there's a big enquiry about it. It's a send-up of those situations." [Finnane: p. 7] 27

From Sycamore mental hospital, Ivy is eventually released, with little preparation or care, for reintegration into "the community". This essence of particularisation to a community and the sense of exploration of "the community", are vividly portrayed with significance on the quest of belonging. Even the opening scene in Morgan's My Place begins in a hospital but the reintegration is not the significant mode of description. Instead, Sally Morgan uses alienation as the word of demarcation and displacement between reality and the narrative discourse.

She is taken in by a woman suffering from more than a usual dose of delusion and through years of paranoid coexistence they eventually goad each other towards an event that kills the woman, leaving Ivy to a life of scavenging, an unwanted cur. Then the protagonist metamorphoses herself into a different identity to leave Ivy just to follow the life of the daughter she's never known, Mary, who after the death of her adoptive parents, is bent on discovering her origins. A well-known Aboriginal artist from Queensland, Delphine Sarago-Kendrick deals with this quest of belonging and the desire of her own roots and an urge to return to their tribal land to live out their later years in her novel, Nana's Land (2000). In her marvelous creation, she says:

"As a child watching my Nanas it seemed to me they were secure and fulfilled. In fact they had longings and desires we as children were never aware of; in their hearts they belonged somewhere else other than with us, especially as they grew older. ..."[Sarago-Kendrick: p.72].29

The domineering whites have been impinged onto her with the information in their will that her mother was Aboriginal. She is a tertiary educated city girl and her search starts with an urban Aboriginal organisation, the Coalition of Aboriginal Governments, which has been portrayed in the third section of the novel --Victory Lane.
Wright in the novel doesn't have a good word to say about this. She paints a pretty grim picture of the experience in terms of its sensitivity to the personal needs of people involved:

"In a lot of organisations there's a cohesion between people at various levels but at the same time it's very hard work that they do. It becomes quite ruthless, given the ruthlessness of the governments they have to deal with, and it really hardens people. It's on all of our minds that it does harden us and we have to very consciously not let it overtake our lives in all aspects." [Finnane: p. 10] 

As a personal experience, Mary is left to defend for herself as the outsider, the stranger as much as Ivy and her mother were. She develops a quite strong temperament to fight against all odds. She believes in the fact that however strong or weak one may be, one's tact for survival leads one to exist or perish. Mary is a very courageous girl to intrude into the world that she thinks to be her own. She knows that in such a struggle for space and identity, she has to confront lots of tormenting circumstances, especially from the masculine world. The innate strength that she possesses has been derived from her mother, Ivy. Both women protagonists have been portrayed as strong characters. Despite such innate inherited strength and courage, she does suffer a fair degree of mental and emotional abuse. Although she undergoes much psychological denigration and malignity of emotions from the circumstantial instances, she isn't beaten into submission.

If probed into, such an innate strength to struggle against all odds was a trait noticeable in the protagonist, Sally, of Morgan's novel, *My Place*. She also had inherited this trait from her mother and her grandmother, but the representation of this inherited strength is very different from Wright's representation. The reason may be very simply Morgan's novel was autobiographical and in Wright's case it is fictionalised. But this trait of innate strength to struggle is portrayed in a much more complicated way in Keneally's character, Jimmie, from the novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Because Jimmie is a real life character, represented in a fictionalised frame, the reader
mistakes most of the time that Jimmie is more a victim of circumstances than a victim of historical reality.

Wright tactfully draws incidents that make the reader have such a feeling for her characters. Ivy's work with this organisation finally leads her back to the community, where Ivy grew up. But her exploration remains no longer a mission. We meet again the characters of the first section, now old men and women; rather they have grown out of their age and seemingly appear to conquer time. The story's interest intensifies as Wright portrays a realisation of entering into their lives in the earlier part.

In her essay *Marrying Eddie*, Robyn Davidson explains the change that has evolved through the passage of time. She says:

"In the ten years I had been away, Aborigines had undergone something of a transformation in the national psyche. Previously, they had been on their way to extinction because social Darwinism said we were better than them. ...No one had believed the situation for Aborigines in Australia could get worse, but in many ways it had. There were patches of coherence and success, but they quickly faded. Did this mean that the liberal policies of the past twenty years had paved a way to hell, or did it mean that there had not yet been enough time for those policies to work? Had welfare crippled Aboriginal self-respect, or had too little money been thrown at their problems? ...The Seventies had been a romantic and idealistic time. Now relations... were more complicated, less innocent...." [Granta 70: pp. 64-65] 31

Wright also evokes very well the same kind of temperament and emotional sustenance that exists in the mind of Mary. There seems to be a kind of blankness that holds Mary back from personal fulfillment. She circles round and round the question of her belonging with nothing to reach out to. Where there should be relationship, detail, information, memory, there's a blank, a void, an emptiness of everything.

Even when she finally meets Ivy, in frightening circumstances, she does not realize that she is her mother. By coincidence, another set of events forces her to leave the community without ever understanding what it had to tell her of her past, of the "Aboriginality" that she wanted to discover. Though the terms
"Aborigine, Aboriginal, and Aboriginality" 32, which Ombudsmen formulates in the context to describe and evaluate the individuality and existential nominalistic attitude of these indigenous people of Australia, are, however, implicated by Wright to highlight the inappropriateness that the whites have used as tools to discriminate people on the basis of race and color. This inappropriateness by italicising these words draws a strategy in recognition of the power that the whites used since their invasion. Her novel pictures the violence and the brutal truth of marginalising the Aboriginal societies, cultures, and even language groups. When the language is concerned, most of the Aboriginal writers, like Alexis Wright, seem to be proud of their language. In the introduction of her The Story of Crow (1999), Magdalene Williams utters her attachment and descending inheritance from these Aboriginal people of Australia, with a sense of pride and that is revealed from the very beginning of the text:

"One of the greatest gifts, apart from my stories, is that my people left with me is my Nyulnyul language. This language is dying today and only a few people can speak it properly. I want to leave my stories and the list of language words and phrases behind for my family, so that they will benefit from my teachings and retain some aspects of their Nyulnyul identity." [Williams: p.5]

Taken together, these have made the concluding part --Plains of Papery Grass--of Alexis Wright's novel, Plains of Promise seem to be, devastating, without any hope.

A deconstructive reading of the text is a conglomeration of reminiscences, experiences and realities. Wright's novel highlights the usage of traditional modes and conventional metaphors. The subjugated voice is explored in a detailed form. This form of expression is very common among the marginalized minorities. This text has created a space for freedom and voicing the desire of homogeneity among the domineering whites. Such texts today have made the subjugated Aboriginal knowledge emerge in a form of literature that they deserve not only culturally, but also politically and socially. Alexis
Wright and her text *Plains of Promise* have deconstructed the images of the Aborigines that existed as exotic or as "sub-human". This exotic image was very clear in the character of Jimmie in Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*.

Memories, longings, frustrations, love and hatred, dreams and pains -- the same tropes have been used by Wright in her next book *Grog War*. Like her previous book, she goes on to use the same narrative techniques, powdered by her passionate desire for social justice and sentimental attachment for her own people. The Julalikari Council, the Warrumungu people (the fictional Aboriginal couple --Lucas and Devine) and other residents of Tennant Creek -- tell the story of this novel. Her courageous attempts of disclosing and portraying the brutal reality have taken not only the literature of Aborigines, but 'the Australian novel to places it has never been before. This is authentically Australian magic realism that puts imported versions into new perspectives'.

What Wright feels that the reconciliation process the government is thrusting upon the Aboriginal people and this is ruthlessly affecting to closet their cultures. The natives are themselves locking up their whole oral tradition, their stories and the experienced historical truth. She is therefore fighting against the government and the non-Aboriginal people and trying to the feeling of freedom and eradicate the sense of fear in the hearts of these Aboriginals. Wright thinks:

"Constraining the sting of the memory of a painful and shameful history will only make it grow poisonous. All Aboriginal people need to be free to stand up without fear and to be able to tell their own stories themselves." [Finnane: p. 14].

In the introduction to his book, *The Red Thread: A Love Story*, Nicholas Jose tells us about Alexis Wright's novel *Plains of Promise* that the novel "retraces the journeys of displaced people. Remembering where they have
come from, they are able to recover a sense of wholeness from tragedy and despair." He says that Wright has given a detailed picture of the conflict between black and white and within black communities. *Plains of Promise* is an intense book that will leave as many questions open as "wounds bleeding." It picturises a lot of suffering but also portrays a ray of hope for future generations. It is for the future generation that it hopes to trace a way towards reconciliation with the past and, by giving them back their origins, to provide them with a new and more stable identity, which Sally Morgan has also attempted through *My Place.*