“This country was founded on a lie, the lie of terra nullius” (Ginibi 1992: 106). The Australian Aboriginal woman writer, Ruby Langford Ginibi’s words highlights an unchangeable truth of the Australian history, the concept of terra nullius propagated by the colonial racist hegemony, that lies at the root of the massive exploitation of the ‘native’ Aborigines whose territorial rights were brutally disregarded. The Australia before European settlement has been projected as an uninhabited, empty terrain, or to use Bill Ashcroft’s phrase, a ‘blank’ space—a place that represented the absence of modernity, of ‘civilization’, an absence that was ‘filled’ by European exploration, mapping and naming and the fact that such spaces were “richly filled for their occupants, densely inscribed with local cultural reality” has been conveniently ignored (Ashcroft 2001: 131). This was merely the initial stage of what has been termed by Sheila Collingwood-Whittick as “the imperial power’s grand scheme for writing over the ‘blank page’ of the ‘New World’”. The colonizers not only drastically altered/disfigured the natural landscape of Australia that provided the spiritual sustenance to the Aborigines, but “the human cultures that had flourished there for millennia were, firstly, physically exterminated on a massive scale and then, later, symbolically eliminated through their exclusion both from the civil life of the nation and from all scriptural accounts of its past” (Collingwood-Whittick 2002: 42). This deliberate omission of the Aboriginal side of Australian history is referred to as ‘the great Australian silence’ by W. E. H. Stanner who criticised white Australia for
“having given the aborigines no place in [the Australian] past except that of ‘a melancholy footnote’” (Collingwood-Whittick 2002: 42).

Cliff Watego says that it was in the 1960s when the Australian Aborigines were on their way to extinction as a result of massacres, maltreatment, and government policies of displacement and assimilation that the Aboriginal writers reached a consensus to “enlighten the white public to the grievances and aims of black Australians through literature” (1998: 11). Many aboriginals, particularly women, took to writing autobiographical narratives as an effective means of consolidating “a sense of self” (Brewster 1996: 27). Sally Morgan’s My Place (1987) was one of the most important narratives of this kind that, according to Ruby Langford Ginibi, “opened [Australia] up” (quoted in Brewster 1995: 41) by positing as a “counter-memory, as a record of displacement and deculturation, in opposition to official Australian accounts of settlement and civilization” (Trees 1992: 65). Sheila Collingwood-Whittick suggests that the impetus for My Place is provided by an authorial determination to break the coloniser’s monopolistic control over the writing of colonial history, by enabling the ‘subjugated’, orally transmitted knowledge of the colonized to be communicated via the powerful medium of print (Collingwood-Whittick 2002: 44-45).

My Place has been hailed as “a new space within Australian literary culture for the discovery of Aboriginality and for repudiation of all that has obliged its invisibility and silence” (Rowse 1993: 14). However, many critics are skeptical of both Sally
Morgan’s claim as an Aboriginal and the classification of her narrative as an autobiography.

Stephen Muecke criticises Morgan for claiming only a genetically determined identity:

… Aboriginality in the case of this novel [sic] is more a genetic inheritance than a set of social practices to be engaged with. (1988: 411)

Claiming that Morgan’s aboriginal identity was “forged in the creation of the text, rather than the reverse”, Bain Attwood argues:

… the nature of the Aboriginality asserted in My Place is inherently problematic. In this, I am neither seeking to debunk Aboriginality nor questioning whether Morgan’s Aboriginality is true or real. Any identity is a cultural construction, a product of the human imagination, and in this case Morgan’s genetic inheritance does provide the material basis for of her particular choice. (1992: 303)

Unlike Muecke, Attwood does not dismiss Morgan’s claim to Aboriginal genes as the only reason to identify herself as an Aboriginal. He probes further to know, between her Caucasian and Aboriginal descent, Morgan identifies only with the latter:

… why is it that Morgan has constructed herself in terms of being Aboriginal? To express this question another way, what is the unconscious (or conscious) problem that belief in her Aboriginality solves for Morgan, or what wishes or desires does this belief satisfy? Here, I will be pointing to, and seeking to
explain, the contradiction between Morgan’s freedom to choose this identity and her assertion of it as essential. (1992: 303)

Therefore, like Muecke, Attwood too, has reservations about the genre of *My Place* which, he claims is shaped by several different literary genres. In the most obvious of these, the autobiographical mode, Morgan recounts her life story as being that of her hesitant but nonetheless inexorable movement towards the discovery of her real self. It is, in other words, rendered in terms of her capacity for growth and self-knowledge. “This romantic view of an individual life not only characterizes autobiography, but also the classic realist novel” (1992: 305). Moreover, suggests Attwood:

…as Eric Michaels noted, Morgan collapses the distinction between subject and object… and so acquires a more convincing authority and a more compelling authenticity. (1992: 317)

Janette Turner Hospital in *The New York Times* also reviewed *My Place* as “a book with a form and texture of a novel and the complexity and pace of a mystery not solved until the final pages. It is wonderfully entertaining and a luminous prose poem” (1989: web). Thus, elements of a novel are undeniably present within the narrative structure of *My Place*.

Apart from the disputed contentions about the genre to which it belongs, even the authenticity and historicity of the content and perspective of the facts related in *My Place* has been questioned by Judith Drake-Brockman in her book of recollections
Wongi-Wongi: to Speak (2001). Judith is the daughter of Howden Drake-Brockman, who built the Corunna Downs as a sheep station, and Morgan’s grandmother Daisy’s life is intimately connected to the Drake-Brockman family. Therefore, the uncertainty of its genre and the difference of opinion about the historical accuracy of the facts of Morgan’s narrative strongly assert the fictional nature of the text. This justifies the inclusion of *My Place* in the present study of postcolonial fiction where it has been analysed strictly as a fictional narrative.

The landscape of memory determines the structure of Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (1987). Variously classed as a “social history, political protest, or as an example of feminist voicing” (Elder 1992: 17) this narrative is an expression of Morgan’s “spiritual sense of identity and place as she laboriously fill in the details of her family’s geographic, historical and psychological wanderings” (Elder 1992: 16). From the moment she first suspects her aboriginal ancestry, the protagonist perseveres and eventually succeeds in penetrating through her family’s conspiracy of silence and shame to elicit the truth about her ancestry from her relatives. Sally listens to, tapes, and then writes down the stories that Arthur, Daisy and Gladys relate to her about their personal experiences of discrimination, forced separation, bondage and miscegenation. The recollection of the past by the different members of Sally’s family helps her to re-construct the narrative of her Aboriginal origin.

The narrative of *My Place* helps Sally to gain a sense of home vis-à-vis the discovery of a sense of her own identity because the “practice of inhabiting is in fact a dense
fabric of interwoven acts in which the issues of inheritance, ethnic identity, belonging, history, race, land are all intertwined” (Ashcroft 2001: 158). Identifying Sally’s desire to visit Corunna as a ‘postcolonial’ attempt to reconstruct her identity in relation to the landscape occupied by her ancestors, Ashcroft contends that the narrative:

…recounts her search for roots, her search for some physical and cultural location from which she can trace her identity, and it describes the eventual return to Corunna Downs from whence her family came. But here the search for place reveals itself to be inflected with the core condition of colonial displacement, the search for that static and transcendent object of desire, elusive and ultimately non-existent: the authentic pre-colonial identity. Corunna Downs represents but one stage in the location of Sally’s family’s ‘place’. The very term ‘my place’ is polyvalent, for clearly, it can, and does, refer to a place in various physical and imaginative environments.” (2001: 158).

Morgan’s personal history and the experiences of three other members of her family, namely her great-uncle Arthur Corunna, her mother Gladys Milroy and her grandmother Nan (Daisy Corunna), as they relate them to her gives My Place a polyphonic perspective where each narrator speaks from the position of someone who has been dispossessed, dislocated and humiliated because of his/her Aboriginal origin. Amongst all her family members, the only person who readily agrees to narrate the past to Sally is her great-uncle: “I been tryin’ to get someone to write it for
years” (213). Her mother being “a hard nut to crack” (99) needs more persuasion, but it is her grandmother Nan who is most reluctant: “I’m not saying nothing. Nothing, do you hear…I’m not talking, I’m not talking” (105). Even when she finally complies, she refuses to tell everything because of her continuing fear of white authority’s power and her socially induced shame of her Aboriginal origins:

‘You won’t ever tell them about me, will you, Sally? I don’t like strangers knowing our business, especially government people. You never know what they might do.’ (173)

‘Don’t you understand, yet,’ she said softly, ‘there are some things I just can’t talk about.’ (351)

Growing up in ignorance of her Aboriginal lineage in suburban western Australia, Morgan’s own narrative of her childhood and maturation is structured in a family that was polarized between her father Bill Milroy, an alcoholic and somewhat mentally disturbed but most importantly a Caucasian Aussie on the one extreme and her aboriginal grandmother Nan on the other.

The narrative begins with little Sally and her mother visiting her father at the hospital during one of his frequent confinements there as a patient due to excessive drinking. In spite of their paternal grandfather’s pride in the Milroy men’s talent for drinking (33), their father’s drunken fits often forced Sally and her siblings, along with their mother and Nan, to seek shelter with their neighbor Grace (47-50). After their father’s death, however, the children are given a relatively more peaceful and stable
upbringing by their mother who provided the income for the family with her odd jobs and Nan who took up the responsibility of the domestic duties. Together, the two women try to raise the five children and provide for their education to the best of their abilities, but at the same time, camouflaging the truth of their half Aboriginal ancestry.

In conjunction with their Aboriginal origin, the matrix of gender also impacted the Milroy children during their formative years. After their father’s death, their mother promoted Billy to the position of the “Man of the House” that caused his siblings to wonder whether he possessed any special power (59-60).

The bewilderment of the children increased on perceiving the preferential treatment that the young Billy also received from their paternal grandparents.

The only one they were really keen on was Billy, and that was only because he was the image of Dad. Grandpa always liked to have Billy close to him, but the rest of us were relegated to the backyard. Our cousins were allowed inside, but we had to stay outside. (62)

At this stage, the children were too young to comprehend the ambiguous attitude of their grandparents, but old enough to realise that their mother’s family background, in some way, accounted for it:
It wasn’t that our grandparents dislike us. In fact, they always treated us kindly, in their own way. After all, half of us belonged to Dad. It was the other half they were worried about. (63)

Even as a child, little Sally had begun to perceive the subtle differences between her family and the families of the other children in her school. Eventually, she questioned her mother about her ethnicity: “…The kids at school want to know what country we come from. They reckon we’re not Aussies. Are we Aussies, Mum?’

While Nan displayed her displeasure, Sally’s mother tactfully dealt with her daughter’s query: ‘Tell them you’re Indian.’ (45)

This response satisfied Sally till her teenage years when one of Nan’s rare outbursts over her own skin colour made Sally suspect her ethnicity once more (120-121). When Sally confided her doubts to her younger sister Jill, she was surprised by Jill’s uneasiness at confronting the reality of being labelled a ‘boong’, a derogatory term for the Aboriginal.

‘You know, Jill,’ I said after a while, ‘if we are boongs, and I don’t know if we are or not, but if we are, there’s nothing we can do about it, so we might just as well accept it.’ (121)

Jill, however, is not in favour of a confirmation of this fact because she fears the social stigma attached to being Aboriginal.
‘You still don’t understand, do you,’ Jill groaned in disbelief. ‘It’s a terrible thing to be Aboriginal. Nobody wants to know you…You can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal! …’ (122)

The strong suspicion of her Aboriginal origin induced Sally’s efforts try to pester either her Nan or her mother into a confessing the truth. Eventually she succeeded when she tricked her mother to own up her Aboriginality during a casual conversation (170). After the confirmation of her descent, Sally applied for and obtained an Aboriginal scholarship that made her “the butt of many family jokes” (172). Sally, however, stands her ground: “It wasn’t the money I was after…I desperately wanted to do something to identify with my new-found heritage and that was the only thing I could think of.” (172)

The reaction of her friends and acquaintances and fellow students at the university to the open acceptance of her Aboriginality forced Sally to radically alter her earlier opinion of Australia as “the least racist country in the world” (175). Most people believed Sally’s assertion to be primarily motivated by the monetary benefits of the scholarship so much so that she was even summoned by a senior officer of the Commonwealth Department of Education to justify the veracity of her claim.

Sally’s next step to asserting herself as an Aboriginal materialises in the beginning of 1979 when resolves to inscribe the history of her mother’s family in the form of book (190). Lead by her mother, Sally begins to collect facts for her book by interviewing
Aunt Judy (Judith Drake-Brockman) because Nan had been Judy’s nursemaid. However, what Judy tells Sally disagrees with what she learns from Arthur about Nan’s parentage. Finally, for the first time, Gladys gently coaxes the truth out of Nan:

‘Well, you know when you write a book, it has to be the truth. You can’t put lies in a book. You know that, don’t you Nan?’
‘I know that, Glad,’ Nan nodded.
‘Good. Now, what I want to know is who you think your father was. I know Judy says it was Maltese Sam and Arthur says it was Howden. Well, I’m not interested in what they say. I want to know what you say. Can you tell me, Nan, who do you think he really was?’
Nan was quiet for a few seconds and then, pressing her lips together, she said very slowly, ‘I … think … my father was … Howden Drake-Brockman.’

The reverence for a book about their own history that should contain unadulterated truth is in sharp contrast to how Nan treats printed matter produced by others. Sally is astonished to discover that Nan, unable to read or write, encouraged two women from the Jehovah’s Witness Church to call on her each week and even bought leaflets and magazines from them on the pretense of reading them. When she confronts her grandmother, Nan’s reasoning leaves Sally ‘dumbfounded’:

She grinned, then said, ‘Feel them, Sally.’
‘Feel what?’
‘The papers.’

I looked, dumbfounded, at the papers in my hand. ‘They feel soft,’ I said.

‘That’s right!’ Nan grinned triumphantly. And then, lowering her voice, she whispered, ‘They’ll make the most marvellous toilet paper, Sally. I’ve got boxes of those magazines in my room. It’ll save your mother a lot of money!’

The manner in which Nan procured printed literature as a cheaper alternative to toilet-paper demonstrates how she utilised every possible opportunity to strike back at the larger unaccommodating society.

Judy directs Sally to visit Alice Drake-Brockman (Mum-mum), Judy’s mother in a nursing home in Sydney. From Alice, Sally learns some more facts about Nan’s youth, her pregnancy and the birth of Gladys and her upbringing in Parkerville Children’s Home, but the identity of Gladys’ father continues to remain a mystery. When Sally confronts her mother about her ‘sin of omission’ about growing up in a children’s home, Gladys, too, becomes secretive like Nan.

Soon after her return to Perth, Sally hears of Arthur’s death. Sally had a premonition of Arthur’s death, and before she left for Sydney, she had spent more than three months recording Arthur’s story on a tape-recorder that she later transcribed and pieced together.
It was very important to me to finish his story. I owed him a great debt. He’d told me so much about himself and his life, and in doing so, he’d told me something about my own heritage. (219)

Arthur’s aboriginal name was Jilly-yung (223) and his narrative of his experience of growing up as an Aborigine contrasts sharply with Alice’s story of Nan and Gladys narrated from the coloniser’s point of view. Similarly, the attitude that the surviving members of the Drake-Brockman family, Alice and her daughters Judy and June, display towards Daisy Corruna highlights the implacable hostility of the ‘whites’ towards the aborigines. The refusal of Arthur and Daisy’s biological father Howden Drake-Brockman to ‘own’ up his illegitimate offspring born due to his liaison with Annie, a aboriginal women and the wife of the headman of a local tribe also underscores the racial history of sexual relations between the white men and the aboriginal women (Donaldson 1991), a theme that recurs in a muted form in the portrayal of the precarious marital relationship between Sally’s own parents because Sally’s father, too, had a similar attitude towards his wife and his mother-in-law.

Piecing together the information she garners from the narratives of Judy, Alice and Arthur, Sally decides to visit north to Corruna Downs, Nan’s birthplace. Along with her husband and three children, Sally takes her mother Gladys with her on the trip, disregarding Nan’s vehement opposition and dissuasion: “All you’ll be lookin’ at is dirt. Dirt and scrub” (270).
Sally and Gladys are identified by the Aboriginals living there as the ‘Corruna mob’ and the ‘Brockman people’ and very soon they discover a lot of people related to them through complex kinship structures. Most of the local Aboriginals receive Sally warmly and encourage her search for her roots:

‘…People like you wanderin’ around, not knowin’ where you come from. Light-coloured ones wanderin’ around, not knowin’ they black underneath. Good on you for comin’ back…’ (279).

In another instance, Sally meets an old full blooded Aboriginal woman who whispered to her: ‘You don’t know what it means, no one comes back. You don’t know what it means that you, with light skin, want to own us.’ (288)

Though they are unable to identify Nan’s father correctly, many of the local people decisively eliminate the possibility of Maltese Sam being Sally’s great-grandfather. Both Judy and Alice had confidently identified Maltese Sam as Nan/Daisy’s father.

While leaving Corruna, both Sally and her mother are overcome with emotion:

We kissed everyone goodbye…Mum and I were both a bit teary. Nothing was said, but I knew she felt like I did. Like we’d suddenly come home and now we were leaving again. But we had a sense of place now. (290)

Apart from the gift of a grinding stone that one woman gives Sally to take back to Nan, the other Aboriginals also identify which of the four groups Sally and her family
members belong to and instruct them to remember the groups so that they claim kinship with the other Aboriginals.

We all felt very moved and honoured that we’d been given our groups. There was no worry about us forgetting, we kept repeating them over and over. It was one more precious thing that added to our sense of belonging. (292)

Sally and her family virtually went knocking at the doors of strangers who became relatives as soon as introductions were completed. All these relations gladly accepted Sally and her family’s right to the land as equal to that of those who were staying on it.

‘…You always come here. You can come and live here…This is your place too, remember that.’ (294)

This journey not only concludes the quest motif of the narrative; here both Sally and her mother achieve completion as they are owned by the aboriginal remaining on the land. On their way back to Perth, Sally and her family members feel overwhelmed at the sense of belonging they have gained as a result of this trip.

How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as whole people. We would never have known our place. (294)

Interestingly, these words also form the epigraph of *My Place.*
As Sally and her family reluctantly make their way back to their old lives in Perth, they take cognizance of the change within them.

What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it. (294)

Gladys is thankful to her daughter for restoring to her a sense of pride in her origin:

“All my life, I’ve only been half a person. I don’t think I realised how much of me was missing until I came North.” (295).

The trip radically altered Sally’s and Gladys’ perception of Nan by making them realise that continuous oppression had rendered Nan incapable of ‘belonging’ to her place. Armed with knowledge that they have gained, the mother and daughter duo return to Perth determined to penetrate through Nan’s armour of resistance and silence to help her come to terms with her Aboriginal identity.

We belonged, now. We wanted her to belong, too. (295)

Reminiscences of the Corunna trip help Sally and her mother make two important assumptions which, however, remain uncorroborated by anyone else. The physical resemblance that Gladys bears to an old photograph of Howden Drake-Brockman leads the two women to think of the possibility of Howden fathering both Daisy and Gladys (299). A clue about Nan’s supposed return to Corunna in 1923 and the resurfacing of a long-forgotten memory in Gladys’ consciousness of Nan’s fleeting
mention of Gladys’ sister paves the way for Gladys to tell her daughter her story in order to reach out to a sibling she had never known (301).

Just like Arthur’s tale, Gladys’ story also contrasts sharply to the narratives of both Judy and Alice. In addition, Gladys fills up some of the gaps in Sally’s narrative of her childhood memories of her parents. Gladys begins by narrating her upbringing at children’s home and then her marriage with Bill Milroy despite the disapprobation of both the families. Bill’s memories of his traumatic experience as prisoner of war during the Second World War in Germany made him a compulsive drinker and the consecutive births of their two daughters, Sally and Jill, widened the emotional gulf between Bill and Gladys. Thereafter, despite the successive births of two sons, Billy and David, their marriage continued to deteriorate due to poverty and Bill’s worsening drinking habit till there came a time when the only bond that tied together was Bill’s threat to separate Gladys’ from their children. Bill uses the knowledge of Gladys’ Aboriginality to hold power over the lives of both Gladys and their five children as long as he is alive:

He said if I left, he’d make sure the children were taken off me. He said, ‘Nobody will let someone like you bring up kids and you know it. I’m the one that’ll get the custody, I’ll give them to my parents.’

I knew what he meant. I always had a sinking feeling in my stomach when he said that. Aboriginal women weren’t allowed to keep children fathered by a white man. He was right, I couldn’t take the chance of losing them, I had to stay and try to cope somehow. They were all I had. (374)
After the pain that both Gladys and Nan had endured of being forcefully separated from their parents in their childhood due to their aboriginality, Gladys’ unwillingness and fear of exposing her own children to a similar fate is understandable.

With Nan’s support, Gladys continued to struggle with Bill’s frequent trips to the hospital of increasing duration till Bill died barely eighteen months after the birth of their fifth child Helen. Even in her widowhood, the fear of losing her children did not subside. Soon after Bill’s death, the visit of a Welfare lady to check the living condition of the family acts as a catalyst that compels Gladys and Nan to enter into a mutual ‘conspiracy of silence’ to conceal their Aboriginal ancestry from the children in order to protect them from harm.

It was after the visit of the Welfare lady that Mum and I decided we would definitely never tell the children they were Aboriginal. We were both convinced they would have a bad time otherwise. Also if word got out, another Welfare person might come and take them away. It would have killed us both.

Mum said she didn’t want the children growing up with people looking down on them. I understood what she meant. Aboriginals were treated the lowest of the low. It was like they were the race on earth that had nothing to offer. (378)

Gladys and Nan’s constant fear of eviction and disruption of the family bonds that the revelation of their Aborigine origin may lead to perpetually threatens the essentially
‘private’ site of the Milroys’ house and imparts an insecurity and a sense of placelessness to this. Despite this, this house also provides the sustenance of belonging to the family due to Nan’s comforting presence and her Aboriginal consciousness. Bill Ashcroft analyses Nan’s contribution to making the Milroy children feel at home in such an unstable and insecure place:

“Nan has a way of inhabiting that makes the place her own, that dwells in a space beyond location, an imaginative space deeply imbued with the place-ness of her own carefully nurtured sense of being. This practice of habitation is more than the occupying of a location, it is itself a way of being within which, and through which, place comes to be…. For Nan, the inherited ways of being in place, of seeing place as a numinous and liberating mystery, determine her Aboriginality more effectively than any location, as indeed it must. This gift of being is the opposite of exile, for it turns location, any location, into home, into owned place.” (2001: 158-59)

The final narrative strand of the text is provided by Daisy Corunna/Nan’s recounting of her early life.

My name is Daisy Corunna, I’m Arthur’s sister. My Aboriginal name is Talahue. (402)

The manner in which Daisy introduces herself as Arthur’s sister brings up the gaps in her consciousness about the date of her birth and her paternity. She narrates her early life at Corunna, her association with the Drake-Brockman family that led to her gradual but forced separation from her own family and friends. She remembers the
depravity of food that she was forced to endure as a child. Growing up as a servant in the Drake-Brockman household, Daisy found herself “too black for whites and too white for the blacks” (415).

In her narrative, Daisy confirms giving birth Gladys’ sibling (419) but she remains silent on the issue of Gladys’ paternity. She had irrevocably lost her first child to government policy, and Gladys too was sent to Parkerville. Daisy recounts her struggle to protect Gladys both before and after her marriage to Bill.

Daisy also recounts the racist attitude of Bill and his parents towards the aboriginals. For the sake of her daughter, Daisy quietly put up with Bill calling her “a bloody nigger” behind Gladys’ back (427).

Though Daisy breaks her silence and reveals some details of her life to her granddaughter Sally, she leaves significant gaps in her narrative. She cites her approaching death as the reason she finally decides to speak: “Some things I’m tellin’ you ‘cause I won’t be here much longer” (425). However, she stubbornly refuses to reveal everything about her life:

Well, Sal, that’s all I’m gunna tell ya. I don’t want to talk no more. I got my secrets, I’ll take them to the grave. Some things, I can’t talk ’bout. Not even to you, my grand daughter. They for me to know. They not for you or your mother to know. (428)
The narrative of *My Place* represents “both the spatial and the temporal location of its protagonists in contemporary society and in history, where history is understood as a narrative unfolding spatiality and temporally” (Ashcroft 2001: 158-59). Thus, apart from the spatial locations of her parent’s home and her husband Paul’s home in Perth and the Nan’s connection with Corunna Downs, the narratives of her family members provide Sally with temporal sites for her identity. However, Sally’s realisation and acceptance of her Aboriginal heritage reaches maturity when it finds its parallel in the process of her evolution as an artist. While in school, the young Sally had been ridiculed by her art teacher:

> He held up one of my drawings in front of the class one day, and pointed out everything wrong with it. There was no perspective, I was the only one with no horizon line. My people were flat and floating...By the end of ten minutes the whole class was laughing and I felt very small. I always believed that drawing was my only talent, now I knew I was so good at that either. (119)

Robin Dizard quotes the Aboriginal painter Michael Nelson Tjakamarra who complains of a similar incomprehension of his art:

> “White people don't really appreciate these dreamings that we paint. These dreamings are part of this country that we live in... We try to show that this is our land. We try to show them our dreaming” (Dizard 1997: 152).
This humiliation and the psychic injury that the young girl Sally sustained discouraged her artistic ambitions which she had been nurturing despite her mother’s opposition.

I decided then to give up drawing. I was sick of banging my head against a brick wall. I got together all my collection of drawings and painting, sneaked down to the back of the yard, and burnt them. (119)

Arlene A. Elder says that this trauma healed only when, during a visit to her grandmother’s birthplace, the young woman Sally met an aboriginal artist whose similar style of painting helped her gain her lost confidence:

“I couldn’t draw a three dimensional picture if I tried…I never felt the need to put in any horizon lines…I’ve always liked patterns” (quoted in Elder 1992: 19-20)

The elderly aboriginal painter’s work inspired Sally: “When I saw his work I could relate immediately” (quoted in Hospital 1989: web). Therefore, she started painting brightly-coloured scenes of aboriginal life twenty years after her art teacher disgraced her: “My paintings don’t have a European feeling at all. They have a more innocent, naïve feel to them” (quoted in Hospital 1989: web). Thus, creative art became a therapeutic procedure for the construction of Sally’s aboriginal identity.

The ‘lack of European perspective’ in the paintings of the Australian Aborigines is accounted for by the fundamental disparity in the ‘worldview’ that determines how the Europeans and the Aborigines perceive space and place. Bill Ashcroft enumerates
this difference by describing the European painters’ views of the colonial space as “perspectival” that translates into art by a separation of the subject and the object to sustain the sense of the static extension and the isolation of the viewer from the scene. The ‘priority of perspective’ that the European gaze gives to the visual space is a result of the perception of the colonised place as a “spatial expansion, a horizon of ‘uninhabited’ land” which the colonisers’ art forcefully imposes upon the indigenous modes of spatial perception (2001: 138-139).

Aboriginal art, on the other hand, has been described by Ashcroft as “metonymic and symbolic rather than representational in function, and deeply implicated in the performance of religious obligations” (2001: 139). Ashcroft elaborates on the Aboriginal heritage of a spiritual tie with the land by arguing that the Aborigines do not perceive landscape either as a visual construct in the perspectival tradition, or as a measurable space or a topographical system. To an Aborigine, land as a visual space is nameless and a tangible location of one’s own Dreaming, an extension of one’s own being. The focus of the Aboriginal gaze is on naming the natural formations and features into which the Dreaming ancestors metamorphosed when they completed their travels on the nameless plane of the original universe. The land becomes a function of the Aboriginal’s own being, an embodiment which is expressed in art. Animal and abstract forms are drawn for their sacred significance because they ‘embody’ rather than ‘represent’ the power of the things they signify. Thus, a stream or a hill may represent a particular Dreaming figure whose location on the Dreaming track is of particular significance to a person’s life (2001: 139).
Apart from the perspective, even the medium that the Aboriginal artists use to depict the land differs significantly from that used by their European counterparts. Whereas Europeans categorise art into fine art and performing art and primarily use the canvas as a medium for painting the landscape, the Aboriginals often blur the distinction between fine and performing arts by painting their own body. Galarrwuy Yunipingu highlights this aspect of the representation of land in Aboriginal art:

> When I get out and paint myself and go bush, whether I am performing a sacred ceremony, or corroboree, I am performing an art that talks about the land…When aboriginal people get together we put the land into action. When I perform, the land is within me, and I am the only one who can move, land doesn’t, so I represent the land when I dance. I pretend to be the land, because the land is part of me. So I perform whatever I do on behalf of the land. (Yunipingu 1980: 13-14)

Even the pictorial representation of land in Aboriginal art is essentially symbolic. Robin Dizard contends that the traditional Aboriginal Australian paintings depict the artist's relationship to a given landscape and to the totems in her or his descent line. Contemporary painters use dots and lines to encode landscape features which, correctly understood, enable the possessor of that descent line to walk desert trails, find water, meet kinfolk and avoid foes over miles of country. Besides being graphic narratives of ancestral journeys, these paintings, by recording the songs, dreams, and
sacred tradition native to each spot, join cartography, family trees and philosophy and sum up thousands of years of the Aboriginal oral traditions (1997: 151-152).

Sally remembers how Nan had initiated her to the skill of drawing and understanding tracks on the sand in their back yard when Sally was very little.

‘This is a track, Sally. See how they go.’ I watched, entranced, as she made the pattern of a kangaroo. ‘Now this is a goanna and here are emu tracks. You see, they all are different. You got to know all of them if you want to catch tucker.’

‘That’s real good, Nan.’

‘You want me to draw you a picture, Sal?’ she said as she picked up a stick.

‘Okay.’

‘These are men, you see, three men. They are very quiet, they’re hunting. Here are kangaroos, they’re listening, waiting. They’ll take off if they know you’re coming.’ Nan wiped the sand picture out with her hand. ‘It’s your turn now,’ she said, ‘you draw something.’ I grasped the stick eagerly. (123)

Both the Australian and the Indian editions of *My Place* published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Indialog Publications respectively display on the book's cover Sally Morgan's painting of *My Place* that depicts “a number of houses …connected by a meandering path marked by arrows in a clockwise direction” (Jaireth 1995: 71). This painting “traces her family's pathway from the sheep station to Perth and their suburban home, all framed with a snake clamping its tail in its
mouth”. Morgan uses some conventional European images and incorporates human figures and faces into her works, but she also esteems Aboriginal aesthetics. Her work shuns perspective, tells stories, and depicts her descent lines (Dizard 1997: 152).

Therefore, Sally’s doubts about her identity, situated in a interstitial postcolonial context, both as an Australian of mixed ancestry and as an artist of mixed heritage, are dispelled when she is able to integrate her aborigine ancestry into her perception of her ‘self’ by interpreting and accepting her family’s origin in terms of a politics of identity.

Sally’s construction of her identity takes place as a result of both her own volition and certain factors beyond her control. When Sally first started perceiving her physical differences in relation to her classmates, she was misled by her mother to adopt the identity of an immigrant Indian. This misconception ‘satisfied’ Sally’s playmates who, despite her Caucasian paternity, relegated Sally to the position of the ‘Other’ vis-à-vis their own identification as Australians.

They could quite believe we were Indian, they just didn’t want us pretending we were Aussies when we weren’t. (45)

In contrast, when Silly visits Corunna, she is readily accepted by the local Aborigines as one of their own, despite her lighter skin colour. Thus, the racial hegemony of the Australian society automatically relegates her to the periphery in terms of her ethnicity. This provides a possible answer to the question Bain Attwood raises about Morgan’s favouring of her Aboriginal lineage over her Caucasian genes.
When Sally eventually discovers her Aboriginality, initially she finds it very difficult to come to terms with this aspect her identity. The process of conscious acceptance, declaration, construction and assertion of her Aboriginal identity takes place slowly but steadily. First, she readily accepts the fact instead of suppressing it or being shamed into silence. Then she publicly declares her aboriginality through her application for the university scholarship. Eventually her decision to transcribe her aboriginality in the form of a book to counter the misconceptions and emissions of the Aboriginal voice from the Australian history helps her to construct her identity. Finally, her assertion finds expression through her painting that helps her to integrate her identity with her ‘place’.
I wonder what your idea of heaven would be — A beautiful vacuum filled with wealthy monogamists. All powerful and members of the best families all drinking themselves to death. And hell would probably an ugly vacuum full of poor polygamists unable to obtain booze or with chronic stomach disorders that they called secret sorrows.

To me a heaven would be a big bull ring with me holding two barrera seats and a trout stream outside that no one else was allowed to fish in and two lovely houses in the town; one where I would have my wife and children and be monogamous and love them truly and well and the other where I would have my nine beautiful mistresses on nine different floors …

— Ernest Hemingway