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REVEALING HIDDEN HISTORIES THROUGH GENERATIONAL VOICES: SALLY MORGAN'S *MY PLACE*

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ABSTRACT:
Aboriginal literature, especially post-1960s, challenges the "Great Australian Silence" on history by amplifying Indigenous voices. Writers like David Unaipon, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Sally Morgan, through personal narratives, expose the colonial methods used to silence Aboriginal perspectives. Sally Morgan's *My Place* serves as a poignant example, intertwining her own life story with those of her family members, including her great-uncle, mother Gladys, father Bill, and grandmother Daisy. The narrative spans from the 1950s to the 1980s, detailing Morgan's childhood marked by the trauma of her father, an ex-soldier and war prisoner, who committed suicide. The book also addresses the impact of World War II on ordinary Australians and their children, while focusing primarily on the "Stolen Generation" and the hidden histories suppressed by colonial narratives. Morgan's work highlights the importance of Indigenous women's writing in questioning traditional history and its sources.

Keywords:
Sally Morgan, Aboriginal literature, Stolen Generation, Colonial

INTRODUCTION

Despite being the original inhabitants of the land, Aboriginal Australians have struggled for basic rights in their own country since Captain Cook's arrival in 1788. For over 200 years, they have been denied respect for their traditions, culture, and laws. From the early European colonial settlements in the late eighteenth century, Aboriginal peoples were not recognized as fully human, and over time, they endured the seizure of their land, social and cultural restrictions, forced labor, religious imposition, and violence. Under various government Acts, policies, and laws, Aboriginal people were explicitly denied fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of movement, the right to own property, the right to marry, the right to free association, and the right to fair wages for their labor. These systemic injustices persisted well into the late 1970s, perpetuating cycles of oppression and marginalization.

They had neither power nor resourceful strategies against the British colonizers when their communities were massacred or forcibly relocated and enslaved, nor when women and children were kidnapped and violated. They were also denied the right to speak their languages, and practice their traditional spirituality and traditional law. Twentieth-century historians and politicians have also erased Aboriginal people from Australian history declaring them on the verge of the 'dying' stage. To address the unrecorded and untold narratives of the Aboriginal people, William Stanner, a seminal white Australian anthropologist, virulently coined the phrase the 'Great Australian Silence' in 1968. "The silence" in the words of Maryrose Casey:

> Concealed the war of conquest and the ongoing traumas Aboriginal people suffered under colonization, and fostered a fascination for images of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures as remnants of a dying race', disseminating the myth that non-white people would die in the face of progress (Casey, 74)

Aboriginal literature with different genres has tried to break the 'Great Australian Silence' on history, particularly after the 1960s. These writers are David Unaipon, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Marcia Langton, Jack Davis, Kavin Gilbert, Alexis Wright, Kate Howarth, Sally Morgan, Ruby Langford, Doris Kartinyari and Doris Pilkington, etc. Personal narratives in Australian Aboriginal literature expose the colonial ways and methods used to silence the

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Aboriginal voice. The vibrant voice of these powerful narratives can be heard in the personal narratives of Australian Aboriginals. The Natives who experience the harsh realities of racial discrimination in their daily lives begin to question the Eurocentric version of their past by way of presenting their own firsthand experiences "When the self is transcended and the collective gets represented, personal narratives become history. (28)

From the latter half of the twentieth century to the present time the ice of the 'Silence on Australian history' has not melted out. This 'silence' on the exposition of real and fact-based two hundred years old Australian past has a disturbing continuity that not only creates problems for both peoples but also makes a dent in the international image of Australia as a common-wealth nation. Commenting on the continuation of 'silence' in the present time Mary O' Dowd states that "Despite some vocal intrusions into the silence, there continues to be a reluctance to listen to this history. There is a reluctance of teachers to teach this history." (Dowd, n.pag.)

My Place as a life story of Sally Morgan includes the life narratives her mother Gladys and father Bill (incorporated into Gladys' narrative), her grandmother Daisy and her great Uncle. The text largely covers the period between the 1950s to the writing of the book in the 1980s. Her narrative describes that her childhood was partly influenced by the 'post-traumatic stress disorder' of her father, an ex-soldier and war prisoner of World War II, who committed suicide when she was nine. Despite the issues of 'Stolen Generation' the text also incorporates the history of the participation of common Australians in World War II and its impact on their children. However, the main plot of the text focuses on the intergenerational history of the 'Stolen Generation' that has been hidden under the colonial discourses written and spoken by colonial administrators, explorers, and historians. The family is taken care of by her mother Gladys and grandmother Daisy keeping the children unaware of their Aboriginal background. The narrative reveals the complex situation of the society and culture of the 1950s when the Aboriginals' children were prepared and taught to avoid their traditions, culture, and identity. Morgan and other children of the family in the text are told that they are of Indian origin. As a result, Morgan only learned about her Aboriginal heritage when she was fifteen. The revelation of the secret prompts her to research the records of her family background. She separately documents the life experiences of Uncle Arthur Corunna, her grandmother Daisy Corunna, and her mother Gladys Milroy and later includes these edited versions in My Place. A crucial feature of Indigenous women's writing is the challenge to what constitutes historical discourse through what Bart-Gilbert calls, "The strategic erosion of established distinctions between the public/political and private personal spheres, …the critique of the supposed 'objectivity' of History, (and) the traditional primacy of archival material sources such as 'oral testimonies'" (68)

In My Place, Sally Morgan directly challenges colonial discourses surrounding Aboriginal history and culture. Through the rediscovery of her family's history, spanning three generations, Morgan counters the colonial narrative that has long shaped representations of Aboriginal peoples. Her narrative not only uncovers the colonial and pre-colonial connections to Aboriginal life but also sheds light on the economic, social, and cultural realities of Aboriginal people under colonial laws and policies.

The book is divided into four parts. The first section focuses on Sally Morgan's personal life, with 26 chapters that explore her experiences from 1951 onward. These chapters unravel the untold stories of the 'Stolen Generation,' the impact of the health system, the psychological effects of World War II on Australian soldiers and their families, the history of the labor system, poverty, and the detrimental effects of assimilation policies on Aboriginal communities. These themes reveal the historical oppression of the 'half-caste' children of the 'Stolen Generation' and the systematic efforts to eradicate Aboriginal culture and traditional ways of life from Australian soil.

The second section, titled Arthur Corunna's Story, spans the period from 1893 to 1950, while the third section, Gladys Corunna's Story, covers the years from 1931 to 1983. The final section, Daisy Corunna's Story, records events from 1900 to 1983. Through these sections, Morgan uncovers the multi-dimensional history of her family, tracing her Aboriginal heritage through the matrilineal lineage. This Aboriginal heritage, however, was deliberately hidden by her mother and grandmother, who assured her that her roots were Indian, not Aboriginal.

This powerful exploration of family history not only unearths personal stories but also serves as a direct confrontation with the erasure of Aboriginal identity and culture in Australian society.

This Autobiography is an attempt to bring the history of the colonization of Aboriginal cultural inheritance out of memories and experiences of intergenerational kinship and family members. The text insists on the need for

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Aboriginal people to claim a rightful place in history. In other words, it reclaims the history that has been discarded by the white people's historical and literary narratives. Despite unraveling Aboriginals' historical and ethnographic life to the non-aboriginal readers, the text re-evaluates the post-national attitude of the Australian state towards the Aboriginals through new 'Acts' and 'Policies' viz. multicultural and assimilation, etc. Regarding the universality of My Place, Adam Shoemaker says My Place will be the first taste of indigenous writing for many who would otherwise not be exposed to it all and who will be encouraged to read further as a result" (Shoemaker, 343).

Autobiographical narrative of Sally Morgan adequately centers on the oral testimonies of her great-uncle, mother, and grandmother. Sally Morgan's endeavor to break the 'silence' of Australian history through personal narrative significantly provides an alternative history of colonial Australia. The intergenerational narrations recorded by Sally in the text unfold the psychological terror injected by different phases of colonial rule in the minds of the Aboriginal people. Chapter eighteen, 'Part of Our History, of the first section of the novel that pertains to Sally's personal life, casts light on deep scars and terror rooted in the minds of Sally's grandmother, mother, and great-uncle which never allow breaking their silence on the historical injustice and racial cruelty they have gone through under the colonial Acts, laws, and policies. When Sally decides to break the long silence on unvoiced stories by writing a book she faces first reluctance from her grandmother, the main resource person of the information and knowledge. On asking to share her experience she reluctantly says, 'I'm not talking about the past, Gladdie. It makes me sick to talk about the past (MP, 161). She doesn't want to make their plight, predicaments, and grieves public. Sally's mother tries to convince her so that some secret could be revealed on the repercussion of 'stolen generation etc.

The narratives of Australia's national official history keep the secret of colonial misrepresentation of natives due to their racial history. But in May Place, the aboriginal individuals keep the same secrets for individual reasons. Sally Morgan is told a lie that her birth has Indian roots. The text covers the intergenerational narratives from the last decade of the nineteenth century to 1987 as Arthur Corunna was born in 1893 and his sister Daisy Corunna was born in 1900; one year before the Federation of Australia as a nation. Their narrative is the central point of discussion; because the entire process of Australian settlement after the federation was focused on establishing the roots of British culture in Australia.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century, the accepted position in Australian official discourse and the practice was that the Aborigines were a 'dying race', and this was based on the notion of the essential 'fragility' of Aboriginal culture in contact with Europeans (Brantlinger 1995; McGregor 1997). Aboriginal culture was defined as simply 'weak' in the face of the robustness of the European way of life – militarily, technologically, economically, culturally, socially, and physically. Some Europeans were distressed and dismayed that this should be so, and it troubled their Christian consciences, but did nothing about the sense of its inevitability. Extinction was thus simply a matter of time, so that the most Europeans could do was to 'smooth the dying man's pillow' (Bates 1944), pursing what Pat O'Malley has called 'gentle genocide through a program of enforced eugenics' (1994: 52).

The intergenerational accounts of Sally Morgan, Daisy Corunna, Glayds Corunna, and Arthur Corunna in My Place significantly reveal that all the 'missionary' and other forms of 'schooling' imparted under British colonial rule to 'civilize' the Aboriginals were only pretensions to make them laborers. In the narratives 'half-caste,' children are assigned domestic work and manual labor in white people's households and during the construction of the colony. In this respect, the intergenerational deconstructing colonial history that claims the welfare of Aboriginals by and large, "one of the most significant historical truths exposed and fore-grounded in My Place is the part played by indigenous labor in the construction of the colony (Collingwood, 44)". Similarly, the text also delineates the denial of land rights to the 'half-caste'. Arthur's account raises the issue of the land rights of the 'half-caste' Aboriginals, "there are so many whitefellas don't understand. They want us to be assimilated into the white, but we don't want to be. They complained about our land rights, but they don't understand the way 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 (MP 212)".

Intergenerational narratives in My Place reveal the hidden dimensions of Australia's colonial history. Through the lens of her family's personal story, Sally Morgan provides an alternative history of the 'Aboriginal Protection Act,' the 'Assimilation and Education Policies,' and the objectives of missionaries who sought to 'civilize' Indigenous peoples, alongside colonial land and labor policies. In documenting her family's past, Morgan uncovers the numerous efforts by the Australian government to erase the life stories, culture, and suffering of

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Aboriginal people from the nation's historical and political record. Her autobiographical account exposes the harrowing experiences of 'half-caste' children under various government policies, offering a stark portrayal of the mistreatment endured by members of the 'Stolen Generations.' This abuse is brought to light through the poignant memories and childhood recollections shared by those affected, as recounted in autobiographical and biographical works like My Place. As Berndt argues, "The history of Aboriginal people is not something that can be brushed aside or forgotten. The experiences of the past have implications for the present and the future. They are part of an Aboriginal heritage that is just as significant, just as vital, as traditional Aboriginal life" (107).

My Place covers almost the twentieth century, ninety years, of a family struggle from the early removal of Aboriginal children from their parents to the policies of assimilation and multi-culturalism. It breaks the silence on the historical marginalization of the Aboriginals from their basic rights of land, culture, and traditions. The Abdominals' issues started to be brought into the public domain after the 1960s when Aboriginal literature in form of poetry, fiction, plays, and memoirs came directly from Aboriginals' writings. But the issues of 'half-caste' children and their removal from parents as one of the worst attacks on Aboriginal culture and population was directly exposed by the auto/biographical narratives of the 1980s. The revelations of the hidden aspects of Aboriginal history, particularly of the stolen generation through personal narratives, can be concluded with the remark of Peter Read who states that "in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century the removal of children was neither the subject of many stories told in neither communities nor central to their historical consciousness" (185). In this context, Sally Morgan's My Place plays a significant role in breaking the historical silence over the Aboriginals' issues and trying to bring them to the center of historical consciousness.

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