

# A Preliminary Study of Sally Morgan's *My Place*

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## Introduction

Sally Morgan's *My Place* plays an important role in Australian Aboriginal literature because for the first time it provides non-Aboriginal readers with knowledge of hidden indigenous history (Newman 1992: 73). The book, currently a literary classic, is used as a textbook at educational institutions throughout Australia (Yagi 2007: 129). It has also become popular worldwide. Regrettably, however, in Japan it is not well-known and there have been few studies done on the book, so in this paper I shall briefly sketch out a background of the author and the book. Although the story is about Morgan's family life, it is also "a powerful political narrative" (Broun 1992: 25). Jody Broun says, "Underlying the story of Morgan's family history are the laws and government policies of the past which have affected so strongly the lives and personalities of the people in the book" (1992: 25). Broun (1992: 25) also writes that there exist white Australians who lack knowledge of the country's laws and past policies. To understand *My Place* fully, non-Aboriginal readers should know how white Australian history relates to native people so the historical background behind the story will be briefly covered. Finally, I shall seek out new areas to be discussed by reviewing studies on the book.

## The Author and the Work<sup>1)</sup>

Sally Morgan was born in 1951 in Manning, a suburb of Perth, the capital of Western Australia. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the University of Western Australia.

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1) To write a brief profile of Sally Morgan, I referred to the following sources:

Bird, D. (1999). "Morgan, Sally." *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Edited by G. Davison, J. Hirst and S. Macintyre. Melbourne: Oxford University Press 439.

Cameron, L. (1994). "Sally Morgan." *Aboriginal Experience: 2 UG Topic Area*. Glebe: Pascal Press 35–37.

Mitra, R and Dhawan, R. K. (eds.). (2009). "Introduction." *Sally Morgan's My Place: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Prestige Books 7–14.

Morgan, S. (1987). *My Place*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

——— (2007). "Sally Morgan." *Speaking from the Heart*. Edited by S. Morgan, T. Mia and B. Kwaymullina. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press 179.

lia. She also gained postgraduate diplomas in both Counselling Psychology and Computing and Library Studies from what was then the Western Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University of Technology.<sup>2)</sup> She is currently a professor of Indigenous Studies and the director of the Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts at the School of Indigenous Studies, the University of Western Australia.

Sally Morgan published her first book, *My Place*, in 1987. It became a best-seller and Fremantle Arts Centre Press reprinted it three times that year (Cameron 1994: 35). From the beginning, the book enjoyed wide success and its popularity has increased in the years following. The book sold 110,000 copies in Australia in about a year and a half from publication (Thomas 1988: 755). By 1999 a total of more than 500,000 copies had been sold in that country and abroad (Laurie 23 Oct. 1999: n. pag.). The book brought the author the 1987 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Award for Literature, the 1988 Braille Book of the Year Award and the 1989 Western Australian Citizen of the Year Award for Arts, Literature and Culture. Thus, Sally Morgan has firmly established herself as a voice for indigenous people in the world.

It is rare for a new and unknown writer<sup>3)</sup> to achieve such stunning success. She was able to universalise her personal family story and open up a window into previously hidden Australian history for non-Aboriginal readers. This view is supported by Adam Shoemaker who says, "*My Place* will in fact be a 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" (1998: 343). Morgan's success may also be due to the fact that she was born and raised as a part-Aboriginal person in white society (Arimitsu 2003: 129). This success springs from the fact that she is a woman with a foot firmly planted in each world. As such, she is in a better position than a non-Aboriginal to draw information from full/part-Aboriginal people. Also, since her mother tongue is English she was able to relate her story and the part-Aboriginal point of view in words and concepts that the general English-speaking world could understand (Attwood 1992: 317–318). *My Place*, in the words of David Britton, is "as compelling as a mystery novel" (11 July 1987: 56). He states, "To find out the next piece in the puzzle, you [readers] have to read on" (11 July 1987: 56). It should be noted that there are a few exceptions to the widespread praise the book received. Mudrooroo Narogin suggests that the book's sweeping success is largely due to Fremantle Arts Centre Press which edited the work.<sup>4)</sup> He notes, "As a publishing ploy, it [abridging the native Aboriginal patois to make it understand-

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2) When Sally Morgan wrote *My Place*, her study of psychology may have helped her to elicit her family history from her grandmother and mother who had kept silent about their past for a long time.

3) In an interview with Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell (Bird and Haskell 1992: 9), Sally Morgan confesses that she read a lot but never intended to be a writer. She also says that she hates English literature (1992: 21).

4) Sally Morgan admits that Ray Coffey did a good job as an editor, but she also mentions that she did not always accept his criticisms (Bird and Haskell 1992: 3–4).

able to a wider reading public] was extremely successful and her book has sold in the tens of thousands” (1990: 162–163). He also adds that “this [the editing of the book] in no way detracts from the authenticity of the story” (1990: 162).

In an interview with Mary Wright (1988: 10), Sally Morgan says that she was first motivated to write *My Place*, an account of her own family history, by her anger at the injustice she perceived. In the book, she (*MP* 163–164)<sup>5</sup> further clarifies her motivations. She notes that Australian history concentrates on Caucasians and marginalises Aboriginal people.<sup>6</sup> Here, the author is concerned that Aboriginal history has been lost. At the time Morgan was researching her book, government files about indigenous people were under the control of the police and not open to the public. Patricia Crawford (Gare and Crawford 1987: 82) points out that it is difficult to describe what happened to Aboriginal people in the past without access to official records which are considered essential for historical writing. To overcome this difficulty, Sally Morgan employed the oral history approach which, as Paula Hamilton (1999: 482) points out, emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as an effective method to reveal the hidden life history of oppressed people.

According to David Britton (13 June 1987: 48), Sally Morgan claims that contrary to her initial emotional reaction, she did not allow her anger at the injustice her people experienced to distort her account of the events related in *My Place*. She also states that she consciously tried to eliminate personal feelings of bitterness and revenge as much as possible to keep her account both objective and hopeful (Britton 13 June 1987: 48). Britton (13 June 1987: 48) and Crawford (Gare and Crawford 1987: 83) agree that the author succeeds in limiting acrimonious emotions in her story. The book highlights a number of humorous, everyday episodes (Brett 1987: 9) which help counteract any inclination towards bitterness. The story is peppered with very human anecdotes as when Sally’s grandmother washes her family’s clothes while smoking and accidentally burns holes in them with her cigarettes. The sometimes tragic history of her people is lightened by happy events along the way such as the account of Sally’s wedding and her mother’s success in the flower business. Furthermore, characters in the book have their own ways of dealing with unhappiness (Macleod 5 July 1987: 34). For example, Sally’s mother has her own philosophy which is to “laugh over difficult situations” (*MP* 32). Thus, *My Place* balances hardship with an upbeat and positive outlook on life.

*My Place* brought Sally Morgan success as a writer. Ironically, however, the success had a discouraging influence on her writing<sup>7</sup> because it deprived her of privacy and put pressure on her to meet readers’ expectations (O’Brien 10 Oct. 1992: 35). Sally Morgan looked towards art as an

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5) When I refer to Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987), I use the abbreviation, *MP*, and page numbers in parentheses.

6) Patricia Crawford (Gare and Crawford 1987: 81) indicates that one problem with Australian history is a disrespect for Aboriginal history.

7) Although Sally Morgan became discouraged with writing, she did not completely abandon it.

other way of expressing herself, and developed an interest in painting, saying, "Painting is less intellectual, more intuitive. I'm a bit sick of words. Painting seems to draw less attention [than writing]" (O'Brien 10 Oct. 1992: 35). She has now achieved success both as a writer and an artist. Her works are displayed in major Australian galleries such as the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra and the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.

### **The Historical Background behind the Story**

Aboriginal people have never received their just due in Australian history. In *My Place*, Sally and her mother both believe that the history of Australia is "about the white man" (*MP* 161&163). This history was greatly influenced by the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900<sup>8)</sup> which came into force in January 1901. The Constitution included Sections 51 (xxvi) and 127 which discriminated against Aboriginal people:

Section 51 The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:—

.....  
 (xxvi) The people of any race, *other than the aboriginal race in any State*, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws: . . .

Section 127 In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, *aboriginal natives shall not be counted*.

(Italics added)

The above two Sections denied citizenship to Australian native tribes. It took nearly seventy years to amend the Sections and delete the phrases which exclude indigenous people (Disher 1993: 126; Chesterman & Galligan 1997: 58). McGrath and Markus call this period of time "the Great Australian Silence" (1987: 118) during which most historians largely ignored Aboriginal people.

Although the Constitution excluded indigenous people, each state enacted its own legislation to "protect" them. According to Bain Attwood (1999: 10), Victoria passed the first protection act in 1886, followed by Queensland in 1897, and these two acts became models for those subsequently enacted in other states. In 1905 Western Australia, the setting of *My Place*, implemented an Act to Make Provision for the Better Protection and Care of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Western Australia.

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8) The website of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 is <<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?sdID=82>>.

lia which is often cited as the *Aborigines Act 1905*<sup>9)</sup>. Rather than protecting Aboriginal people, the Act deprived them of freedom and caused them great suffering (Aoyama 2008: 112–113). For example, the Act restricted their movement. In the story, Daisy was rarely allowed to go and see her daughter in the Home. The Act also legally separated part-Aboriginal children from their parents and placed them in institutions such as missions and children’s homes. Arthur was placed in the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission, and Gladys was sent to the Parkerville Children’s Home. Furthermore, the Act limited indigenous job opportunities. Daisy had no choice but to become a maid. It is generally agreed that, as Harumi Aoyama (2008: 112–113) points out, the Protection Acts of the various states aimed at accomplishing three things: appropriating land from Aboriginal people; using them as a work force for white people; and converting them to Christianity.

Towards the middle of the 1930s, it became obvious that the Protection Acts did not function as had been expected. Eve Mumewa D. Fesl (1993: 123) points out that the number of indigenous converts to Christianity was low. She (1993: 123) also mentions that part-Aboriginal children were raised to be menial labourers or domestics, but most of them were unwilling to become simple servants for white society. Since the Protection Acts were not designed to “protect” native tribes in the real sense of the term, it was believed that Aboriginal people would eventually die out (Elkin 1951: 130; Macintyre 1999: 42; Aoyama 2008: 116). Despite expectations, however, Aboriginal mortality rate was relatively low and the numbers of indigenous people did not decrease precipitously between 1901 and 1933 (Fesl 1993: 123).

Estimated Minimum Population of Aboriginal Descent

Year	1901	1911	1921	1933
Population	94,564	83,588	75,604	73,828

Source: Price (1987: 4)

Even though there was a clear drop in the number of native tribespeople, it was nowhere near as steep as had been predicted and certainly nothing approaching extinction (Bell 1963: 471). Nigel Parbury (1999: 118) notes that the number of part-Aboriginal people increased during the 1920s and 30s. Such being the case, a new policy was required.

In 1937, the first Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities was held in Canberra to discuss native welfare. It decided to adopt an assimilation policy and passed the following three resolutions:

9) The *Aborigines Act 1905* is available at <[http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1247333434831-97](http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1247333434831-97)>.

#### Destiny of the Race.

That this Conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.

#### Uniformity of Legislation.

That the details of administration, in accordance with the general principles agreed upon, be left to the individual States, but there shall be uniformity of legislation as far as possible.

#### Education and Employment.

That, subject to the previous resolution, efforts of all State authorities should be directed towards the education of children of mixed aboriginal blood at white standards, and their subsequent employment under the same condition as whites with a view to their taking their place in the white community or on an equal footing with the whites.

(Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities 1937: 2)

Obviously, the assimilation policy did not widely differ from the Protection Acts (Parbury 1999: 118), which promoted Caucasian exploitation of indigenous labour and the cultural extinction of native tribes. It was connected with the White Australian Policy where white people were considered superior to any other coloured race (Parbury 1999: 118). The actual implementation of the assimilation policy was delayed because of the Second World War (1939–1945) (Broome 2005: 312–313). In 1951 the assimilation policy, which had previously been the province of the states, was revised as a federal policy and began to be implemented nationwide, targeting all Aboriginal people (Macintyre 1999: 42).

The precise meaning of the policy of assimilation was defined more clearly at the 1961 Native Welfare Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers in Canberra:

The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians.

(The Native Welfare Conference 1961: 1)

However, the policy of assimilation had unexpected repercussions and was of no practical use. One serious problem was related to Caucasian racial prejudice against people with Aboriginal blood.

Bell (1963: 473) notes that Caucasian townspeople in those days did not want indigenous people living next to them or even in the immediate area. In New South Wales, opposition to Aboriginal enrollment in public school was strong (Parbury 1999: 119). In *My Place* a deacon requests Sally to stop associating with his daughter, implying that he does not want his family members to socialise with indigenous descendants. Thus, whites did not want to accept Aboriginal people as different but equal members of society, which meant the eventual failure of the policy of assimilation.

By the late 1960s the policy of assimilation was repealed together with most Aboriginal protection and welfare laws. During the 1960s social attitudes towards indigenous people gradually changed. Native tribes were granted “voting rights in federal elections, equal pay, and were counted in the census” (Disher 1993: 198). They were also allowed to choose their life styles (Aoyama 2008: 127) and to preserve Aboriginal identity and culture (Parbury 1999: 119). In this way, members of native tribes were finally recognised as full-fledged Australian citizens. However, they still face various problems as a result of the treatment they received over many, many years. One of the lingering scars of years of official discriminatory policy is exemplified by what is called “the Stolen Generations”<sup>10</sup> which refers to Aboriginal children who were forcibly separated from their parents by law from the 1920s to the 1960s (Doyle 1999: 612). These children lacked a sense of their own background or an understanding of their indigenous identity and cultural history. They also felt alienated in white society. As a result, they had nowhere they considered their “place.” In *My Place*, Sally Morgan dramatises the many problems faced by “the Stolen Generations.”

### Review of Studies on the Work

There are many critics who think that the theme of *My Place* is “identity.” This key word can be found in the titles of several articles: “Counter-Memories: History and Identity in Aboriginal Literature” (Trees 1992); “Race, Gender and Identity: *My Place* as Autobiography” (Newman 1992); and “The Complexity of Aboriginal Identity: Mudrooroo and Sally Morgan” (Hughes 1998). Moreover, this term is often referred to in other articles: “Sally’s story begins with a quest for identity” (Gare and Crawford 1987: 80); “. . . the protagonists undertake a journey to discover their roots, their place which helps them to discover their identities” (Jaireth 1995: 75); “*My Place* explores the potential of a postnational identity . . .” (Finn 2008: 24); and “*My Place* deals primarily with the personal themes of family and identity with special reference to the Aboriginals of Australia . . .” (Mitra and Dhawan 2009: 49). The question is how an authentic identity is established. Bain Attwood provides insight into the question, saying that “naming oneself is invariably insufficient; for a stable identity to be achieved one needs the confirmation of others” (1992: 304). In *My*

10) According to Hokari (2005: 203), the phrase “the Stolen Generations” was first used by Peter Read, an oral historian.

*Place*, Sally identifies herself as Aboriginal, but this is difficult for other people to confirm because she has little knowledge of her tribal background. Anne Brewster points out that "identity" is variable and susceptible to societal mores when she states that "identity is a shifting, changing and relational thing; it is contingent and constructed according to historical circumstance and political strategy" (1996: 15). Although Sally has Aboriginal blood, she is told by her grandmother and mother that she is Indian, obviously to protect her from being sent to mission school under the assimilation policy. Lizzy Finn writes that "there is no one place where identity is rooted" (2008: 23), implying that the source of "identity" is complex. According to her book, Sally follows a white way of life and lives as an Australian in the city of Perth, even as she is recognised by indigenous people as a member of an Aboriginal group called Burungu in Pilbara, the northern section of Western Australia.

Many critics study the theme of "identity" in *My Place* and pay special attention to Sally's Aboriginality. Among them Bain Attwood and Jackie Huggins are often referenced. These critics question Sally's construction of her Aboriginal identity. Attwood argues that "the nature of the Aboriginality asserted in *My Place* is inherently problematic" (1992: 303). He reasons that "[Sally] Morgan was unconscious of her Aboriginal background and only becomes fully cognisant of her 'Aboriginality' through the telling of the history of various members of her family" (1992: 303). Huggins agrees with Attwood's statement that "Morgan's 'Aboriginality' is forged through the creation of the text rather than the reverse" (Attwood 1992: 303; Cited in Huggins 1993: 459), and questions the authenticity of Sally's Aboriginality.<sup>11</sup> Although Sally has indigenous blood, she has spent her daily life in white society. In the story, she visits an Aboriginal community only once and learns her family's historical background from local tribespeople. Sally seems to be "an outsider approaching the Indigenous communities" (Narogin 1997: 193). Such being the case, it is quite doubtful that she fully understands indigenous people who follow their own traditional way of life. Thus, the construction of her Aboriginal identity by the oral historical method is not successful (Kato 1994: 56; Arimitsu 2003: 135).

Both Attwood and Huggins display negative attitudes towards Sally's use of English to build her Aboriginality. Attwood (1992: 317–318) indicates that white readers can easily understand Sally's Aboriginality because *My Place* is written in English, arguing that though this makes the book more accessible, it weakens rather than strengthens her indigenous identity. Huggins (1993: 460) states that Aboriginality is not easy for all-white Australians to comprehend. When she cites Attwood's statement that "it [*My Place*] requires little if any translation" (1992: 318; Cited in Huggins

11) In response to the negative comments towards Sally's Aboriginality by Attwood and Huggins, Jaireth questions, "Does this mean that Sally Morgan, who chose to write an autobiography, should have found some 'extratextual' mode to forge her Aboriginality, or do they [Attwood and Huggins] want Sally Morgan to become an Aboriginal person first and then produce a text which could be called an Aboriginal text?" (1995: 69).



gins 1993: 460), she ends with “that is *My Place*’s greatest weakness – requiring little translation (to a white audience)” (Huggins 1993: 460). Huggins also suggests that Aboriginal writers should “keep indigenous languages, styles and methodologies” (1993: 460). Since these things are known to very few white editors, they help prevent loss of authenticity of indigenous stories. Then it is possible for Aboriginal writers to retain their indigenous essence and to make their stories understood by their tribal readers. However, non-Aboriginal people cannot read books written in tribal languages and thus would miss the chance to learn about tribespeople. Here, various questions arise. Why is English unsuitable to describe Aboriginality? To what extent does the language prevent the accurate description of Aboriginal ways, if any? How do white editors corrupt the authenticity of Aboriginal stories? Are there any examples which prove this? These questions still remain unanswered.

Although many critics question Sally’s Aboriginality, Tomoko Ichitani defends it. In her study of *My Place*, Ichitani employs “a symbolic and metaphorical concept, the blood/land/memory complex” (2009: 116) which Chadwick Allen adopts to analyse the construction of native tribes’ identity in New Zealand and the United States. She thinks this approach is “a useful construct to examine Aboriginality in Australian Indigenous writings” (2009: 116). Ichitani notes that land is essential for Aboriginality, adding that “narrating and representing specific Indigenous land is the act of recapturing ‘blood memory’” (2009: 116). She also says, “In spite of lacking knowledge about background, a previously unknown entity, Morgan successfully asserts an enduring Aboriginality (blood) through the narrative of connection to a specific land (memory)” (2009: 119). In the book, Sally only once goes on a trip to the Pilbara region where she meets Aboriginal people from whom she learns information about her family history. She did not live with them for an extended time and did not participate in any tribal rituals to share traditional knowledge or memory with those people. Although Sally shares indigenous blood, it is questionable that a single journey would bring her enough knowledge of the land and tribal memories to truly assert her Aboriginality. This is supported by Huggins who says, “Aboriginality cannot be acquired overnight” (1993: 461). Thus, it is hard to insist that Sally succeeds in discovering the full nature of her Aboriginality.

Since Sally is a contemporary part-Aboriginal person, it seems of little significance to question the authenticity of her Aboriginality even though it differs from the stereotypical idea of Aboriginal people. Rather, it seems more meaningful to consider why she ends up regarding herself as Aboriginal. According to *My Place*, Sally lives in a suburban area and follows a white lifestyle. She never experiences ritual or tribal ways of life. From a genetic point of view, she is only one-eighth Aboriginal. The above fact only proves that Sally is genetically part-Aboriginal but the important thing is that she realises this part of her identity is a complete unknown to her. Through researching and writing *My Place*, she gradually develops a more complete sense of her identity. At the time she was writing the book, the category “part-Aboriginal” did not really exist in the minds of

most Australians; one was either white or Aboriginal. If she was to be true to herself, her choice was obvious. In her primary school days, Sally is asked by children at school “what country” (*MP* 38) she was from, probably because her dark skin. This question effectively denies her white identity despite the fact that her father is Caucasian, and it also eliminates her (in the minds of the children) from the group of “Australians.” This point of view is reinforced by the statement “what about ya [Sally’s] parents, bet they didn’t come from Australia” (*MP* 38). Thus, white society pushes Sally into identifying herself with a coloured racial identity. Even when, as an adult, she learns that she is Aboriginal, she has difficulty accepting her indigenous identity because she has no knowledge of tribal background: “What did it [to be Aboriginal] mean for someone like me?” (*MP* 141). However, two events provide Sally with the basis to develop an understanding of her identity. During their college years when Sally and her younger sister drop the fact among their classmates that they are Aboriginal, they find that white society accepts their Aboriginality yet treats them differently: “Many students reacted with an embarrassed silence. . . . It was like we’d [Sally and Jill had] said a forbidden word. Others muttered, ‘Oh, I’m sorry . . .’ and when they realised what they were saying, they just sort of faded away” (*MP* 139). The second event occurs in the Pilbara region where Sally is warmly welcomed as a member by local tribespeople. Billy, an Aboriginal man, tells her and her family members, “You come as often as you please. There’s always a spot here [Yandeearra] for you all” (*MP* 232). Thus, Sally’s indigenous identity is nourished though, at this point, her knowledge of her Aboriginal side is limited. Despite this lack of real understanding she is considered Aboriginal by both races.

Although Aboriginality is a central issue in critical studies of *My Place*, what is meant by Aboriginality is an elusive issue. According to Finn, “the text does not put forward any single definition of Aboriginality” (2008: 20). The word “Aboriginality” is often used in Attwood’s article, “Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality” (1992), but Tim Rowse (1993: 468) notes that Attwood does not really specify what Aboriginality is. Mary Ann Huhes raises a question of “who should be able to represent Aboriginality at a public level” (1998: 22). She notes that “the persistent attempt by critics to identify Aboriginality links it with the past” (1998: 24). Brewster (1996: 4) also admits that the concept of Aboriginality is often related to the past.<sup>12)</sup> If the definition of Aboriginality is limited to the nature of nomadic indige-

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12) According to Brewster (1996: 4), there existed no Aboriginality before the white settlement because indigenous people had different regional and tribal senses and did not have a united identity. In the 1960s Aboriginality developed as a standardised counter-identity to dominant white society which looked down on indigenous people (Brewster 1996: 3). According to John Gardiner-Garden, in the 1980s Aboriginality was defined by the Constitutional Section of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs: “An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives” (2003: 4). The definition has raised questions both inside the Aboriginal community and elsewhere. Uncle Norm Newlin and Uncle Charles Moran ask, “Do Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people have to be accepted ✓

nous people who inhabited Australia before the white colonisation, it is not applicable to any contemporary part-Aboriginal people who live in urban white society. So Hughes (1998: 27) remarks that it is dangerous to narrow the definition of tribal identity too much, implying that it is inappropriate to criticise Sally's Aboriginality because it does not fit some limited definition. Elizabeth Reed (1993: 639) indicates that when Attwood and Huggins see Sally's indigenous identity as a problem, they ignore the fact that she is not purely Aboriginal. Sally's achievement as an individual comes in acknowledging and integrating the two racial streams that flow together and comprise her identity.

There are critics who display a new, positive insight into *My Place*. Among them is Brewster who insists that "it [the book] gave many Australians their first meaningful picture of contemporary urban Aborigines" (1996: 7). She (1996: 15–16) thinks that nature of Aboriginality is changing, subject to historical and political circumstances. In the story, Sally's grandmother is brought up to feel ashamed that she is indigenous owing to the discriminatory ideas fostered by the assimilation policy. Although in her younger years she dreams of becoming white, as a grandmother she thinks this is shameful. She tells Sally about her experience of being torn between a white identity and a black identity because she is part-Aboriginal: "There I was, stuck in the middle. Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks" (*MP* 336). This statement indicates how difficult it is to define part-Aboriginal identity, and how complicated the concept of Aboriginality is. Brewster writes "there are many variations of the notion of Aboriginality as Aboriginal people articulate their sense of self and of their culture" (1996: 27), indicating that *My Place* expands the concept of Aboriginality because it consists of four distinct life stories. Rowse considers the book to be "a challenge to an historical understanding of the changing apprehensions of 'Aboriginality' within Australia's settler colonial culture" (1993: 468). Susan Lever states that *My Place* helps the reader to recognise that "Aboriginal problems are not 'long ago and far away' but part of the present" (2000: 115). Thus, the book deals with current problems rooted in the past which contemporary urban indigenous people face.

## Conclusion

Studies of *My Place* mainly focus on the theme of "identity," particularly "Sally's Aboriginality." In the book she identifies herself with the Aboriginal, but it is open to question whether she truly succeeds in constructing a comprehensive Aboriginal identity because she lacks sufficient per-

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↘ by the 'community' to be Aboriginal? Who is 'the community'?" (1999: 28). These questions highlight a problem that Aboriginal people who were taken away from their community due to the assimilation policy have in establishing tribal identity. Newlin and Moran also point out that the definition "fails to include the spirituality of Aboriginal identity" (1999: 28).

sonal knowledge of indigenous culture. However, Sally's trip to the Pilbara region suggests a way for native people of the Stolen Generations to rediscover their Aboriginal sides. They may gradually be able to deepen a sense of their Aboriginality by repeated visits to ancestral lands where they can learn their tribal background and experience the indigenous way of life. Although Sally's Aboriginality has been the main focus point in academic studies, about one-third of the work consists of biographies of her granduncle, grandmother and mother. This indicates that there are other important thematic issues yet to be examined. Harpreet Kaur (2009: 109) states that Sally Morgan shines a light on tribespeople and how they suffered and fought against hardship. Jo Robertson refers to more specific problems such as "the loss of kinship ties (a result of the removal of individual members from Corunna Downs); the breakdown of the family line (the uncertainty about paternity); the loss of language; and finally, shame" (1992: 47). The past echoes through contemporary part-Aboriginal people and continues to reverberate in their lives today. Although much has changed, the healing process is not yet complete. How the past colours the present and how it affects the current generation of mixed race people is a study worthy of consideration and will be the subject of my next essay.

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