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"so much about myself I didn't understand": Rememory and the Problematics of a lost identity in Sally Morgan's *My Place*

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the problems of a lost identity in My Place, an Australian aboriginal autobiography by Sally Morgan. Albeit literary critics have questioned the 'indigeneity' and 'reality' concerning the narration of stolen generation, this paper situates the reading of My Place within the issue of (un)making and recuperation of socio-cultural consciousness of the self. Through the lens of rememory as an exercise of recollection and rediscovery of the past, the analysis focuses on the triangulation of the themes of self, culture, and consciousness as represented in My Place. The findings indicate that rememory as illustrated in My Place, is evident in the protagonist's exploration of her personal history, her discovery of cultural/racial history, and her realisation of the double consciousness that comes with being a member of the aboriginal community.

Keywords: Australian aborigine narrative; childhood trauma; cultural assimilation; indigenous identity; rememory.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the problematics of a lost identity using the lens of rememory as expressed in the Australian aboriginal autobiography, *My Place* by Sally Morgan (1987). In so doing, we echo Subhash Jaireth's (1995) reading of *My Place* as a work of literary fiction that mirrors, but is not confined to, an autobiography: "In *My Place*, as in all autobiographies, the author has created a protagonist based on herself, and although the two selves might be very close to each other they are not identical" (p.70). Likewise, John Docker (1998) situates *My Place* within this liminal space of the artist and the work of art: "Since the narrator of *My Place* grows up conscious of herself as a storyteller and artist, the novel is a kind of *kiinstlerroman*, where the text maintains a more or less gentle distance from the narrator" (p.8).

As scholars responding to *My Place*, we are compelled to discuss the ways in which cultural predicaments depicted in the memoir can resonate with readers of different cultural backgrounds. The objective is not to cast doubt on the validity of *My Place* as a text of indigeneity or even on its function towards the reconciliation process between Aborigines and the white majority in a "totalising" and "ubiquitous" way. Given the repeal of Australia's Aborigines Protection Act in 1969, we are, therefore, aware of the significance of this memoir to the narrative of the stolen generation of Aboriginal children in Australia during the 20th century. However, we are unable to avoid referencing *My Place* and how it is intertwined with issues of ethnicity and identity, especially on both the personal/private and interpersonal levels. This essay, therefore, makes an effort to regress from the historical context and draw parallels to interpersonal issues that connect

readers of various socio-cultural backgrounds. We, therefore, interpret *My Place* in a manner that exemplifies "bottom-up and socio-culture-informed understandings" that "emphasise less on legal dimensions and more on personal substantive aspects, of one's lived experiences, sense of belonging, and identity" (Nguyen, 2023, p. 2). By using the lens of rememory, the subsequent concern of this essay is to identify and explain Sally Morgan's personal and emotional experiences that are filled with people and particular places, encompassing rich details that often have significance to Sally's recollection of personal and ancestral memories.

AUSTRALIA'S POSTCOLONIAL AND *ONE-RACE* IDEAL

This section discusses Australia's cultural assimilation policy and the coercion of indigenous peoples into the assimilation process. This context will serve as the backdrop for our discussion of *My Place* within the larger project of accounting for what it means to grow up across various socio-cultural, indigenous spaces. While a complete reading of assimilation in Australia goes beyond the scope of this essay, and the following section is not comprehensive and definite, it, nevertheless, presents insights into the digging up of *My Place*.

Historically, White Australian authorities harboured deep-seated biases against Aboriginal people and their way of life due to their perceived inferiority. These authorities believed in the concept of "terra nullius," which asserted that the land was unoccupied prior to European settlement (McFadden, 2023). This belief persisted well into the 20th century. During the colonial period in Australia, these authorities viewed Indigenous Australians as subhuman. This viewpoint advocated for the forced removal of Indigenous people from their traditional lands and the enforcement of discriminatory laws, such as the assimilationist policy that mandated the separation of Indigenous children from their families (Dockery, 2010). Australia's push for greater cultural assimilation was symptomatic of a broader trend toward civic nationalism that prioritised commonalities in values and customs over distinctions based on race or ethnicity. Motivated by the need to portray Australia as a modern, progressive nation that upheld democratic values and human rights in the midst of the Cold War, the policy aimed to improve the country's international image. However, the indigenous population suffered as a consequence of the policy. As we shall see later, the repeated disparagement and repression of Aboriginal traditional practices and languages further marginalised and undermined the rich legacy of the Aboriginal people.

By promoting the adoption of white Australian values, customs, and lifestyles, the policy sought to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society. There was a widespread belief among white people that the only way for Aboriginal children to survive after colonisation was to be civilised (Petchkovsky et al., 2004). This belief emphasised the concept that the Aboriginal people needed to be saved, with the primary means of doing so being the "education" of Aboriginal children. The policy also sought to encourage the emigration of Aboriginal people from rural to urban areas, which frequently resulted in social dislocation and economic disadvantage (McGregor, 2009). In addition, children were frequently institutionalised in spaces that were harsh, brutal, and strictly regulated (Swan & Raphael, 1995). In these institutions, children were instructed to despise their own ethnicity, culture, family, and, by extension, themselves. To make matters even more dire, Menzies (2019) reports that Aboriginal children were frequently victims of child sexual abuse, neglect, as well as physical and psychological violence. Due to the implementation of these strategies, the indigenous people were "devalued and rejected as archaic and savage, and unimportant to the contemporary settler country"

(Haebich, 2001, p.75). Despite ongoing efforts toward reconciliation and acknowledgement, the legacy of the cultural assimilation policy and its related actions continues to hurt the indigenous people living in modern Australia, given its generational nature (National Museum of Australia, 2023).

The effects of racial profiling on Australia's progress and trajectory are just one aspect of the country's widely reported fight against cultural assimilation policies (McGregor, 2009). As Ashcroft (2010) notes, such racial segregation is historically indicative of White Australian imperialism during a time when European powers were vying to seize and monopolise global territories. In order to withstand the rigours of this competition, imperialists seized control of what they perceived to be inefficient indigenous authorities and used that power to their advantage. From this vantage point, cultural assimilation appeared to provide order under the pretence of "peace," "cohesion," and "unity," a possible outcome that works in tandem to accord privilege to White/Western imperialism.

The unity of people in Australia, therefore, is pertinent to the future of the country (Moran, 2011). Yet, as a precursor to Australia's spirit of unity, heritage ideals and understanding of the past of one's own life might better be overtly recounted. Only then can the mechanism of reconciliation begin to take effect (Idrus et al., 2016). With a better understanding and awareness of the past, individuals and vulnerable communities may be better equipped to understand the problems and anxieties of the present, as "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past" (Kleinecke-Bates, 2014, p. 201). The indifference with which authorities perceive the lives of the helpless and vulnerable needs to be addressed. The most vulnerable individuals are typically the ones who are "effectively stripped of agency" (Watson & Smith, 1992, p. xiv). This is due to the fact that the capacity to have one's "story" recorded is what denotes the existence of agency. This idea that the act of narrating one's past also demonstrates the exercise towards the preservation of the events in its "textual traces," is what motivates us to read *My Place* using rememory because "all past 'events' are potential historical 'facts,' but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated" (Hutcheon, 189, p.75). An important exercise in recollecting the past, in this case concerning Australia's cultural assimilation, might be a reevaluation of the stigma and stereotype used to describe the Aboriginals. According to Cornwell (2012), the perception of the black servant is that he is filthy, ignorant, and uncivilised, in contrast to the white master, who is seen as being civilised despite his brutality. The binary opposition that white equals good and clean, while black is dirty and evil, becomes an ingrained acceptance that is challenging, if not impossible, to eradicate in the mindset of the generation that experienced such an existence. However, if there is to be reconciliation, this aspect of "degradation" (Cornwell, 2012), which is frequently a crucial component of indigenous existence, may need to be carefully examined.

When people have agency, which is the locus that confers this ability to them, they might be able to take action and articulate those actions in a way that is intended to bring about some sort of change. *My Place* by Sally Morgan serves as "the trope within," the focal point through which the author reimagines the empowerment of her female protagonist to defy "gender and other societal constraints within the literary sphere" (Prowse, 2015, p. 49). That is why books like *My Place* are so important; they show how authors 'confront' the gender and cultural conflicts that so often arise in the real world. As a result of this agency, *My Place* can be seen as an illustrative piece of literature that can shed light on the hierarchical conceptions of power present in other discursive systems. By reading *My Place* as a text constitutive of human agency, we are challenged

to consider how the narrator constructs the novel to discuss the events and problems that have shaped the lives of the protagonists and members of her family (Zamani & Idrus, 2022).

But the question remains: Would those whose independence has been systematically taken away ever be able to share their stories? (Spivak, 1988). More appropriately, can those who have mentally and physically been colonised and transformed into mere objects speak of all that has happened instead of being "spoken for and thus colonised by the process constitutive of the human condition, from the psychological and biological to the economic, political, and discursive?" (Watson & Smith, 1992, p. xiv).

The answer is not a simple affirmative or otherwise, yet indirectly lies in what Toni Morrison (1987) describes as rememory in *Beloved.* The following example illustrates how rememory operates in the analysis that follows. The concept of rememory, as depicted in the following scene from *Beloved*, refers to the act of thinking back on and reliving one's experiences and memories from the past:

> 'What were you praying for, Ma'am?'
> 'Not for anything. I don't pray anymore. I just talk.'
> 'What were you talking about? ...
> 'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.'
> …Denver picked at her fingernails. 'If it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies.'
> Sethe looked right in Denver's face. 'Nothing ever does,' she said
>
> (p. 35)

In the aforementioned passage, Sethe makes an attempt to describe to Denver what it is like to carry around the pain of the past in one's mind. Unlike prayer, which involves asking for something specifically, her "rememory" entails simply "talking" with and releasing the spectre of the past. Only after the task has been completed can the person involved hope to move on to something else. Because 'nothing ever dies,' it is imperative that individuals recognise their own experiences, even if those experiences are not acknowledged by others. The individual's experience becomes more tangible and perhaps even more credible in their mind as a result of the "talk," which can take place either in oneself or to others. Individuals are able to take ownership of the traumatic experience to which they were subjected through the process of rememory. This process is similar to that of a trauma patient speaking to a therapist (Hanft-Robert et al., 2023). Within the narrative of *My Place*, the act of remembering symbolises the protagonist's quest for self-discovery by delving into her family's and community's pasts in search of long-lost truths and a deeper understanding of her Aboriginal heritage.

ARTICULATING THE PROBLEMATICS OF IDENTITY AWARENESS: SALLY MORGAN'S *MY PLACE* AND REMEMORY

Using the above-discussed context of 20th-century Australian policy towards the Aboriginal community, this paper highlights the centrality of rememory within the lives of three Aboriginal women and the eventual rediscovery of agency in their lives. Rememory operates as a narrative tool that allows the protagonist to revisit and reconstruct her personal and familial history. Firstly, we use the process of rememory to illustrate the tension between the pursuit of one's own self-

knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge about one's heritage. The latter, which is often suppressed in the face of mainstream society's "unity" project, is materialised through cultural assimilation. Secondly, the following discussion slants towards the importance of rememory of the past to individuals and the members of their family and towards their acceptance of their heritage, including their sense of identity. *My place* examines grassroots strengths of questioning one's identity, voluntarily or otherwise, finding them in eventual individual and collective voices across the family and community. It is these voices that can then be used interchangeably as one's own to address issues in society. That is, *My Place*, as an autobiography, may be said to deal with the extremes of human emotions, but one must also remember the specific identity colluded under the guise of the global policy of assimilation while simultaneously generating questions related to a sense of belonging for who Sally Morgan was. By concentrating on *My Place*, we may demonstrate that the autobiography is universally decodable through memory and mental suffering.

What follows in subsequent discussions is the actual operation of the proposed procedure of rememory, seen in three separate corollaries, each with its own emphasis and reading position. It is our central argument that these operations of rememory are provided to demonstrate that autobiographies, such as those addressed in *My Place*, empower readers to grapple with the painful, ambiguous pressures of growing up without a firm acceptance of their history and fragments of identity. Whether read singly or in combination, the following three veins of engagement with rememory highlight cultural confrontation that figures as the intermingling of the truth of an event and its comprehensibility (LaCapra, 2004). By focusing on the following readings, it is argued that although exploration of the self and memory coexist, they enable ‘lived experiences’ to be transmitted and absorbed into one's own and others' understanding of the past.

REMEMORY AS CATALYST FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

After coming to terms with who she really is as an adult, the author, Sally Milroy or Sally Morgan, sets out to revisit her formative years in an effort to better understand how she came to occupy the particular social niche she does today in contemporary Australia. It is also through her newfound discovery that two other women in the household, her mother and grandmother, are pushed into re-discovering their past and simultaneously reinstating their sense of identity and belonging within the Aboriginal community. As she says in the acknowledgement to the memoir: "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 a whole people. We would never have known our place." (*My Place*, np).

Prior to her journey into the past, the person Sally remembers herself to be was one who had “an active dislike of school,” for it made her “bored and lonely.” (*My Place*, p. 23) Additionally, she became aware of her differences with her classmates. To begin with, she realised that living in Manning implied being in the "rough-and-tumble part, where there were teenage gangs called Bodgies and Widgies, and where hardly anyone looked after their garden" (*My Place*, p. 41). However, Sally also recognised how fortunate she was to live near a swamp close to “wild birds, snakes, or goannas” (*My Place*, p. 27), unlike her school peers, whose sole source of entertainment was “visit to the toy shop” (p.27). Secondly, what she ate for lunch was another distinction between her and her classmates. Sally's lunch consisted only of "sticky jam sandwiches" and water from the school "water fountain," in contrast to the other kids who had "salad," "cake," and "cordial" (*My Place*, p. 41). Her socioeconomic status was apparent, albeit Sally did not articulate them in any discernible way.

Thirdly, her interactions with her siblings outside of the home also widen the chasm between her and her classmates. Unlike the other kids and their families, Sally and her siblings "always spoke in the playground" and "often walked home together" (*My Place,* p. 42). Sally understood that her classmates did not like their own siblings and would never play with them in school. (*My Place*, p. 42). The importance of family plays a significant role in the narrator's sense of self and belonging growing up. Unlike her peers, who had their own rooms, young Sally prioritised the relationships she had with her family members for the purpose of companionship and "warm security." This meant that she occasionally sacrificed what her peers at school would refer to as "privacy," which further highlighted the differences between them.

However, despite growing up in a home with a strong sense of community, Sally Milroy did develop her own sense of self. She discovered, in the art of reading and drawing, a form of self-expression. Discovering *Winnie the Pooh*, as the young Sally narrates, "was my salvation" (p.47). The emotional connection that she forged with this fictional character is evident. Like Pooh, who "lived in a world of his own" and who "believed in magic", young Sally connected to the need to "make adventure out of anything." Pooh mirrors Sally's need to be accepted and loved for herself, as she says in the following statement, "He wasn't particularly good at anything, but everyone loved him anyway" (p. 47). In addition, at this point in her life, Sally became aware of how different she was from others around her and yet how similar she could be to a make-believe character in a book. As she observed, "While Pooh was obsessed with honey, I was obsessed with drawing." (p.47) She also began to understand how her drawings provided others with a glimpse into her emotions. When she was asked why her "drawings were sad", the observation caught her off guard and made her "even more secretive" about her self-expression (p.47).

In keeping with what memory researchers have observed about the mind, these vignettes from Sally's childhood show how the narrator "holds together on the page what the mind tends to keep apart" (Miller & Tougaw, 2002, p.7). The narrator returns to the vulnerable moments of her youth and relives them in order to gain a deeper understanding of who she is in relation to the people around her. The power of the aforementioned passages as examples of "episodic memory" comes from the author's ability to "recall, relive, and replay" (Seager, 2016, p. 151) those episodes of her past that would otherwise be muted or lost.

REMEMORY TOWARDS UNCOVERING MUTED CULTURAL BELONGING

One such muted recollection of Sally's past that she has to keep playing over in her head is the numerous instances in which her fellow students questioned her about her background. When the young Sally revisits this issue, she realises that:

> The kids at school had also begun asking us what country we came from. This puzzled me because, up until then, I'd thought we were the same as them. If we insisted that we came from Australia, they'd reply, 'Yeah, but what about ya parents, bet they didn't come from Australia'.
>
> (*My Place*, p. 42)

The weight that is placed on the question of "what country we came from" (p.42) is a reflection of the politics of misrecognition (Raihanah, 2009a) that marginalised groups face in the multiethnic societies of today. The answers that Sally received to her question, "Are we Australians, Mum?" inadvertently exemplified their general perspective on who they are as a whole: "Mum was silent. Nan grunted in a cross sort of way, then got up from the table and walked outside" (*My Place*, p.42). Gladys, Sally's mother, felt more at ease answering her daughter's

inquisitive questions by saying that they were "Indian" (p.42). The answer did serve a purpose for all concerns, as it gave the narrator a temporary reprieve from finding a sense of belonging within a society that "didn't want us pretending we were Aussies when we weren't" (p.42). However, much later in the narration, upon Sally's continued persistence and curiosity, Gladys revealed the truth:

> 'We are Aboriginal, aren't we mum?'
> 'Yes, dear,' she replied, without thinking
>
> (p.133)

Sally's perspective on herself, her mother and grandmother, and her community as a whole shifts as a result of her newfound knowledge. She describes the moment in the narration, "It was as if a wall that had been between us suddenly crumbled away. I felt closer to Mum then than I had for years." (p.133)

She took a major step in claiming her Aboriginal heritage when she applied for the Aboriginal scholarship. It was the only thing she could think of to do to feel more connected to her newfound heritage, as she explains (pp.134-135). The scholarship itself did not give her a sense of identity; instead, it was the negative attention given to her newly discovered "allegiance" that gave her a sense of what it is like to be an Australian Aborigine. She was criticised for choosing to be associated with the Aboriginal community merely for the scholarship (p.136-137). She experienced the suspicious treatment first-hand when she was asked to prove her aboriginality by the committee that awarded her the scholarship. The senior officer of the committee says:

> We have received information … that you have obtained the Aboriginal scholarship under false pretences…. that you have been bragging all over the university campus about how easy it is to obtain the scholarship without being Aboriginal.
>
> (p. 137)

She is now aware of the challenges involved in not only proving her identity to other people but also comprehending the meaning of the concept. She eventually came to realise that part of learning to accept her newly discovered identity was also admitting that she had never actually lived as an Aboriginal person.

> There was so much about myself I didn't understand ... Had I been dishonest with myself? What did it really mean to Aboriginals? … What did it mean for someone like me?
>
> (p.139)

Sally's understanding of Aboriginal identity, which encompasses everything from the sacramental rituals of the "corroborees" to the proverbial "Dreamtime" tales of how the world came into being, is currently very textbook-like and one-dimensional (p.139). Her lack of knowledge and interaction with "any aboriginal people" and her lack of experience living "off the land" and being "a hunter and a gatherer" add to her doubt of her newly found identity (p.139).

With these foundational beliefs in place, she sets out to uncover her past, including the stories of people who might shed light on who she is. However, even this turned out to be more difficult than expected because the people in question, namely her mother and grandmother, refused to talk about or even acknowledge their tumultuous history. As Gladys angrily questions her daughter:

> 'Can't you just leave the past buried? It won't hurt anyone, then.'
> 'Mum,' I reasoned, 'it's already hurting people. It's hurt you and me and Nan, all of us. I mean, for years, I've been telling people I'm Indian! I have a right to know my own history.
>
> (p.150)

In the midst of these disagreements and compromises, a significant event happened. Both Gladys and Nan started talking about their histories, including their anxieties and nightmares, as a result of Sally's gradual persistence and continued questioning. With time, the power of remembering, retelling, and reliving the past allowed Gladys and Nan to better understand who they were and where they fit in the world while also strengthening their bond with one another.

In sum, the recollection of the conversations she had with her mother and grandmother prompted her to learn about her previously unknown racial heritage, which in turn sparked a newly discovered desire to reclaim her Aboriginal identity. Sally's identity, as seen through the prism of rememory, now encompasses the complex and tense intergenerational cultural conflicts she and her family have endured in the name of cultural assimilation. For readers of *My Place*, the recollection on a subconscious level allows us to become emotionally invested in the characters' rememory. As a result, readers are "...implicate[d] in the lives of others" (Miller & Tougaw, 2002, p.5) in the fictional world created by the author through her author-defined social reality (Raihanah, 2009b).

REMEMORY AND THE DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS OF IDENTITY ASSOCIATION

The first understanding of their past came from Arthur, Nan's brother. It was through him that Sally realised the stigma that had been attached to being Aboriginal, one that Nan, like most Aborigines, had to contend with. As Arthur says:

> 'Aah, she's been with Whitefells too long. They make her feel 'shamed; that's what white people do to you. Why should we be 'shamed? We bin here longer than them. You don't see the black man diggin' up the land, scarin' it. The white man got no sense.
>
> (p.146)

The candid explanation by Arthur highlights two key aspects of how cultural assimilation affects the Aboriginal sense of self. On the one hand, Arthur recognises how Nan could be ashamed of her identity after having assimilated white values. On the other hand, Arthur acknowledges their link to the land and the reverse the Aborigines have toward the land. The double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Joseph & Golash-Boza, 2021) is evident in the recollection of "shame" as each family member recognises the twoness in them between who they really are and how they are perceived by mainstream White society. The degradation of being black was very obvious in her grandmother Nan's accounts of her past. As she says, "The blackfella couldn't live his own life then." (*My Place,* p.326). The forms of degradation varied from physical and verbal abuse to losing one's own family and sense of belonging. Hard work became instilled in them, and if they ever showed signs of slowing down, "then they (the white superiors) call the police in to make you work hard" (p.319).

The double-edged sword of being an Aborigine also meant that one was never allowed to feel any sense of belonging; as Nan recollects, "Aah, you, see, that's the trouble with us blackfellas we don't know who we belong to, no one'll own up" (p.317). The situation was further aggravated as they were not allowed to be part of a family; in fact, they were forced to live as two different classes of Aborigines, "camp natives" and "house natives" (p. 323)

The breeding out policy further heightened the sense of twoness within the Aboriginal community. The women were made to feel 'privileged' (p.328) to be wanted by a white man, and the children that were born from this contact were separated into two categories: the white ones and the black ones. The former was taken away, while their mothers kept the latter. This process created a "wedge" (p.328) among the Aborigines, as the fairer ones saw themselves as superior to the darker ones, which caused many individuals like Nan, to feel completely displaced, even within her community, "Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks" (p. 328). The objectification of the Aboriginals, who were made to feel like property, like a "cow" or a "horse," further heightened their sense of double consciousness, causing many to wish themselves white instead of claiming their indigeneity (p.328).

Due to the racist cultural bias against dark-skinned aboriginals, Nan herself wanted to be white so that she could have an opportunity to "get on in the world, make somethin' of myself" (p.328). Subsequently, Nan disowned her indigeneity for fear of the authorities taking her family (p.340). It was also with the same fear that she kept the children in the dark about their true identity. The double consciousness of knowing who they are and how they are perceived by the "government" made Nan and Gladys agree to be identified as Indians (p.340) instead of Aborigines. As she explains to Sally, "the government might come and get you. They didn't like people like us rearin' kids with white blood in them" (p.340).

Gladys, too, was "made to feel ashamed" (p.259) of her aboriginal identity, as she learned early in life. Her experience of cultural assimilation in the "Home" (p. 259) made her understand the difference between being white and black. As Gladys' astute rememory illustrates:

> You see, if there was an argument or if something had been damaged, and it was yur word against a white kid, you were never believed. They expected us black kids to be in the wrong. We learnt it was better not to tell the truth, and it only led to more trouble. The home also taught us never to talk openly about being Aboriginal. It was something we were made to feel ashamed of.
>
> (p.259)

Later, following the conclusion of schooling days, she had another encounter which added to her sense of twoness about her identity. In a conversation with a woman at a bus stop where she was asked about her "nationality", Gladys' answer drew sympathy from the woman.

> 'You're very beautiful dear, what nationality are you, Indian?'
> 'No,' I smiled, 'I'm Aboriginal. ... 'Oh, you poor thing...what on earth are you going to do?'
>
> (p.274)

The unsaid in the woman's question made Gladys "feel like a criminal" (p.274). The same anxiety caused Gladys to remain quiet about her own children's queries over their identity. She wanted to protect them from the "Welfare person" who "might come and take them away" (p.299). Despite knowing their worth as Aborigines, Galdys and Nan were psychologically colonised by the cultural assimilation policy. The acceptance that "Aboriginals were treated the lowest of the low… like they … had nothing to offer" (p.299) caused Gladys and Nan to withhold their true identity from Sally and her siblings.

Even though Gladys learned to keep her Aboriginal identity a secret in the privacy of the other Aborigines at school, she thrived upon it for the sense of belonging and security it provided her. She understood that her communal link to the "older Aboriginal girls" provided her with the "feeling of security": "Even though we weren't related, there were strong ties between us black kids" (p.238). Unfortunately, she was never allowed the same security with her own mother. When she was still at school and fell ill, she was not allowed to be with her mother as she belonged to

the 'Native Welfare Department' (p.279). Later, when she left school, she had to live with a white family due to the policies. Gladys and Nan were both traumatised by the fact that she knew she had a mother but was not able to acknowledge her due to the authorities' oppressive behaviour towards Aboriginals (p. 279). And this rememory that they took part in through Sally's insistence allowed both of them to take ownership of their history and the abuse they suffered.

An important question that was never completely answered was regarding Gladys' biological father. She needed to know his identity so that she could realise some form of family within her life as well as dispel the rumour that her mother was one of the "bad girls having babies." As Gladys recounts:

> I often prayed for God to give me a family. I used to pretend I had a mother and a father and brothers and sisters.... It was very important to me to have a father then. Whenever I asked Mum about father, she'd just say, 'You don't want to know about him, he died when you were very small, but he loved you very much.' She sensed I needed to belong...
>
> (p.247)

Nan's own account provided some clues to the identity of the father. In speaking of Gladys' father, she mentions Howden, her own father (p.332). Earlier on, Sally made an observation based on an old photograph of Howden about the similarities between his features and Gladys (p.233). However, the story shifts focus away from providing an answer and instead emphasises Galdy's sense of belonging after visiting her birthplace, Corunna Downs.

> I think now I'm better off without all that business. All those wonderful people up north, they all claimed me. Well, that's all I want. That's enough, you see. I don't want to belong to anyone else.
>
> (p.233)

Gladys' recognition that she is "claimed" by the Aboriginal community is a clear indication of her newfound sense of belonging.

Readers are given insight into the present lives of the three women through their discussions of their recollections of their pasts. There were common threads among the three women's stories, even if the severity of their individual challenges varied. The desire to blend in and be "like everyone else" or even "white" was a common theme, as was a sense of alienation from one's own race. The most powerful element of opposition in this account was the deeply held shame and hatred of being Aboriginal. Not to mention the generalised bigotry and condescension that society hurls at them. However, the journey was a worthwhile process, as it allowed for a better understanding of each member's past, which in turn created an atmosphere of awareness and acceptance of the past. After many confrontations, they were able to reconcile with the past and with each other's secrecy.

The characters' discoveries of their racial background, or "politics of association" (Raihanah, 2009a), originated in their rememory. Nan's death implicates the surviving family members on two separate accounts. On the one hand, it is the loss of a voice in their family, that of the Aboriginal past, the 'link with the past'. This indirectly implies a loss of agency in their lives, for Nan provided the strength and personality of the Aborigine. On the other hand, her death ensures that their new identity is kept alive, for it is a symbolic gesture towards the rememory of Nan's life. Either way, Nan, like their newfound identity, has become an integral part of their lives, both past and present, providing them with agency and a need to reconcile with the past and each other for a future. Whether or not the future will be bright is not the issue; rather, now, they have a locus from which to approach that future. As Jill, Sally's sister, remarks, "With her gone, we

could pass for anything. Greek, Italian, Indian ... what a joke. We wouldn't want to now. It's very important. It'd be like she never existed. Like her life meant nothing, not even to her own family" (*My Place*, p.346).

How, then, do these experiences operate from the lens of rememory? These alignments indicate the manner through which *My Place* depicts individual and collective human contact, highlighting the significance of delayed and indirect postmemory that readers might experience (LaCapra, 2004). By emphasising the intersection between rememory and double consciousness in *My Place*, historical social and racial injustices might better be confronted through the building of a resilience narrative based on the recollection of the past. Only then can the collective stories of the family's history offer a transformative tool that fosters the growth and development of the individuals.

CONCLUSION

In *My Place*, rememory plays a vital role in the protagonist's *bildung*, her journey of growth, self-discovery, and self-development. Sally's recollection of personal and ancestral memories is intertwined with her maturation process. Through these memories, she gains a deeper understanding of her past, confronts the challenges faced by her ancestors, and develops a sense of responsibility towards her community. Rememory as a lens through vicarious encounters (re)creates an impetus for self-diagnosis and/or self-dialogics, liberating the author to consolidate her cultural identity and stabilising her voice as an Aboriginal woman at the centre of her and her readers' consciousness.

As much as *My Place* is a woman's narrative, the narrative may not be a suspect of objective truth that relativises women's and men's positions. It does not seek to assert a belief in sexual equality by suggesting erasing 'sexist domination' at a complete removal from cultural affliction and confrontations. In this narrative, the women are positioned as being oppressed by the entire white Australian authority, and their experiences, both individual and collective, become the sole surviving proclamation of their lives and existence. It is as important for them to recollect their past as it is for them to have survived. *My place* illustrates the role women play in each other's lives, not simply as the socially constructed mother, daughter, and grandmother, but as potential human agency for one another.

Furthermore, in *My Place*, the author Sally Morgan, through her authorial-defined social reality (Raihanah, 2009b), unpacks memories by three generations of women towards the understanding of their individual and collective present lives. In doing so, the reader gets an impression of the network of relationships and human agency within the lives of each character. In addition, the narration illustrates the problems faced by one another in (de) stabilising individual identity, as well as their collective identity characteristic of Aborigines of the land. The resistance in ascribing to this identity is conceived both within and without the family unit. Finally, *My Place* also compels us to draw on elements of reconciliation within the family and within the two communities, Aboriginal and white Australian. On a broader level, individuals should not be compelled by childhood trauma that is ruthlessly indifferent to maturity and mental growth. By focusing on institutionalised segregation and discrimination under the guise of the assimilation policy, as was the practice in Australia concerning the Aborigines, the traumatic experience in childhood is carried across into adulthood and old age, even into extended relationships with fellow members of the community.

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