Sally Reclaims her Place: The Reconstruction of the Sense of Place in *My Place*
To My Family

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.

(Morgan 5).
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Introduction

The role of place in the construction of identity and sense of belonging is of great significance. Therefore, individuals who have lost their sense of place feel as if a very vital part of them is missing and that they never belong anywhere (Morgan 106). This matter of place and displacement is precisely one of the major features of postcolonial literatures: “It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin The Empire 8).\(^1\) An important issue when it comes to place is the situation of indigenous or original cultures that are literally and metaphorically dislocated. These people are literally dislocated, that is, they are moved off what was their territory, and metaphorically dislocated since their culture has been put aside and their institutions and values ignored in favour of the values and practices of the colonising culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 75).\(^2\) This theme characterises Sally Morgan’s My Place, the literary work that I will analyse in this essay. The characters/narrators in the story have to face a reality of displacement; they have lost their place.

This autobiographical narrative is a quest for selfhood and identity, an Aboriginal identity the protagonist has been denied by her own family. Sally discovers her Aboriginal heritage only when she is 15 years of age. For that reason, she embarks on a search for her roots, a journey that leads her to her people, to her place. In addition, the discovery of her aboriginality encourages her to travel to her grandmother’s birthplace and to write her life story and the life stories of her uncle, Arthur Corunna, her mother, Gladys Corunna, and her grandmother, Daisy Corunna. After all these historical and geographical journeys she is, eventually, able to rebuild her place. However, the meaning of place in the story seems to be much more than a geographical location since many aspects are related to it, such as displacement, selfhood, cultural belonging, ethnicity and history.

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\(^1\) I will not spell the term postcolonial with a hyphen but as a simple word. The reason is that the hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch, like those suggested by phrases such as ‘after colonialism’, ‘after independence’ or ‘after the end of Empire’. However, I will consider postcolonialism not just in terms of strict historical periodisation, but as a term used to discuss the various cultural effects of colonisation from the beginning of colonial contact (McLeod 5; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 186-87).

From now on I will refer to this book, The Empire Writes Back (2002), as The Empire.

\(^2\) From now on I will refer to this book, Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts (2000), as Post-Colonial Concepts.
Aim and Approach

As I have already mentioned the theme of place is essential in *My Place*. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to explore the postcolonial conception of place in the story in relation to the concepts of displacement/dislocation, history and ethnicity. I believe that for an accurate understanding of Sally’s situation the term place cannot be studied in isolation. On the contrary, it has to be analysed within a broader context, to be more precise, in relation to the three terms identified above. The idea is to examine how this construct of place can explain Sally’s dispossession of her Aboriginal identity in the first place and the recuperation of her “true identity” in the end.

The theoretical approach that I will use in my analysis is postcolonial criticism. As Castle points out, many postcolonial commentators have demonstrated that it is difficult to say what exactly postcolonial theory is (XIII). Nevertheless, Culler, for example, defines it as an “attempt to understand the problems posed by the European colonization and its aftermath” (130). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, in addition, argue that the term postcolonial is used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process; the term also addresses all aspects of this process from the beginning of colonial contact to the present day (The Empire 2; Post-Colonial Studies 1). According to these authors, postcolonial theory includes discussions about different kinds of experience: “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being” (The Post-Colonial 2). Furthermore, Barry identifies two major books that can be said to inaugurate postcolonial criticism. The first is Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and the second is Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). He also distinguishes four major characteristics in postcolonial criticism: The awareness of the non-European represented as exotic or immoral, the conviction that the coloniser’s language is always tainted, so it can never be innocent, an inclination to perceive identity as hybrid or unstable and, finally, the emphasis on cross-cultural interactions (194-96).

The main postcolonial concept that I want to base my analysis on is place. In colonial societies the concept of place is not considered in terms of landscape in which the objective world is separated from the viewing subject but as a complex interaction of language, history and environment (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Post-Colonial Studies* 345). I will also con-

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3 From now on I will refer to this book, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (2006), as *Post-Colonial Studies*. 
sider place as Carter defines it within his concept of ‘spatial history’ (qtd. in Post-Colonial Concepts 182). That is, place is not simply a neutral location for the imperial project, place is intimately involved in the development of identity, deeply involved in history, and deeply implicated in the systems of representation that develop particularly in colonised societies. Furthermore, I will regard place as Hodge and Mishra identify it, that is, “the ‘place’ in aboriginal culture, rather than existing as a visual construct, is a kind of ‘ground of being’” (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Studies 346). Moreover, place is a tangible location of one’s own dreaming, an extension of one’s own being, it is the idea of not owning the land but in some sense being ‘owned by it’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 180).

Another important term I will use, which is intimately related to the concept of place, is displacement/dislocation. As I have already explained, the concept of displacement/dislocation will be considered both literally and metaphorically. Namely, a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation as a result of, for example, migration, enslavement or transportation or “it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin The Empire 9).

A third central concept I will work with in my analysis is history. Firstly, history is essential for postcolonial discourse since to have a history means to have a legitimate existence: “history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates ‘us’ and no others” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Studies 317). I will again consider the concept of history in relation to place that Carter proposes, namely, ‘spatial history’ (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 182, Post-Colonial Studies 318). Carter’s conception, in addition to what has already been said, rejects “the imperial idea of history as a stage on which it plays out its universal theme of the emergence of order out of chaos. The concept of place as a palimpsest written and overwritten by successive (historical) inscriptions is one way of circumventing history as the ‘scientific narrative of events’” (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Studies 318).

I will also use the concept of ethnicity as a term that accounts for human variation when it comes to culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry. According to Schermerhorn, “[e]thnicity refers to the fusion of many traits that belong to the nature of any ethnic group: a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviours, experiences, consciousness of kind, memories and loyalties” (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 80). What is very important to mention is that ethnic identities persist be-
yond cultural assimilation into the wider society; many times very few features of traditional culture are needed as ‘symbolic elements’ for ethnic identity; individuals need to experience just a few elements, for example common ancestry, to consider themselves member of the group (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 84).

The first term I will use in my analysis is displacement in order to explore and explain Sally’s dispossessions of her Aboriginal identity. The concepts of place, history and ethnicity, on the other hand, are considered as essential within postcolonial criticism when it comes to the development and reconstruction of subjectivity. Consequently, I will use these concepts to show the importance of place, past and ethnic belonging for Sally in the rebuilding of her Aboriginal identity.

The primary focus of my argument and analysis will be on the character and narrator Sally Morgan, on her denied heritage and her search for identity and belonging. I will, however, consider in my analysis the life stories of the other members of her family as well but in relation to Sally’s situation as the main object of study. The method of analysis that I am going to use as a tool in this research paper is close reading and the analysis of quotations.

Finally, I will argue that Sally reconstructs her sense of place that a colonial history of displacement has fragmented and this restored place locates her culturally, geographically and historically allowing her to rebuild her identity. At the same time, she finds her place in the past, in history, within her people, her ethnic group, as well as in the geographical place where her people belong.

Previous Research and Material
Sally Morgan’s My Place was first published in 1987. However, the edition that I will use is from 1988. This work is considered a Stolen Generation narrative since some of the characters/narrators in the autobiography were ‘half-caste’ children that were forcibly removed from their parents in an effort to “civilize” them by assimilation into white society (Curthoys; Rowse; Huggan 96-97). My Place has also won the Order of Australia Book Prize and was described as having the same impact in Australia as Alex Haley’s Roots did in Australia (De

4 Stolen Generations was Peter Read’s title for a 1981 study of NSW government removal of 5625 Aboriginal children from their families between 1883 and 1969. Those removed became more visible in the 1990s, after the 1991 Report of the Commonwealth Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody highlighted the pervasive psychological morbidity of indigenous Australians. From 1995 to 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reviewed all governments’ ‘separation’ programs. Its report, Bringing Them Home (1997), found that indigenous children had been forcibly separated from their parents since Europeans first colonised Australia. From 1910 to 1970, between one-tenth and one-third of Australia’s Aboriginal children were so treated. Testimonies from 535 indigenous people who had experienced removal revealed that many children, after separation, suffered physical (including sexual) and mental abuse (Rowse).
Candido & Rogers 28). However, the contents of this work have also been criticised by Eagle (94-95), for example, who disapproves of its literary quality.

I have found a large amount of previous research on *My Place* that was written between 1991 and 1997 (Trees 1991; Tarrago 1993; Jaireth 1995; Hills 1997). One of the most extensive is, however, Bird & Haskell’s *Whose Place? A Study of Sally Morgan’s My Place* (1992). This book examines why Sally Morgan’s story is so important. It contains many essays that discuss the different ways *My Place* can be read: as autobiography; as history, oral history or counter history; as a political intervention in the ‘story’ of white Australia; as a detective story. *My Place* is also analysed in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Innes 2007), in *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures) (Huggan 2007), in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (McLeod 2000) and a chapter appears in *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Thieme 1996). Although there are so many studies on this autobiography, some of which I will consider in my analysis, I have not found any works that analyse the theme of place in particular.

On the other hand, when it comes to theoretical approaches the literary sources that I will use include works by some of the most important postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Aime Césaire, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Paul Carter and Helen Tiffin. However, my study will mainly be based on the following works by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin: *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (2006) and *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000). The reason is that in these books they include and examine the major postcolonial theorists, theories and concepts, some of which I will use in the following analysis.

Sally and the Fact of Being out of Place

Firstly, the concept of displacement is essential in the understanding of the concept of place since being displaced denotes being out of place. It does not mean the absence of place but the fact of living in an alien place. In Sally’s case it is the lack of a community she belongs to and where she is accepted as a member. Sally experiences this dislocation but as I will illustrate she is not alone bearing this burden. Sally’s grandmother, her great uncle and her mother have also gone through even worse experiences. Furthermore, I will show that Sally’s displacement is a result of her family’s displacement for so many years.
As I have already described from a postcolonial perspective, both the literal and the metaphorical aspects of the term dislocation are considered important at the moment of analysing a postcolonial text. In Sally’s story both characteristics are present. She and her family are displaced as a result of colonialism. Her grandmother, Daisy, and her great uncle Arthur were half-caste children who were separated from their Aboriginal family and were forcibly removed from their place of origin, Corunna Downs. They were literally dislocated. They were taken away from their place. Daisy remembers: “I must have been ‘bout fourteen or fifteen when they took me from Corunna […] Funny how I was the only half-caste they took with them from Corunna” (Morgan 333). Arthur and other children had had the same experience, as he says to Sally when he regrets being a half-caste: “Aah, I always wish I’d never left there. It was my home. Sometimes, I wish I’d been born black as the ace of spades, then they’d never have took me. They only took half-castes. They took Albert and they took me and Katie, our friend” (Morgan 181). In relation to their situation, Beresford and Omaji point out that children of mixed parentage were widely thought to present the worst characteristics of both races; it was feared that half-castes would be more black than white in their outlook and they could be a numerically strong population to threaten white interests (qtd. in Huggan 96). Thus, as Huggan adds, the solution was to absorb mixed-blood Aborigines into the ‘master race’ (96-97). However, mixed-blood children like Alfred and Daisy are the outcome of colonialism as Arthur testifies: “My mother’s name was Annie Padewani and my father was Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman, the white station owner […] While on the station, he shared my Aboriginal Father’s two wives, Annie and Ginnie” (Morgan 175). Additionally, Sally’s mother, Gladys, was also separated from her mother, Daisy, as she remembers: “I have no memory of being taken from my mother and placed in Parkerville Children’s Home, but all my life, I’ve carried a mental picture of a little fat kid about three or four years old […]. I think that was me when they first took me to Parkerville” (Morgan 241). Gladys was so little when she went through this separation and the experience was so traumatic that the only image that Gladys has now about herself as a child is completely distant. Furthermore, her uncertainty represents her sense of displacement.

However, they are also metaphorically dislocated. They are the object of what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin identify as “cultural denigration” (The Empire 9). From the time they were at the station they have to leave their traditions, their religion and their language, as Arthur describes: “Albert was older than me and they started educatin’ him early. Mrs McGregor, Archie’s wife, was the teacher […]. He had to speak English and learn the white man’s ways and table manners […]. She also gave us what you call religious instruction […].
They caught me in the end put me with Albert and Mrs McGregor. I wasn’t allowed to talk blackfella after that” (Morgan 178). As I have already mentioned they are still children when they are separated from their families and from their ethnic group. Hereafter they have to live entirely as individuals that are part of the white system. They have to give away their roots and adopt the whites’ traditions and way of life. Worst of all, they have to leave the people they belong to. Daisy describes this situation very well:

At night, I used to lie in bed and think ‘bout my people. I could see their campfire and their faces. I could see my mother’s face and Lily’s. I really missed them. I cried myself to sleep every night. Sometimes in my dreams, I’d hear them wailing, ‘Talahue! Talahue!’, and I’d wake up, calling ‘Mum! Mum!’ You see, I needed my people, they made me feel important. I belonged to them. I thought ‘bout the animals, too. The kangaroos and birds. (Morgan 333-34)

What is really significant in this quotation is the loss of her Aboriginal name, which symbolises the loss of her culture. Another important aspect is Daisy’s feeling of cultural/ethnic belonging, which is just what Sally lacks in her life. Daisy’s transportation is crucial for Sally’s family since it represents the separation from her Aboriginal inheritance.

Sally and her siblings lived with their mother and their white father until he died when Sally was just a little girl. However, she feels displaced within the white society she lives since those days. Her displacement could be seen as a result of her grandmother’s separation from her original culture. When she goes to visit her father at the hospital her feelings of being out of place symbolise her social and cultural displacement in an alien white society as a foreshadowing of what she is going to experience in the future:

The hospital again, and the echo of my reluctant feet through the long, empty corridors. I hated hospitals and hospital smells. I hated the bare boards that gleamed with newly applied polish, the dust-free window-sills, and the flashes of shiny chrome that snatched my distorted shape as we harried past. I was a grubby five-year-old in an alien environment. (Morgan 11)

Moreover, when she is at school she is treated as if she was from elsewhere by her teachers and classmates. For instance, one of the most noticeable features that Sally has from her Aboriginal heritage is her darker skin and therefore she is not supposed to be an authentic Australian: “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 your parents, bet they didn’t come from
Australia’” (Morgan 38). Sally is told that they are Indian and therefore they are different.
According to Innes, her colour is connected with her sense of unbelonging, of being out of
place, and urban Australia is seen as the world of white people, where black people are per-
ceived as belonging elsewhere (68). Therefore, she is condemned to be a foreigner just be-
cause she has a darker skin, even though she was not conscious about her family’s skin colour
at that time.

Additionally, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, these concerns with the
“post-colonial body” that are centred on ideas of colour and race are central to many analysts
of postcolonial experiences and especially, Frantz Fanon (1961), Aime Césaire and Edouard
Glissant (1989):

They emphasized the visibility of signs of difference when manifested in skin colour,
hair type, facial features such as eye shape or nose shape, etc. Although such ‘differ-
ences’ do not constitute any decisive genetic dissimilarity, and certainly do not indicate
the existence of sub-groups within a single human species […] they nevertheless be-
came prime means of developing and reinforcing prejudices against specific groups.
(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Concepts 183-84)

Consequently, Sally and her family are not considered to be Aussies because of their darker
skin. It is obvious for every kid at school that Sally and her family are not Australian, as Sally
tells her mother: “They reckon we’re not Aussies […] they just didn’t want us pretending we
were Aussies when we weren’t” (Morgan 38-39). Besides, when Jill, Sally’s sister, tries to
convince her that they are Aboriginal Sally recalls the prejudices against Aborigines at their
school. Jill says to Sally: “‘A Boong. You know, Aboriginal. God, of all things, we’re Abo-
riginal!’”, and Sally reflects, “‘Oh.’ I suddenly understood. There was a great deal of social
stigma attached to being Aboriginal at our school” (Morgan 98). It seems as if Jill is com-
pletely sure about their Aboriginal roots, whereas, Sally is still unaware of their true identity.
However, it is important to notice that she reveals the discrimination and prejudices against
Aboriginal people.

As Sally grows up she is more and more aware that something about her family is un-
usual. She feels increasingly displaced and she cannot stand it. This feeling is particularly ac-
ccentuated when one of Sally’s classmates tells her that her family is not normal at all:
“You’ve got the most abnormal family I’ve ever come across. Don’t get me wrong, I like your
mother, I really do, but the way you all look at life is weird” (Morgan 107). Moreover, Sally’s mother tries to encourage her to do things but Sally is simply trying to understand who she is: “How could I tell her it was me, and she and Nan. The sum total of all the things I didn’t understand about them or myself. The feeling that a very vital part of me was missing and that I’d never belong anywhere. Never resolve anything” (Morgan 106). Sally knows that something is wrong about her family and thus about her life. However, she does not know about her ethnic origin yet, and, therefore, she is so confused.

When Sally discovers her Aboriginal heritage she gets so excited since it is a beginning: “Before we have nothing. At least now, we’ve got a beginning” (Morgan 136). However, as she acknowledges, this is just the start. Now she has to reconstruct her subjectivity since even though she has uncovered her family’s Aboriginal identity she still feels displaced, as she reflects: “There was so much about myself I didn’t understand” (Morgan 141). I would say that Sally is now consciously dislocated since she now knows why she is as she is. She also realises that she has not had any experience as an aborigine and she does not know anything about her people either: “What did it really mean to be Aboriginal? I’d never lived off the land and been a hunter and a gatherer. I’d never participated in corroborees or heard stories of the Dreamtime. I’d lived all my life in suburbia and told every one I was Indian. I hardly knew any Aboriginal people. What did it mean for someone like me?” (Morgan 141). For that reason, she is going to embark on a search for her roots and the best way is to explore her family’s history, which is part of Australian history as well.

Sally Reclaims her Own Past to Rebuild her Place

First, I want to reflect on an important issue when dealing with the past, namely, that there is no way to isolate the past from the present. Consequently, the past is always present in Sally’s life even though her mother and grandmother try to hide it and Sally herself does not notice its presence clearly. On the one hand, Sally’s feeling of displacement is a result of the colonial past of her family, and on the other hand, it is not possible to deny Sally’s darker skin and her black grandmother any longer:

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5 Corroboree, meaning traditional Aboriginal ceremony, is a word that derives from the Dharuk language of Port Jackson and was adopted by Europeans in the first years of white settlement (Doyle). Dreamtime refers to the spiritual dimension of Aboriginal existence, linking the present to the time of world creation. The concept is complex because it refers to the existence of spiritual forces in the here-and-now as well as to a time when ancestral beings emerged from beneath the surface of the earth and formed the landscape. In the time of creation the ancestors emerged from the ground, creating features such as waterholes; where they walked, they created pathways or river beds; where they plunged digging sticks into the ground, trees grew; where they died, their bodies were transformed into hills; and where they bled, lakes were formed (Morphy).
You bloody kids don’t want me, you want a bloody white grandmother, I’m black. Do you hear, black, black, black! […] For the first time in my fifteen years, I was conscious of Nan’s colouring. She was right, she wasn’t white. Well, I thought logically, if she wasn’t white, then neither we were. What did that make us, what did that make me? I had never thought of myself as being black before. (Morgan 97)

As Sally recognises in this passage, it is the first time she is conscious of her family’s darker skin. The importance of these aspects that continuously appear and reappear in Sally’s life is that they are a consequence of her colonial history and prehistory and at the same time they are the factors that trigger her search for this past as an essential part in the rebuilding of her identity. However, it is not strange that Sally experiences this strong connection with the past. According to Said, “even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other, […] each co-exists with the other […]. Neither past nor present […] has a complete meaning alone” (2). Thus, the presence of the past is a reality that Sally and her family have to face because the past will always be a part of them.

Sally reclaims her past, her place in history as a colonised individual. She does it for herself but also for her family and her children. It is in the past that she loses her place and it is just in the past that she has to start to recuperate it. Fanon argues that “the first step for ‘colonised’ people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past” (qtd. in Barry 193). From now on Sally will search for her roots until she finds them since she “was anxious to learn as much as [she] could about the past” (Morgan 138). Therefore, she begins her search asking her relatives, her mother, her grandmother and her great uncle for her family’s past (Morgan 138, 145, 157). She also goes to Battye Library to read about Aborigines since she now wants to know everything about her new identity (Morgan 151). As she gathers information she continues her search by visiting Alice, Alfred Howden Drake-Brockman’s second wife, and their daughter Judy, Daisy’s half sister; this is a family Nan worked as a nursemaid for at Ivanhoe, their place in Perth (Morgan 153-56, 167-70). The most important thing in this preliminary investigation is that she gets to know about Corunna Down Station, where Nan was born and lived until she was fourteen years of age (Morgan 142). It is essential for her search since she has now a real place where her family’s past can be traced.

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6 However I would say that the first step for Sally as a colonised individual has been to uncover her true identity, her Aboriginal heritage she has been deprived of as a result of colonialism.

7 Battye Library is a history library about Western Australian history (Morgan 151).
However, she is not satisfied with just knowing about her family’s history but she wants to record their past. Fanon identifies this stage as the second step towards a postcolonial perspective, which is “to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past has been devalued” (qtd. in Barry 193). Sally, consequently, decides to write a book about her family’s history since as she says, “there’s almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything” (Morgan 163). Thus, she does not just want to rebuild her own past but her story as part of a more global history, that is, Aboriginal accounts of Australian history. It is really important for Sally to find and record their version of the past because it is history that legitimates ‘us’ and not others.

Moreover, Sally’s story along with the stories of her great uncle, her grandmother and mother represents the history of the Aborigines in Australia whose past has been devalued. She strives in order to vindicate her people and the book itself—with the biographies of her mother, grandmother and great uncle—becomes the symbol, and the instrument of her vindication. Furthermore, this narrative is one of those stories that makes it possible to record a part of Australian Aboriginal history that had been hidden for so many years. According to Curthoys, the Aboriginal accounts of the colonial past are increasingly heard and this counter-history is revealed particularly through Aboriginal narratives "reaching maximum public impact and apotheosis in the Stolen Generations report, published as Bringing Them Home (1997). [Furthermore,] [t]he best-known internationally of these narratives is one of the earliest, Sally Morgan’s My Place (1987)” (Curthoys, original bold lettering). Thus, Sally, along with other Aboriginal writers, makes public this unknown history. She gives the Stolen Generation’s children a voice and reveals this shameful side of Australian history, as she tells her great uncle:

There’s a lot of our history we can’t get at, Arthur. There are all sorts of files about Aboriginals that go way back, and the government won’t release them. You take the old police files, they’re not even controlled by Battye Library, they’re controlled by the police. And they don’t like letting them out, because there are so many instances of police abusing their power when they were supposed to be Protectors of Aborigines that it’s not funny! I mean our own government had terrible policies for Aboriginal people. Thousands of families in Australia were destroyed by the government policy of taking children away. None of that happened to white people. (Morgan 163-64)
The main reason why Sally Morgan has been denied her Aboriginal heritage can be found in this history of stolen generations. Her denied identity is not her family’s fault, but the product of a colonial past. Her mother and grandmother were afraid that Welfare could take their children away for being Aboriginal since their white father had died, as Gladys Corunna reveals in her story: “It was after the visit from the Welfare lady that Mum and I decided we would definitely never tell the children they were Aboriginal. We were both convinced they would have a bad time, otherwise. Also, if word got out, another Welfare person might come and take them away” (Morgan 305). Additionally, when Sally asks Nan about her past she is too afraid to say anything. Moreover, she thinks that nothing has changed since the old times.

Sally’s mother suggests leaving Nun alone since she is not going to talk about the past: “She’s frightened, you see. She’s been frightened all her life. You can tell her things have changed, but she won’t listen. She thinks it’s still like the old days when people would do what they like with you” (Morgan 142). Nevertheless, after all her efforts Sally is able to record all their stories in order to reconstruct her own place in history.

When Sally writes the history of her own family, she writes a post-colonial history that goes beyond the Western historiographic ideology of “a single narrative truth that [is] ‘simply’ the closest possible representation of events” (White qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin Post-Colonial Studies 318). Sally, on the contrary, not only writes her history and prehistory in order to show the colonised accounts of the past but she also constructs a version of her family’s history from the perspective of the coloniser. These accounts of the past are connected to specific places and to particular people. The colonised accounts are, on the one hand, represented by the stories of her family told by themselves from their perspective as oppressed individuals. Daisy, for example, tells how she and her mother were deceived when she was taken from Corunna: “When they took me from the station, I never seen days like that ever again […] They told my mother I was goin’ to school […] Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin’ out of their promises. My mother wouldn’t have let me go just to work” (Morgan 332). On the other hand, the coloniser accounts are represented by Aunt Judy and Alice Drake-Brockman. Alice, for instance, says about Daisy:

[When I left [the station], I took Daisy with me. Annie had said to me shortly before, ‘Take her with you mistress […] Of course, what I was doing was illegal, you weren’t supposed to bring natives into Perth. The magistrate said, ‘I can’t give you permission to take her, because that’s against the law, but the captain can’t refuse her passage’ […]}
I brought other native girls after that. I’d train them, then find friends who wanted one. I provided quite a few. (Morgan 168)

Furthermore, Sally’s post-colonial history goes beyond the imperial history that according to Carter reduces space to a stage and pays attention to events unfolding in time alone and according to a logic of their own; events that refer neither to the place, nor to the people (333-34). Her narrative is, on the contrary, a good representation of what Carter identifies as spatial history (333-35). One of the most important aspects of the concept of spatial history is that there is not just one interpretation of the past that is correct but different interpretations and experiences of the people who inhabited a particular place. Simultaneously, these inscriptions are written and overwritten in this specific place as a palimpsest. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, place “is in a continual process of being written. This is true of any place, but in post-colonial experience the linkage between language, place and history is far more prominent because the interaction is so much more urgent and contestatory. One of the most interesting aspects of this palimpsest is the rewriting, through Aboriginal textuality, of a place which would seem to have been overwritten by the colonizer” (Post-Colonial Studies 346). Consequently, Sally rewrites a place that has been overwritten by the coloniser since Aboriginal people had been there for thousands of years before the colonisers came. She rewrites Australian history through her book revealing the stories of her Aboriginal family, a history that had not been written before. It is through language that she writes the experiences of the colonised people, their accounts of the past in a specific place, namely, Corunna Dawns Station and in a global perspective, Australia.

Another aspect of spatial history, on the other hand, is that it discovers and explores the lacuna left by imperial history; it considers the different versions of the past and “[i]f it does imitate the world of the traveller it is in a different sense. For like the traveller whose gaze is oriented and limited, it makes no claim to authoritative completeness. It is, must be, like a journey, exploratory…” (Carter 334). This characteristic of spatial history is reflected in Sally’s search for her history. When she has almost finished her journeys to the past – written the stories of her relatives and visited so many people connected to her family- she has already begun the reflexive process of coming to terms with how little she knows about the past of Nan and her family. For instance, Sally makes deductions about Nan’s life and her difficulties living in a white society: “But this, too, only made me even more aware of how much we still didn’t know. My mind went over and over her story; every word, every look. I knew there were great dark depths there, and I knew I would never plumb them” (Morgan 351).
Thus, Sally is aware that it is impossible to get a complete picture of the past, of her family history. There will always be unseen aspects, as it is for the traveller’s limited gaze.

The importance of place in the development of identity and its involvement in history is one more essential characteristic of spatial history. These aspects are evidently present in Sally’s search for her past. She has just written Arthur’s story and even though she has at last “something from the past to hang on to,” she also “experienced a sense of loss” since she knows so little “about Nan and about the history and experiences of [her] own family” (Morgan 214). For that reason, Sally decides that her best course of action is to return to Nan and Arthur’s birthplace, Corunna Downs, and explore the history of her family in the place it has been written: “I guess I want to see if there are any of the buildings left. Buildings that might have been there in Nan’s day. And I want to look at the land. I want to walk on it […] I want to be there, and imagine what it was like for the people then” (Morgan 214-15). Sally is not satisfied with what others say about Corunna, its people and history, but she has to go there and see and feel the place for herself. Besides, being in this place signifies so much for Sally in the reconstruction of her subjectivity. This visit to Corunna implies her encounter with her past, the part of her existence that has been denied her. When Sally and her mother are in Corunna Down Station, Trevor, the manager, shows them the house that Arthur and Nan have talked about. Sally recalls: “it was the same one Nan and Arthur had known in their day. We saw where the old kitchen had been, the date palm Nan had talked about, and further over in one of the back sheds, the tank machine in which Albert has lost his fingers […] It was concrete evidence that what Arthur had told us and what Nan had mentioned were all true” (Morgan 229). The essence of spatial history is summarised in this quotation. The place itself is historical, these are the elements described by Nan and Arthur in their accounts of the past, and at the same time the evidence of their oral history, of the events they have talked about. Sally makes another important relation between place, its people and history when she refers to Corunna Downs Station: “We were both trying to imagine what it would have been like for the people in the old days. Soft, blue hills completely surrounded the station. They seemed to us mystical and magical. We easily imagined Nan, Arthur, Rosie, Lily and Albert, sitting exactly as we were now, looking off into the horizon at the end of the day. Dreaming, thinking” (Morgan 229). It is interesting to notice how easy it is for Sally and Gladys to imagine the past, the people and their reality when they see and feel the place where their family history has been written. It seems as if the people from the past magically appear in the present, just in the place where their experiences are inscribed.
Finally, history is also significant since it is just here in the past that Sally begins to find her people, her place. The next section analyses the process in which Sally eventually finds her people and her place.

Sally: Finding my People, Finding my Place

Sally always wonders and tries to understand who she is. Since she was a little child there was a question that was hovering in her existence, namely, “What people are we?” (Morgan 105). She is constantly invaded by a sense of unbelonging, the feeling that she never belongs anywhere (Morgan 106). On the one hand, she is rejected as an Australian by the urban society where she lives in the suburbs of Perth, and on the other hand, her own family denied Sally her real inheritance. Eagle observes that Sally’s sense of displacement is reflected in the lack of quality in her writing style and this deficiency is the evidence that her prose is in a state of uncertainty since she is in search of her place (94-95). Thus, when she realises that she has Aboriginal ancestry she finds a new beginning. All the years she has been told that she is Indian and now her mother recognises that “[i]t was just a white lie” (Morgan 135). Sally then asks her mother a question that she has asked her and Nan so many times without getting a factual answer, but this time her mother says the truth: “‘We’re Aboriginal, aren’t we, Mum?’ ‘Yes dear’, she replied, without thinking. ‘Why shouldn’t you kids know now? You’re old enough, it’s not as though you’re little any more. Besides, it’s different now’” (Morgan 135). Gladys has changed her mind now and she is also aware that things have changed in their country. This moment is very important for Sally since it is at this very moment that her search for her people really starts.

Furthermore, the importance of cultural belonging is essential for Sally’s development of subjectivity. She is always searching for her roots and when she at last realizes who she really is she is proud of her new identity and she accepts it as a vital part of herself. For instance, immediately after the revelation of her new identity, Sally applies for an Aboriginal scholarship. However, as she recognises, “It wasn’t the money I was after […] I desperately wanted to do something to identify with my new-found heritage […] I wanted to say, ‘My grandmother’s Aboriginal and it’s a part of me, too’” (Morgan 137). The most important thing is that she has now an ethnic group that she belongs to and nobody can take away her Aboriginal identity since individuals need to experience just a few features of traditional culture as ‘symbolic elements’ for ethnic identity. In Sally’s case it is enough with their common ancestry. There are, moreover, strong bonds between an individual and his/her ethnic group.
Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state that “[a] person’s ethnic group is such a powerful identifier because while he or she chooses to remain in it, it is an identity that cannot be denied, rejected or taken away by others” (*Post-Colonial Concepts* 80). Now, Sally is going to search for her people until she finds them.

Sally’s return to Corunna Downs is one of the most fruitful journeys in the reconstruction of her sense of place.8 When she goes there with her mother, her husband, Paul, and their children she is only “trying to trace [her] relatives” (Morgan 222), however, she finally finds her people, not just biologically but also ethnically and spiritually. At this point, it is important to present a more detailed definition of ethnicity. According to Schermerhorn ethnicity is

[a] collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry (that is, memories of a shared historical past whether of origin or of historical experiences such as colonization, immigration, invasion or slavery); a shared consciousness of a separate, named, group identity; and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. These features will always be in dynamic combination, relative to the particular time and place in which they are experienced and operate consciously or unconsciously for the political advancement of the group. (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Post-Colonial Concepts* 83-84)

This description includes a wider range of characteristics than other simplistic definitions when it comes to an ethnic group (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Post-Colonial Concepts* 81-84). Besides, this definition encompasses many of the aspects of Sally’s ethnic belonging.

Once she is in the North it is her own people who guide her to find her place. On their return to Corunna Sally and her family visit different places, Port Hedland, Marble Bar, Corunna Downs Station, the Reserve, Yandeearra, and so on. They do so because in every place they get a new trace of her family to follow. From the day they arrive at Port Hedland they meet more and more relatives because as an older man tells them, “You’d be related to most of the people round here, one way or another” (Morgan 222). Most of the people Sally meets know her family and their past and at the same time they guide her in her search for other members of the family. The importance of these encounters is that all these people give her a real sense of belonging. Many times they tell her: “You’re my relations;” “You belong to a lot of the people here;” “you’ve come to the right place. You my people;” “This is your place, too, remember that” (Morgan 223, 231, 233). The fact that Sally finds so many relatives stren-

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8 I refer to her journey as her return to Corunna since the chapter is symbolically titled “Return to Corunna” even though she never had been in Corunna before.
strengthens her sense of ethnic belonging. It is also important that she can talk with them about her family history and corroborate what Nan and Arthur have told her and in a sense legitimize her own past.

Sally also finds her people spiritually during her journey to Corunna Downs. One night when she is really sad about Lily, she wonders where the dead women in her family, Lilla, Annie, and Rosie and Old Fanny, are when “[s]uddenly, it was as if a window in heaven had been opened and I saw a group of Aboriginal women standing together. They were all looking at me. I knew instinctively it was them. Three adults and a child […] As I cried, a voice gently said, “Stop worrying, they’re with me now’” (Morgan 227). What surprises Sally is that her mother tells her about it and corroborates her own experience: “Last night something important happened to you. You were asleep […] then suddenly, I saw you standing with a group of Aboriginal women. I think there were three of them and a child” (Morgan 227). This encounter means that Sally also finds a spiritual place within her people.

One of the most symbolic moments during their trip is the day they are given their place there in the North in accordance with Aboriginal traditions. When Sally and her family go to Yandeearra to visit Billy and Dolly Swan they are given the groups to which they belong. According to Peter Coppin, the manager, there are four groups, Panaka, Burungu, Carriema and Malinga and the name of the group you belong to determines who you are related to (Morgan 230-31). Billy says that since they know who Sally and her family are they can give them their groups without any problem. Consequently, Billy says to Sally: “‘You […] must be Burungu, your mother is Panaka, and Paul, we would make him Malinga […] You got your place now. We’ve worked it out. You come as often as you please. There’s always a spot here for you all’” (Morgan 231). This event is very important since Sally finds her place and it is her own people who give her this sense of place: “We all felt very moved and honoured that we’d been given our groups. There was no worry about us forgetting, we kept repeating them over and over. It was one more precious thing that added to our sense of belonging” (Morgan 232). They have now these symbolic Aboriginal elements that are a real link with their people since they represent an essential part of their peoplehood.

After all the days in the North, the places they have visited and the people they have met, Sally and her family know who they belong to now. Sally and her family are so glad and overwhelmed at the thought that they had nearly not gone there: “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” (Morgan 233). This observation shows how important it was for Sally and her family to go to Corunna to see the place, to
meet their people and, finally, to find their ethnicity. Moreover, as Sally says, “We were different people, now. What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it” (Morgan 233). They just wanted to know about their history, about the place and their relatives there, however, they had found the spiritual links with their culture. They are different now because they have found a part of them that was missing as Gladys expresses: “All my life, I’ve only been half a person. I don’t think I really realised how much of me was missing until I came North” (Morgan 233). What Gladys says is very significant because it also represents Sally’s feelings and experiences in her encounter with her people, with her place.

Conclusions

Primarily, the analysis I have carried out shows that the postcolonial construct of place that I have used to examine Sally’s situation has offered a new perspective on the understanding of the reconstruction of her sense of place. This concept of place that is intimately related to the terms of displacement, history and ethnicity has made it possible to explore and explain Sally’s denied Aboriginal heritage and the process of her reconstruction of subjectivity from a multidimensional point of view. Furthermore, a study that includes different levels of analysis, in which people, place and time are involved, has been crucial in order to give a more complete account of the development of her identity.

As I have argued, Sally’s life goes through a complex evolution. She develops from being totally displaced within the white Australian society to a completely different situation in which she finds her true place in the world with her people. From being asked what country she comes from by her classmates in Perth she is finally welcome as, “you are my people” and “this is your place, too” by her own folks in the North where she belongs. However, the way has been long and hard. In the beginning, we encounter a Sally that has a deep sense of unbelonging and who feels completely out of place as a result of her colonial past and a history of cultural denigration. Then, as she uncovers her Aboriginal heritage she finds a way out. Now, she will make different journeys in order to find her sense of place.

Firstly, it is through the journeys to the past that she finds out where her roots are, both ethnically and geographically; it is through diverse historical explorations that she constructs her family’s familial past, her Aboriginal history and, most importantly of all, her place within Australian history. It is through the recording of this past, materialised in her literary work, that she vindicates her people and her own Aboriginal identity. Thus, the importance of history in Sally’s rebuilding of place is evident. It is here in the past that she finds the
answers to so many questions about herself and her people. However, she also finds some unsolved mysteries. She needs, on the other hand, to be connected to a real place and she finds it. All her journeys lead her back to her place of origin, namely, Corunna Downs and its surroundings, where her family history has been written. It is here that the encounter with her ethnicity occurs as a culmination of this process of rebuilding that, finally, gives her back the sense of place. Sally can now come back to Perth because she is now another individual, a person with an Aboriginal consciousness. She knows where and to whom she belongs and nobody can take it away because this sense of place will always be with her as an integral part of her new identity.

Finally, it would be interesting to examine the theme of place from a postcolonial point of view in other Stolen Generation narratives in order to attain a wider perspective of the different aspects analysed in this research paper. A comparative study could be a possible alternative to explore different experiences of people who have written this history of stolen generations.
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