The Stolen Generations Narrative and Aboriginality: Sally Morgan’s *My Place* and Alexis Wright’s *Plains of Promise*

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1. The Stolen Generations Narrative

The apology by the newly elected Australian Government to the “stolen generations” of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, delivered on 13 February 2008 marks a significant turning point in Australian history and most importantly heralds a huge step towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.¹ The systematic removal of Indigenous children under the pretext of protecting Indigenous people, which started from the nineteenth century and lasted until the late 1960s, was intended to assimilate Indigenous children, particularly those of mixed Aboriginal and white descent, into white Australian society.² Judy Atkinson, an Indigenous researcher, castigates this large-scale removal or dislocation of Indigenous people from their homelands, calling it “the greatest violence” and “cultural and spiritual genocide.”³ She writes:

> cultural genocide not only works to destroy the cultures of oppressed peoples, it also eradicates the sense of self, of self-worth, and of well-being in individuals and groups so that they are unable to function from either their own cultural relatedness, or from the culture of the oppressors. They feel in a world between, devalued, and devaluing who they are.⁴

Cultural and spiritual genocide undermines the “locale of who we are” and identity becomes fractured and fragmented.⁵ The sense of self is lost, resulting in traumatic distress. However, the fact of Indigenous separation had been neglected for a long time; the issue of the stolen generations only became highly focused with the 1997 publication of *Bringing Them Home: The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC).⁶ During the last decade in Australia, stories about the separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities have assumed great significance as historical narratives, not only for Indigenous but also non-Indigenous Australians. Employing and extending the usage of the phrase of the “stolen generations narrative”—originally coined for the work of the 1996-97 HREOC by an Aboriginal man, Peter Costello—Bain Attwood, white Australian historian, examines the way in which stories about the removal of children appeared in different literary genres in the last two decades. In his study, Attwood suggests that the stolen generations narrative, which used to be a “collective memory” for Indigenous people, now works as a “symbol of the history of the colonization of Australia for non-Aboriginal Australians as well, standing for a broader and more complex past.”⁷ The stolen generations narrative plays an important role in the Indigenous Australians’ search for and recapture of their Indigenous identity (Aboriginality); moreover, it also helps non-Indigenous Australians become aware of the issue of

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separation in order to reconsider the historical relationship between the nation's non-Indigenous (settler) people and Indigenous people.

This paper focuses on two stolen generations narratives, Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* and explores how Australian Indigenous writers recover and empower their subjectivity while asserting the sovereignty of Indigenous people. Morgan's autobiographical narrative, *My Place*, published in 1987, is the best known testimony regarding removal, as it became a best-seller, bringing Indigenous writing from the fringe into the mainstream. As the direction of Indigenous literature changed from communal-oriented activist literature to a literature of understanding and explaining Indigenous individuals to a predominant white readership, *My Place* signaled a turning point initiating a "literature of reconciliation." Wright's novel, *Plains of Promise*, published in 1997 and highly regarded by being shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, The Age Book of the Year, and the NSW Premier’s Awards, is a culturally ground-breaking work by foregrounding gender issues and the marginalization of Indigenous women who belong to the stolen generations.

Since the success of Morgan's work a large number of Indigenous women's stolen generations narratives have been published and these narratives emphasize the tie of Indigenous community and family, specifically the mother-daughter relationship. In her analysis of Indigenous women's writing, Anne Brewster points out that the "family" is a "site of resistance" from which Aboriginal women draw personal substance and collective strategies of empowerment. However, *Plains of Promise* differs from *My Place* as it challenges Brewster's theoretical premise of "family" as a "site of resistance," and it presents different kinds of "family" experiences of Indigenous women. While *My Place* and *Plains of Promise* offer a remarkable contrast, both authors utilize a similar narrative tactic to represent Aboriginality in their texts.

The first section of this paper foregrounds the issues surrounding discourses on Aboriginality in relation to Australian Indigenous literature and explores the Indigenous epistemology that enables Indigenous writers to define an enduring Aboriginality. The following sections are individual case studies of stolen generations narratives and examine how *My Place* and *Plains of Promise* employ the Indigenous epistemology as their narrative tactic. The final section discusses how Indigenous concepts possess a potentiality for Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation in Australia.

2. Aboriginality and Indigenous Writing

In Indigenous literature, Aboriginality acts as a crucial concept in interrogating and negotiating the colonial discourse of Australia from Indigenous perspectives and in articulating both Indigenous culture and identity. However, the definition of Aboriginality has had a contentious and unsettled history within different classification systems. Historically, the definition has been a fabrication imposed by the Australian government. From the 1830s to the 1970s, it was designed for the assimilation of Indigenous people into white society, using blood-quantum criteria such as "half-caste," "quarter-caste," and "quadroon." The 1973 Federal Government regulation governing the definition of Aboriginality required one of the following conditions for Aboriginality: one must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; one must identify oneself as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; and one must be identified by the community as being a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. This definition is supported by non-Indigenous organizations such as...
the Australian Council for the Arts, the major sponsor of Aboriginal arts, in order to award grants to artists. In the surge of the Indigenous rights movement, these definitions of Aboriginality, at first glance, seem to support Indigenous people's identity. However, they only act as another mechanism through which images of the Indigenous other are created and controlled. Although colonial regimes have continually manipulated and made up racial identities, as Ania Loomba points out, “the discourse of race has also been appropriated and inverted by anti-colonial and black resistance struggles, such as the Negritude or Black power movements.” Drawing on Loomba, it could be argued that Indigenous Australians equally “appropriate” and “invert” the concept of Aboriginality, thereby reinventing Aboriginality as a dynamic notion in order to embody their subjectivity, rather than accepting it as a static imposition.

To understand this reinvented Aboriginality as distinct from settler and other non-Indigenous identities, the concept of the “Fourth World” is useful. This concept explains the condition experienced by indigenous minorities who live in First World settler nations, such as New Zealand Maori, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians in the United States, First Nations people in Canada, and Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. According to Chadwick Allen, the term is utilized to “distinguish the particular historical and contemporary contexts of indigenous minorities from those of the majority indigenous populations of so-called developing or Third World nations, as well as from those of the majority-settler First World populations that now occupy and control most of the traditional territories claimed by indigenous minorities, like Maori and American Indians.” The definition of the Fourth World was developed in the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in the 1970s, and this movement led to the formation of an international coalition and identity of indigenous peoples all over the world. The goals of the WCIP were not only the creation of global indigeneity but also local indigeneity. The globalization of indigeneity included “tactical maneuvers designed to redirect power relations in the delegates’ local, regional, and national contexts and to rewrite local and national narratives of power.” In this context, Aboriginal Australians have also responded to the global movement of indigenous peoples worldwide, while reinforcing their own local indigeneity, Aboriginality. In Australia, the word “Aboriginal” was for many years used as a descriptive term for Indigenous Australians. However, “Indigenous” came into prominent use in the 1990s. Furthermore, Mudrooroo has recently introduced the term “Indigeneity” as a more open term to replace the term Aboriginality. He writes: “If you are an Indigenous person, then you have to connect up with other Indigenous people across the world. . . . Indigeneity means you come from a land, and you’ve been here for thousands of years and trace your descent back.” The transition can be understood as an answer at which Indigenous Australians eventually arrived, taking two decades to fully develop the notion of the collective indigeneity in the Fourth World. By utilizing the term “Indigenous,” which is capitalized and used as a proper noun, Indigenous Australians sought self-determination and sovereignty themselves in the network of indigenous peoples, in order to share the struggles and learn from each other’s experiences.

In examining indigenous research issues and calling for the decolonization of research methods, Linda Tuhikai Smith, a Maori academic writing from her own indigenous perspective, suggests the necessity of bringing indigenous concepts to the center of academic research paradigms. Similarly, Chadwick Allen argues that indigenous theory needs to be developed and be utilized to read the Fourth World activist texts rather than elaborating a theory of postcolonialism and multiculturalism. According to Allen, orthodox postcolonial theory focuses on “what it defined as an ambivalence

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inherent in colonial discourses; by revealing or exploiting this ambivalence, so the argument goes, 'natives' or indigenous 'subalterns' have been able to effectively de-center European colonial discourses from their positions of power and authority in India, Africa, and the Caribbean. In this context, orthodox postcolonial theory is not relevant to analyze Maori and American Indian texts which engage with the project to "re-recognize," rather than deconstruct, the authority of particular colonial discourses such as treaties. Maori and American Indian writers appropriate and redeploy the discourse of treaties that enable them to delineate "a clear border between one nation and its treaty partner." As the treaty paradigm requires a level of "essentialism" and it is a crucial narrative tactic of Maori and American Indian writing, Allen criticizes orthodox postcolonial theory, which expels "essentialism," "tribalism," and "nationalism."

Australian Indigenous writers, in the stolen generations narrative, also emphasize a certain level of "essentialism" which is related to Indigenous land and spirituality, and defines Aboriginality. We will explore this point in the later part with case studies, but in general, Indigenous characters who are taken from their families return to their homeland and regain their Aboriginality. In narratives, the land (earth) has a crucial function as it comes to dominate the essence of a person. In *Haunted Earth*, Peter Read, an Australian historian, explores "the spiritual forces that grow from the association between person and place" and argues that the supernatural is a conception of reality in relation to Indigenous spirituality. Concerning the significance of land for Indigenous people, Hobbes Daniyarri, a Mudhura man from Yarralin (Northern Territory) explains: "Everything come up out of the ground—language, people, emu, kangaroo, grass. That's Law." Through his field work in Gurindji country and dialogue with an Aboriginal elder, Minoru Hokari writes:

The earth, or in a sense, 'place' is neither a conceptual nor non-organic space in which every being exists and lives. Instead, place is the origin, cause and reason of every life and its existence. To describe this, Old Jimmy [the Aboriginal elder] often uses the following five different words: Earth, Dreaming, Law, 'Right Way' and History.

According to Hokari, these five different words are interchangeable: "the landscape is not just the product of Dreaming, but is itself Dreaming. In the same way, Dreaming did not just create the Law—Dreaming is the Law. Logically, since Dreaming itself is Law, a place becomes the Law as well." Claiming the essential characteristics of Aboriginality to be in connection with Indigenous land as the Law and Dreaming, it differs from a biological essentialism related to race and blood quantum and is of fundamental importance in being and living as Aboriginal and claiming Indigenous rights. The land is "central to Aboriginal identity and it proves a logos or guide for human interaction and sense of wellness or well-being."

Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the essence of a person based on "the significance of place, of land, of landscape, of other things in the universe" in relation to the indigenous concept of "spirituality" and suggests it defines "the very essence of a people." While she admits that "the belief in an authentic self" that is within humanism has been politicized and idealized by colonized people in becoming strategically effective in their political struggles. Smith argues for the importance of the Indigenous concept of essentialism based on a spiritual relationship to the land and universe that provides a different world view and creates "difference between indigenous peoples and the West."
In order to analyze the construction of indigenous identity in New Zealand and the United States, Allen employs a symbolic and metaphorical concept, the blood/land/memory complex. Expanding the trope "blood memory" of Native American writer N. Scott Momaday, Allen defines the concept as follows:

Land plays both in the specific project of defining indigenous minority personal, familial, and communal identities (blood) and in the larger project of reclaiming and reimagining indigenous minority histories (memory). Like Momaday's trope, the blood/land/memory complex acts of indigenous minority recuperation that attempt to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of indigenous "blood," "land," "memory" and that seek to liberate indigenous minority identities from definitions of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures, including those definitions imposed by well-meaning academics. 

The blood/land/memory complex is a useful construct to examine Aboriginality in Australian Indigenous writings. As discussed earlier, land, as the essence of a person, has a crucial function for Aboriginal people. In Australian Indigenous texts, "land" is always the most important motif, as well as a narrative tactic, for Indigenous writers to assert Aboriginality. For the stolen generations writers, narrating and representing specific Indigenous land is the act of recapturing "blood memory." The following sections consider the way in which Indigenous writers such as Sally Morgan and Alexis Wright redefine and assert an enduring and distinctive Aboriginality beyond a forced authenticity, through employing the blood/land/memory complex as a narrative tactic.

3. Sally Morgan's My Place

Sally Morgan's My Place is a narrative with a complex structure, expanding the frame of Morgan's own autobiography, interweaving the record of her research trip and three oral stories by her family members. Morgan constructs her Aboriginality through both telling her own story and listening to the narratives of her family members. Beyond the family storytelling, a pilgrimage by Sally and her mother, Gladys, plays an important role: the two journey to the birthplace of Sally's grandmother (Gladys' mother), Corunna Downs Station in the Pilbara Region in Western Australia, which is crucial in representing the family's Aboriginality. At the beginning of the tentative search, the lack of sufficient clues makes it difficult for them to discover the Corunna family's past. However, when they meet their extended family, Sally and Gladys can progressively access their family's past. Their relatives warmly welcome them and tell them stories of the past which remain vividly in Indigenous people's "long memory." Jack, an elderly Indigenous man, says:

Ahs, mulbas [the Aboriginal people of the port Hedland] have got long memories. Most around here remember the kids that were taken away.57

His words remind us of the stolen generations children, like Daisy and Gladys, who were forcibly removed from their Indigenous family and placed in missionary schools or white families through the policy of the Australian government. As this assimilation policy resulted in the destruction of traditional Indigenous culture and families, memory is the only way for Indigenous people to claim
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the hidden history of Australia that has been omitted from the official white Australian history, as well as to resist the assimilation policy by preserving the link to their families. The "long memory" of Indigenous people functions as an intermediation between the past, present, and future, and it is a vital force in recovering a missing link with family or community and the past for Indigenous people who belong to the stolen generations. Sally and Gladys gain a sense of place and belonging through the discovery that their family members still exist in the memories of Indigenous people in the Pilbara Region. Their relatives recognize them as their family members, establishing their place by the Indigenous kinship system:

We know who you belong to now. . . . You just tell them your group and who you're related to. You got a right to be here same as the others.94

You my relation! Yes, you've come to the right place. You my people. I am your Nanna's cousin. . . . This is your place, too. Remember that.95

Through this physical pilgrimage to their ancestral land, Sally and Gladys have a spiritual experience. By listening to their stories, Sally and Gladys feel that dead family members, who they have not met before, are real people. During the trip, they meet the dead Aboriginal women of their family including Daisy and Arthur's mother, sister, and Daisy's other daughter:

'Where are the women in my family, are they all right? I wish I'd been able to help.' Suddenly, 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 . . . . And then the tears came. As I cried, a voice gently said, 'Stop worrying, they're with me now'.96

Simultaneously, Gladys sees Sally surrounded by a group of Aboriginal women. While providing relief, this supernatural occurrence engraves the Aboriginal women of their family in their mind. Through this experience, Sally and Gladys begin a retrieval of their Aboriginality. Significantly, their spiritual awakening is depicted in the connection with their physical return to their ancestral land. Morgan represents Aboriginality as an essence of the Indigenous person which is given through the spiritual force that grows from the association between the Indigenous person and a specific landscape. At the end of the trip to their people's place, both Sally and Gladys develop an identity as Indigenous Australians, saying that:

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.97

Through the physical pilgrimage, they obtain a "blood memory" that is shared with Indigenous people in the community. Although Gladys is initially reluctant to talk about her past, her attitude changes after the trip to the Pilbara. As she eventually decides to relate her life story to her daughter, she says:

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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.\(^{49}\)

While admitting that she “wanted to be white” and has had a complex and ambivalent identity, Gladys gains pride as a woman with an Indigenous heritage and feels that she becomes a whole person by acknowledging her Aboriginality at the end of her storytelling.\(^{49}\) Gladys’ Aboriginality is reconstructed as a positive one which she wants her children to inherit and pass on:

I suppose, in hundreds of years’ time, there won’t be any black Aboriginals left. Our colour dies out; as we mix with other races, we’ll lose some of the physical characteristics that distinguish us now. I like to think that, no matter what we become, our spiritual tie with the land and the other unique qualities we possess will somehow weave their way through to future generations of Australians. I mean, this is our land, after all, surely we’ve got something to offer.\(^{50}\)

Of importance here is that Gladys relates Aboriginality to their “spiritual tie with the land.” By returning to her ancestral land and revising her distorted Aboriginality through recounting a traumatic memory, Gladys achieves an essential Aboriginality based on Indigenous spirituality connected with the specific land and landscape, which is unable to be defined by the physical characteristics of Indigenous people, or a biological essentialism. Daisy, who is inspired by the storytelling of other members of her family, also finally admits that it is time to narrate her own past. Beyond her traumatic memories, Daisy recreates her Aboriginality through the process of telling her past. Although she has attempted to repress her Aboriginality for much of her life, Daisy finishes her narrative and expects to die believing that she will go back to her Indigenous homeland. Referring to the mystical and symbolic bird that signals her death. Daisy recounts the “Aboriginal bird” that has called her spirit home “to my own land and my own people.”\(^{50}\) At the end of My Place, Daisy passes away with “an overwhelming sense of calm,” while asserting her renewed Aboriginality that originated in her ancestral land.\(^{49}\)

Morgan’s My Place breaks the forced invisibility and silence of stolen generations and opens a new space of literature of reconciliation within Australian literary culture. However, a number of critics have been cynical about My Place’s success and have challenged the authenticity of Morgan’s Aboriginality. Mudrooroo, in particular, claims that Morgan is not conscious of being a part of the political movement for Indigenous human and land rights, but remains an individual, either searching for her family history or explaining an Aboriginal individual to a pre-dominantly white readership.\(^{50}\) While pointing out that Morgan’s My Place brought a turning point in Indigenous literature and initiated a literature of reconciliation, Mudrooroo says:

By questioning and discussing Aboriginality, there occurs a displacement in that, instead of discussing Aboriginality, we are really discussing what it is to be an Australian. . . . we can see that a literature which was once an ongoing part of the Indigenous struggle for justice and equal rights has shifted its field—from defining and describing an Aboriginality, to seeking to have a voice in the ongoing discourse of what it is to be an Australian.\(^{50}\)

Unlike Indigenous writers who live in an Indigenous community, Morgan, who was ignorant of her
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origin, constructed her Aboriginality through her writing and listening to family storytelling. In spite of lacking knowledge about her background, a previously unknown entity, Morgan successfully asserts an enduring Aboriginality (blood) through the narrative of connection to a specific land (memory) as we have seen in this section. Morgan's personal practice is also the expression of an Aboriginality shared by many Indigenous people who belong to the stolen generations and lost their link with the Indigenous community. The alteration in the direction of Indigenous literature initiated by Morgan's *My Place* enables non-Indigenous Australians, who do not fully know about Indigenous people and who relate only to stories told by former colonists, to awaken their consciousness to Indigenous issues and to reconsider their own past and history. The title *My Place* indicates a specific Indigenous land functioning as both "blood" and "memory" that makes Aboriginality distinct from settler and non-Indigenous identities in order to realize a fruitful reconciliation.

4. Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise*

Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* is a significant text along with Morgan's *My Place*, depicting the lives of Indigenous women who have lost contact with their Indigenous family and society. Unlike Morgan's *My Place* which ends with the catharsis of achieving Aboriginality, in *Plains of Promise*, the women characters' search for their identity is left unresolved. *Plains of Promise* opens with the description of a poinciana tree brought by a missionary that has grown next to the Aboriginal girls' dormitory in St Dominic's Mission. This "thirsty, greedy foreign tree" by which Aboriginal "spiritual ancestors grew more and more disturbed" is a symbol of the colonial history in which Western invaders such as Christian missionaries infringed on the Aboriginal spiritual tie with their land, culture, and tradition. As if uncovering the memory of the poinciana tree on St Dominic's Mission that has witnessed the colonial mission life of Aboriginal girls over several decades, *Plains of Promise* depicts four generations of Indigenous women: Ivy Koopundi Andrews, an inmate of colonial institutions, including a Christian mission and an asylum; her mother, an unnamed woman, who is forcibly removed from her ancestral homeland and sent to St Dominic's Mission; Mary, the daughter of Ivy, who searches for an Aboriginal identity and struggles in the sphere of contemporary Indigenous politics; and Mary's daughter, Jessie, whose future is left open towards unknown possibilities. The first and second sections of the novel are set between the 1950s and 1970s and explore the lives of Ivy and her mother. Shortly after Ivy arrives at St Dominic's Mission with her mother, the young Aboriginal mother burns herself in despair at being moved from her ancestral country into the mission, as well as being torn apart from her daughter. As her mother dies, Ivy, orphaned at seven years old, is regarded as the incarnation of an evil crow and is ill-treated by the other Aboriginal inmates because of her association with her mother, the "bad, crazy Aboriginal woman" from another country. While ostracized in the mission, Ivy obtains the attention of the Reverend Errol Jipp. After several years of molestation at the hands of Errol, Ivy becomes pregnant at fourteen years old and is forced to marry one of the Indigenous men, Elliot. Enduring public humiliation and a difficult marriage with Elliot, Ivy eventually gives birth to Errol Jipp's child, who is taken away from her immediately. Repeating the history of the stolen generation, Ivy's despair plunges her into madness.

Leaving Ivy's life, the last third of *Plains of Promise* takes place in the contemporary world. By depicting the life of Mary, Ivy's stolen daughter, it offers the story of a part-Aboriginal woman who grew up passing as white without knowing her Aboriginality after the period of assimilation and is
reintroduced into the Indigenous community. Following the death of her adoptive parents in a car accident, Mary discovers through their will that her father is unknown and her biological mother is Aboriginal. The question of “who she really is” instigates her search for her origin and leads her to work for an urban Aboriginal organization, the Coalition of Aboriginal Governments. Mary gives up her twelve-year career at a high-tech computer company and devotes herself to the work of the Aboriginal organization in order to “become” an Aboriginal. Even though she has a relationship with one of the Aboriginal leaders of the organization, Buddy Doolan, and gives birth to his child, Mary continually suffers from the fear of her unknown identity rather than easily fitting in to an existing idea of Aboriginality. While Sally Morgan in My Place is helped and guided by members of Indigenous community in order to attain her Aboriginality, the relationship between Mary and other Indigenous people in Plains of Promise is more complex. At Buddy's home in the northern Gulf country, Mary realizes her difference from other Indigenous people in the community and finds herself even feeling superior to “the yokels.” This misplaced identity reveals to us the complexities at the heart of identity formation:

Obviously those people were her relatives in some degree, but she felt a loathing for them. As an Aboriginal person she knew her feeling should be very different, and she thought of Buddy’s total acceptance of his family. She knew about the importance of families and family connections. Yet she felt nothing where these people were concerned. She kept her feeling to herself. There was no one she could trust sufficiently to discuss the problems she was experiencing in identifying with her Aboriginality.

Betraying her initial expectation and excitement in becoming an Aboriginal person, identifying with her Aboriginality is not an easy trajectory for Mary. She cannot establish connections with the Indigenous people in Buddy’s community, finding it difficult to trust them. At the same time, Indigenous people in the community do not accept her: Mary as a sophisticated city woman is just “like a white woman” to them. Wright carefully avoids romanticizing the process of identification and tackles the issue of the stolen generations who suffer from having the traumatic experience of a misplaced identity. Indeed, what Wright is also attempting here is representing the intense difficulty that Indigenous persons may have when faced with a “ready-made” identity to which they feel no natural affiliation and to which they do not feel able to contribute.

As mentioned earlier, Plains of Promise thus presents different kinds of family experiences of Indigenous women, challenging Anne Brewster's theoretical premise of the family as a site of resistance and showing this site to be equally fraught with insecurities and challenges. Wright refuses to depict the intimate mother-daughter relationship which has characterized Indigenous women's writings such as Morgan's My Place. Rather, she presents the mother-daughter relationship which simply was absent. When Mary finally meets her mother, there is no warm exchange of affection; she is terrified by the figure of her mother:

The old woman [Ivy] growled like a wild animal. Mary had never heard anything like it. She felt cold shivers running through her body. Jessie [the granddaughter] started screaming again. Mary tried to calm Jessie, but her shivers grew wilder and she began to tremble all over. Then Jessie started trembling too, choking on her uncontrollable screams. It occurred to Mary that
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both Jessie and the old woman were about to explode from their violent convulsions.\(^{55}\)

Here Ivy is depicted as a "wild animal" who has lost any sense of connection to others and who cannot activate any maternal instincts that may be expected of her. Here, we see none of the ties between mother and daughter or grandmother and granddaughter that are emphasized in *My Place*; instead, Ivy, Mary, and Jessie are left in "violent convulsions." After the brief encounter with her own mother, and before she has any opportunity to inquire into her mother's past, Mary is forced to leave the community immediately by the demand of the elders who are afraid of where this inter-generational reunion may lead. By avoiding the idealization of both Aboriginality and Indigenous women's family experience, Wright explores the alienation, placelessness, and the cultural rootlessness of the stolen generations.

While challenging the romanticized idea of Indigenous community and uncovering the intricate circumstances of the stolen generations, Wright celebrates the "essence of the land" for an Indigenous person and asserts Aboriginality in *Plains of Promise*. Through Elliot, the Indigenous main character, Wright reflects on the colonial history of the Aboriginal people and land:

The white people wanted everyone to become white, to think white. Skin and all . . . Yet no one could change the law—so Elliot muttered to himself as he crossed the whiteman's roads or stepped across tyre marks made by vehicles that had been bogged at river crossings. In spite of the foreign burrs and stinging nettles along the river banks—nothing foreign could change the essence of the land. No white man had that power.\(^{66}\)

At the end of *Plains of Promise*, Mary, who is not integrated into the Indigenous community, awakens to her Aboriginality through the "essence of the land." The story ends with hope being represented through the powerful landscape and the magical moment in which water raises to the surface of the "Disappearing Lake" which has been dry for at least thirty years.\(^{57}\) Flying over the land of the Gulf Country—Ivy and Mary's Dreaming country—Mary and Jessie watch "the brown and blue-streaked shimmering water of a large lake in the midst of flat plains and foothills" and "thousands of waterbirds returning to the lake."\(^{58}\) As she promises Jessie that she will take her there someday, the scene reminds Mary of Elliot's storytelling:

Then the young waterbird had a child. So that the disappearing lake could be made to reveal its waters each year when the birds returned. The secret was passed on to the child. This meant that they should always live near the lake.

But the crows, greedy and evil, needed to live in new places. Their magic was so strong that they could take on whatever form they wished, and they made the little waterbird and its child, and the child's child and so forth go with them; to do as the evil ones pleased. And the secret of the lake went away with them. But the waterbird's children sent the secret back to the lake each year by unsuspecting carriers.

Over time, however, the waterbird's children's children's child went mad, because she lost her daughter in a terrible place. And the secret of the lake was lost because the crows were too interested in evil things and could not control the waterbird's madness.

So the great lake dried up and is no more.\(^{59}\)
This storytelling related by Elliot for Mary has a significant meaning in the novel. It is the Dreaming story of Ivy, Mary, and Jessie as their “blood memory” and secretly conveys their Aboriginality and their traditional roles, rights, and responsibilities as Aboriginal women. The mad “waterbird” that lost her daughter can be interpreted as Ivy or Ivy’s mother and the “terrible place” as St Dominic’s Mission. In this context, Mary and Jessie are “unsuspecting carriers” who make the water return to the “Disappearing Lake.” In this reading, therefore, the “greedy” and “evil” crows could be understood as white people or any oppressor. Interestingly, a change in the signification of the crows occurs here. In the first section of Plains of Promise, Ivy was seen as a crow incarnate by inmates in St Dominic’s Mission. As Wright describes this through Mary’s thoughts, images of crows tend to be related to “black” people because of their color and abhorred lives:

The parallels of discrimination. Same as Murries [Queensland Indigenous people]. No Land Rights. No Crow Rights. Stereotypes the same. Black is negative. Stands for no. Crows are negative. Even if they have a family life. Similar to an Aboriginal community, tribe, kin-group.\(^{63}\)

In the end of the story, however, the signification of the crows changes from a metaphor for Aboriginal people to one for white people. In her essay, “Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation,” Maria Tymoczko suggests that the task of postcolonial writers is in “transposing a culture, a social system and legal framework, a history.”\(^{63}\) By drawing on this remark, we can understand the transition of the signification of the crows in Eliot’s storytelling as post-colonial translation. Wright deliberately refuses to repeat conventional representations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and thereby challenges linear flows and power hierarchies. Her attempt can be underpinned through Homi Bhabha’s concept of “cultural translation.” Bhabha defines cultural translation as an “insurgent act”:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with “newness” that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The “past-present” becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.\(^{63}\)

By the “cultural translation” of displacing the signification of the crows, Plains of Promise creates a “newness” in the Australian literary landscape. For Mary and Jessie, this storytelling as an “in-between” space of the past-present is not a legend or myth about the past, but a “necessity” for asserting their Aboriginality. While focusing on the disrupted identity of Indigenous women belonging to the stolen generations, Wright carefully deploys “blood memory” utilizing storytelling based on a specific land, or “plains of promise,” and retrieves a viable Aboriginality distinct from non-Indigenous identity.

5. Aboriginality and Reconciliation

In these two stolen generations narratives, we explored the significance of place, land, and landscape that define the very essence of Indigenous people. Although My Place and Plains of Promise depict
different experiences of Indigenous women, they similarly represent their specific land or landscape which is more than a physical place for them: it is law, the seat of life and emotion, and the center of Indigenous existence. These stolen generations narratives could be interpreted as a narrative representing the spiritual journey for Indigenous people who were taken from their land and culture and now have the opportunity to reconcile themselves with their ancestral land. Thus, Indigenous people are able to retrieve a connection with their land and reconstruct Aboriginality. By connecting global indigenous epistemology in Fourth World literature, Australian Indigenous writers such as Morgan and Wright develop a range of narrative tactics that enable them to explicitly assert their Aboriginality through a relation to a specific Indigenous land and “truth” that form an integral part of a proud emergent identity.

How, then, might this range of narrative tactics inform the movement for reconciliation? The definition of Aboriginality and the interpretation and representation of the spiritual relationship with the land are crucial concepts in the future of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Recently, non-Indigenous Australians have begun to explore their sense of belonging and national identity in relation to a more Indigenous understanding of land. For instance, in his three books, Returning to Nothing, Belonging, and Haunted Earth, Peter Read examines how the meaning of places is important for contemporary non-Indigenous people and how they face up to the problem of knowing the colonial history of Australia and understanding the consequences of the dispossession of Indigenous land. Read focuses on the spiritual forces that emerge from the associative relation between places and people, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Moreover, he suggests that this spiritual relationship between people and places provides “alternatives to the polarities of encroaching global uniformity and the eroding sovereign national state.”

The Australian feminist, Germaine Greer, also highlights the concepts of Aboriginality and land, regarding them as clues to the reconciliation process. Referring to the colonial history of Australia, she writes that “we hate this country because we cannot allow ourselves to love it. We know in our heart’s core that it is not ours.” While emphasizing that non-Indigenous Australians should acknowledge that Australia is “an Aboriginal country,” she suggests that the only way to escape from this impasse and to move towards a reconciliation with Indigenous culture is to be found in the adoption of Aboriginality by all Australians. According to her, “Aboriginality is not a matter of blood or genes. Aborigines themselves have to learn Aboriginality. They have to master knowledge of their own country, and of their relationships with neighboring peoples, and the languages appropriate to trade, negotiation and celebration.” Greer argues that Aboriginality should be considered not as “racial” or “genetic” but as a “nationality.”

Although her utopian idea has been criticized, Greer’s suggestion reveals the extent to which Aboriginality and its essential concept of spirituality in relation to land have become a vital notion in the search for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Greer remarks: “Aboriginality is not simply a cluster of behaviours and characteristics that individuals could claim for themselves and recognize in themselves; it is more importantly a characteristic of the continent itself.” While admitting that “the land is the source of everything,” she argues that reconciliation is not enough and an “Australian Aboriginal Republic” has to be imagined. According to her, “Australia will be truly self governing and independent only when it has recognised its inherent and ineradicable Aboriginality.”

In the views of Read and Greer, we can see different stances on the question of reconciliation.
Whereas Read points to Indigenous spirituality in relation to land as a type of post-nationalism, a refuge to "encroaching global uniformity" and the implied loss of one's locality, Greer's utopian idea—the creation of a nation-state—is an overtly political use of the notion of Aboriginality. Read suggests no political aspirations for Aboriginality. Greer, however, openly advocates creating a political entity, a move that could exploit and marginalize Indigenous culture and spirituality if it were to be embraced too soon. In this context, it is useful to refer to Ghassan Hage's *White Nation* in which he clearly points out white agency and its supremacy in Australian multiculturalism.\(^{(11)}\) Through his examination of the Australian children's book *The Stew that Grew*, Hage reveals the "White nation fantasy" in the process of making the "stew" (multicultural society).\(^{(75)}\) At first glance, *The Stew that Grew* seems to celebrate cultural diversity and to create a fair multicultural society in Australia, depicting the process of how people from different ethnic backgrounds combine the various ethnic ingredients together to make a stew. When an Indigenous character, Johnny Barcoo, also joins with his Yam and Kangaroo tail, a "fair dinkum stew" with the "taste of Australia" is completed\(^{(76)}\). Even though everyone contributes their ingredients, only one person, the white Australian named Blue, is allowed to cook the stew from the beginning to the end. Hage writes:

To have a multicultural society you need many cultures. Left to themselves, however, these cultures are bound not to mix or at least not to mix properly without leading to ethnic tensions and wars. For the mix to work, it has to be guided by a White essence, that most valuable of all ingredients: the democratic-tolerance-freedom-of-speech ingredient that only the White aristocracy really knows how to throw into the Australian stew.\(^{(75)}\)

The notion of Aboriginality, which conveys the spiritual forces of land and embodies a characteristic of the Australian continent, could produce a constructive dialogue about national identity and a new understanding of the Australian colonial history. only if the "White nation fantasy" is examined through critical eyes. In this context, articulating Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies is significant in order to dismantle and decolonize white supremacy. Alexis Wright writes:

I have to remember the power of words. Our words are weapons, too. Our books are time bombs and already are breaking down many barriers on their way across the world. . . . All we have to do is wait for a delayed reaction. We only have to wait and one day we will see change. This is the hope of writing. Believing the unbelievable.\(^{(76)}\)

The publication and acceptance of *My Place* and *Plains of Promise* have had a pronounced impact on Australian society by tackling the issue of the stolen generations. "Time bombs" require time to have any effect and stolen generations narratives such as *My Place* and *Plains of Promise* will play a significant role over time, not only by evoking non-Indigenous people's consciousness towards the colonial past, but also by providing an alternative way of viewing and being in the world and subsequently reforming non-Indigenous way of understanding Aboriginality.

Notes

(1) The term "Indigenous Australian" means both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cultural groups who embrace many different communities with different languages and various cultural beliefs, practices and
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traditions. However, a shared collective identity as Indigenous Australians has developed since the 1960s. Generally speaking, Indigenous people who inhabit the whole of Australia are called Aboriginal and ones who live on the islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea are called Torres Strait Islanders. In this paper, the term “Indigenous” is used generally to refer to Aboriginal people, who are the primary group on which this study centers. The term refers to those of Aboriginal descent who are recognized as such by the community in which they live, and who identify themselves as Aboriginal. Indigenous people often capitalize the first letter of “indigenous” as a political statement of self-definition and importance. In this paper, I shall use the capitalized version. While I also address indigenous people in the context of a global movement, I will refrain from capitalizing the term of “indigenous” in this case.


(4) ibid. p.71.

(5) ibid. p.71.


(11) The experiences of Indigenous women were enormously traumatic; they were sexually exploited by white men and their part-Aboriginal children were forcibly removed. Moreover, the removal of girls was more extensive than the removal of boys, because of the question of sex and reproduction.


(21) Mudrooroo is a crucial character to explore the issue of Aboriginality. While he has been a leading figure in Indigenous writing since the 1960s, the fact that his own heritage was not Aboriginal was discovered in 1996. His status as the major Indigenous writer and critic has not changed. Mudrooroo’s mistaken Aboriginality remains a controversial issue. According to Mudrooroo, “Aboriginality” is inherently problematic because this term and concept were created by white Australians. Instead of this term, he recently introduced the term
“Indigenality.” In an interview, Mudrooroo stated, “I think there is a real problem involved with the term Aboriginality” (p.207) and replaced it with the more open term “Indigenality.” This places Aboriginal identity in a more global context. While I think this concept of Indigenality is significant, I will maintain the use of the term “Aboriginality” in this paper as this term has not circulated and considered enough in the sphere of Aboriginal studies. For the interview with Mudrooroo, see The Indigenous Literature of Australia, pp.199-219.

25 ibid. p.18.
26 ibid. p.220. For example, in the United States the federal government’s representatives negotiated nearly four hundred different treaties with indigenous nations between 1788 and 1868. In New Zealand the British Crown’s representative negotiated a single written agreement, the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by more than five hundred Maori chiefs.
27 As an example, Allen takes a line from the anthology, The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: “indigenous groups have so often fallen into the political trap of essentialism set for them by imperial discourse.” See Bill Ashcroft et al., The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (London: Routledge,1996), p.214.
30 The term “Dreaming” refers to a complex set of aspects of traditional Indigenous belief, including mythology, law, and history. It is suggested that the concept of the Dreaming is untranslatable and incomprehensible in other cultural contexts. For example, Mussolini Harvey, a Yanyuwa man from the Gulf of Carpentaria says, “White people ask us all the time, what is Dreaming? This is a hard question because Dreaming is a really big thing for Aboriginal people. In our language, Yanyuwa, we call the Dreaming Yijan. The Dreaming made our Law or narun-Yuwa. This Law is the way we live, our rules. This Law is our ceremonies, our songs, our stories: all of these things came from the Dreaming. One thing that I can tell you though is that our Law is not like European Law which is always changing—new government, new law; but our Law cannot change, we did not make it. The Law made by the Dreamings many, many years ago and given to our ancestors and they gave it to us.” See Rose, Nourishing Terrains, p.27.
32 ibid.
33 Atkinson, Trauma Trails, p.30.
34 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, p.74.
35 ibid. p.74.
36 Allen, Blood Narrative, p.16.
37 Morgan, My Place, p.220.
38 ibid. p.232.
40 ibid. p.227.
41 ibid. p.233.
42 ibid. p.233.
43 ibid. p.306.
44 ibid. p.306.
45 ibid. p.357.
46 ibid. p.357.
47 Mudrooroo, Writing from the Fringe. Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990, p.14. At one point, he was critical toward Morgan’s Aboriginality, however, his attitude has gradually changed. In his 1997 publication,
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*The Indigenous Literature of Australia.* Mudrooroo acknowledges shifts of any essential subjectivity, or Aboriginality, referring to Marcia Langton's argument: "Aboriginality is a field of intersubjectivity that is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation." Concerning the further discussion of Morgan's *My Place* and Mudrooroo's change of his view on Aboriginality, see Tomoko Ichitani, "Storytelling and Reconstruction of Aboriginality in Sally Morgan's *My Place.*," *Tsukuba Review of English Language Teaching*, 25, 2004, pp.49-69.


Wright, *Plains of Promise*, p.4.

ibid. p.15.

ibid. p.299.

ibid. p.249.

ibid. p.249.

ibid. p.282.

ibid. p.294.

ibid. pp.74-75.

ibid. p.302.

ibid. p.302.

ibid. pp.303-304.

ibid. pp.257-258.


Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994, p.7


ibid. p.22.


ibid. p.25.


ibid. p.119.

ibid. p.119-121.

ibid. p.119.


ibid. p.118-123.

ibid. p.121.

ibid. p.122-123.


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SUMMARY
The Stolen Generations Narrative and Aboriginality: Sally Morgan’s My Place and Alexis Wright’s Plains of Promise

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This paper focuses on two Australian Indigenous writings, Sally Morgan’s My Place and Alexis Wright’s Plains of Promise. These narratives can be read as examples of the “stolen generations narrative” that explores the systematic removal of Indigenous children from their Indigenous communities under Australian government policy carried out from the 19th century to the late 1960s. The stolen generations narrative plays a significant role in Indigenous Australians’ search for and recapture of their Indigenous identity (Aboriginality) and also in making non-Indigenous Australians aware of the issue of separation in order to reconsider the nation’s past and the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In this paper, I investigate how Australian Indigenous writers reconstruct their subjectivity and claim the sovereignty of Indigenous people and how the stolen generations narrative can contribute to Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation.

The first section introduces the stolen generations narrative while the second section examines the issues surrounding discussions on Aboriginality in relation to Indigenous literature. Placing Indigenous writing in the context of Fourth world activist texts, I explore the Indigenous epistemology employed by Indigenous writers and demonstrate that the symbolic and metaphorical concept of the blood/land/memory complex functions as a narrative tactic for them to define an enduring Aboriginality.

The third and fourth sections are individual case studies of the stolen generations narrative, dealing with Sally Morgan’s My Place and Alexis Wright’s Plains of Promise. While My Place and Plains of Promise offer a remarkable contrast by depicting different experiences of Indigenous women, Morgan and Wright develop a similar narrative tactic to define an enduring Aboriginality through utilizing the blood/land/memory complex. In each section, I examine the way in which they represent a spiritual relationship to their specific land or landscape as the essence of Indigenous existence.

By way of a conclusion, I argue that the stolen generations narrative is a spiritual journey for Indigenous people who, after being taken from their land and culture, reconcile themselves with their ancestral land and construct their Aboriginality. The definition of Aboriginality and the interpretation and representation of the spiritual relationship with the land are crucial concepts in a future reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In this context, the stolen generations narrative plays a significant role, not only because it evokes the consciousness of non-Indigenous people towards the colonial past, but also because it provides Indigenous perspectives that do not prioritize Western systems of knowledge.