

Colouring the Black and White Australian Past in Sally Morgan's *My Place*

Elena Oliete Aldea

Universidad de Zaragoza

coliete@unizar.es

Since its publication in 1987, the impact of Sally Morgan's *My Place* has been undeniable. It has been read by a wide audience in Australia and other countries in the world and it has been the source of literary criticism and controversy. It is presented as an autobiographical novel which focuses on the narrator's quest for her Aboriginal roots in the dominant white patriarchal Australian society. In this paper I intend to demonstrate how Sally Morgan's *My Place* becomes a crucial "counter-memory" of the Australian past which recovers those long silenced non-white voices, while denouncing the injustices and cruelty inflicted upon Aborigines. In so doing, Morgan not only attempts to bring to the fore that repressed past but also to create of a new space of reconciliation in hybridity.

La autobiografía de Sally Morgan *My Place* ha tenido, desde que se publicara en 1987, un gran impacto, no sólo en la sociedad australiana sino también en fuera de sus fronteras, siendo también objeto de controversia y crítica literaria. *My Place* se presenta como una novela autobiográfica que se centra en la búsqueda por parte de la autora de sus raíces aborígenes en una sociedad australiana de origen patriarcal y anglo-sajón. En este ensayo intentaré demostrar cómo este texto representa un recuento "no oficial" de la historia australiana que recobra las hasta entonces silenciadas voces marginales de la población no-blanca de ese país, mientras denuncia las injusticias infligidas a los aborígenes. Al hacerlo, Morgan no sólo recobra ese pasado reprimido sino que intenta recrear un nuevo espacio de reconciliación en el mestizaje.

Key Words: *autobiography, identity, history and memory, race and gender relations.*

Palabras clave: *autobiografía, identidad, historia y recuerdo, relaciones de raza y de género.*

“There’s been nothing written about people like us, all the history’s about the white man. There’s nothing about Aboriginal people and what they’ve been through” (2000:161). These words, uttered by one character in Sally Morgan’s 1987 autobiography *My Place* summarise the author’s main criticism of Australian society. Being one-eighth black, Sally Morgan tries to write herself into history in order to fill the gap that mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australia created and enforced for so many years. The narrator combines her account of the past with the biographies of other relatives such as her mother’s, her grandmother’s and her great uncle’s, in order to “colour” the until then “pure” white Australian history.¹

In this paper I intend to demonstrate how Sally Morgan’s *My Place* becomes a crucial “counter-memory” of the Australian past which recovers those for so-long silenced non-white voices. In so doing, Morgan not only attempts to account for those forgotten memories but also to recycle them, that is, to bring to the fore that repressed past — however painful it might be— and re-use it in the present.

Giving voice to those silenced by force and relegated to the margins involves a harsh criticism of the post-contact period in so far as it contributes to denouncing the injustices and cruelty of colonialism in Australia against Aborigines. Thus, the aim of this recycling process would be the suppression of boundaries and divisions and the creation of a new space of reconciliation in which new hybrid cultures are able to emerge.²

As is well known, Australia was a settler colony where the relationships between the white settlers and the indigenous population were anything but easy. One of the first aims of these white settlers, having as they had Anglo-Celtic origins, was to build up their own notion of *Australianness* as closely related to, but also clearly differentiated from, that of *Britishness*. Therefore, the dominant group—white and

male—constructed a national history, literature and ideological myths which relegated to the margins—and almost annihilated—the previous inhabitants of the land.³ Aborigines were considered to be sub-human.⁴ Therefore, they became completely invisible in the construction of Australian history and identity.

Contemporary Australian society has become multicultural due to the different waves of immigration that have affected the continent especially after the Second World War. It now appears to be a more pluralist and tolerant nation. However, the dominant Anglo-Celtic group still exerts its power and influence over all the rest. Besides, the attempts to rescue Aboriginal culture from its marginal position and incorporate it in central Australian culture have often led to opportunistic appropriation and misrepresentation, as the cases of Marlo Morgan's New Age fable *Mutant Message Down Under* (1993) and Wanda Koolmatric's "autobiography" *My Own Sweet Time* (1994) clearly show.⁵

Trees argues that Australian history has been written through official 'white' discourses that marginalise 'Aboriginal' culture in a Foucaultian relation power-knowledge (1991:67), that is, the ones in power freely manipulate and select the pieces of information of history in order to ensure their privileged position in society. Connected to the idea of marginalization is the notion of identity, which plays a very relevant role in these texts because both writers try to come to terms with their non-white and female side in a society in which these terms are marked as negative. According to Stuart Hall, "identity" is very important in social and cultural aspects because it constructs boundaries of inclusion and exclusion which have important consequences in the establishment of power and controlling policies. Hall states that "identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to render 'outside', abjected" (1997: 5, italics in original).

White patriarchal discourses, then, need to deny those which do not belong in their group, and therefore mark them negatively in order to assert their inferior status. As regards the racial question, the identification of a subject as black or white has further implications. Taking into account the fact that blackness is the excluded marked term of the identification process, whiteness, then, erects itself as no particu-

lar quality or colour, but as the invisible norm. According to Richard Dyer, “white is no colour because it is all colours”. Consequently, “white domination is reproduced by the way that white people ‘colonise the definition of normal’” (1993: 142).

It seems that racism first emerged as a product of mainly economic self-interest: “No one bothered too much about the differences between races until it was to the West’s economic advantage to profit from slavery or to defend it against the Abolitionists” (Young, 1996: 92). If dark races were considered to be sub-human, therefore slavery, that is, free labour force, was perfectly licit, and so was the occupation of the land and its usurpation from the natives, as was the case of the Australian Aborigines.

It was precisely during the 18th and 19th centuries that the scientific theories on racial difference and hybridity proliferated. Darwin’s conception of evolution helped to establish a hierarchy between the superior, developed and civilised white race and the inferior dark ones. Besides, the notion of “culture” became intrinsically related to that of “race”, which explains why the imperialistic project was seen as an economic enterprise, but also as a civilizing mission. As early as the 19th century, Pritchard’s theory of racial difference mentioned the close relationship between race and culture: “The first people had been black and identified the cause of subsequent whiteness as civilization itself. White skin therefore became both a marker of civilization and a product of it” (in Young, 1996: 35).

Economic, scientific and cultural notions became essential in the elaboration of racist discourses during the colonial period. If racial differences were widely discussed during that time, hybridity also became a polemical issue. A great number of theories on miscegenation therefore emerged.⁶ Hybridity was mainly seen as evidence of degeneration from “pure” races and, as was explained before, as the cause of racial chaos, resulting from the elimination of any racial hierarchy and the privileged position of the white Western man in the colonial world.

Paradoxically, those white males who strove to preserve their privileged status through the maintenance of racial purity, were the

main agents in the production of mixed-breed offspring due to the sexual abuses they inflicted on the native women. According to Bhabha, the subject in power experiences an ambivalent feeling of both attraction and repulsion towards the objectified Other (in Young, 1996: 161), which explains the contradictory attitudes of the white man towards the black woman. According to Lola Young, in the construction of an identity, the Other is filled with the elements that the individual or his/her culture want to repress. Therefore, Blacks become associated with the "intolerable passions and inclinations" that the whites try to repress (1990: 193). It is not surprising, then, that "the black woman became a symbol of regressive sexuality and sexual promiscuity in the nineteenth century" (Low, 1996: 23).

Taking all these facts into account, it is not difficult to understand the attraction that white male colonisers felt towards black women. Moreover, rape and sexual abuse also contributed to the assertion of white male power and domination over the colonized land and its people. As bell hooks explains:

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of the individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices, affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other [...]. [In inter-racial relationships] the direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter. "Naturally", the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, was seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires (hooks, 1992: 23-4).

These sexual encounters between white males and black females were somehow justified by the "natural" attraction that white men felt to "ameliorate" the dark races (Young, 1996: 107). However, as is illustrated in Morgan's account of her grandmother's story, these relationships were never acknowledged and the resulting offspring were always categorized as black. Even in contemporary post-colonial societies the situation still happens to be so. As Robert Young states:

The repressive legacy of the desiring machine of colonial history is marked in the aftermath of today's racial categories that speak of hybrid peoples [...]. The names of these diasporic doubles bear witness to disavowal any crossing between white and black. In today's political terms, any product of white and black must always be classified as black (1996:174).

Elaine Pinderhughes follows the same argument and explains that the fact of categorizing a person with white and non-white lineage within the non-white group is a mechanism used to maintain identity boundaries and the hierarchical scheme, and thus control the threat that miscegenation poses to the dominant structures of society: "As a result of this categorization, there exist within non-White groups all levels of racial mixture, whereas the White and dominant group remains 'pure'" (1995: 76).

The ever-present racism of colonial times, based on the belief on racial superiority, has mostly disappeared in contemporary societies. However, a new kind of racism has emerged in contemporary multicultural post-colonial societies, which aims at the exclusion of the Other in terms of the incompatibility of cultures (Fredrickson, 2002: 141). In a multicultural society, aversive racism becomes more prominent when the "pure" identity feels threatened by the confrontation with the Other. That is why hybridity is so much feared: it not only puts to the test the cultural construction of domination, but also threatens to destabilise that hierarchy. As Robert Young states: "Fear of miscegenation can be related to the notion that without such hierarchy, civilization would, in a literal as well as technical sense, collapse" (1996: 95).

My Place strives to recover the past so that the present can be transformed and the future may allow for the construction of a society in which hybridity can finally find its place. The text also links the female experience with that of the post-colonial subject. Feminist and post-colonial discourses have similarly been relegated to the position of the Other, and both must articulate their experiences in the language of the oppressor in order to be heard and subvert the established order (Ashcroft, 1989:175). In the case of the black female experience, gender issues are inevitably intersected with those of race and class

to bring to the fore the multi-layered oppression that these women have undergone.

The black female experiences depicted in this autobiography have, on the one hand, quite universal appealing, because they show many points in common with the experiences undergone by different post-colonial subjects all over the world (the book became a best-seller and has reached an international readership). On the other hand, the text portrays specific events that basically illustrate the situation in the particular Australian context.

In *My Place* the harsh living conditions of the Aborigines are portrayed and denounced, both in the past and in the present, with special mention to the even harsher situation of Aboriginal women, who have constantly been sexually abused or, if married to white men, have constantly lived with the fear that their own children should be removed from their care.

The main characters in *My Place* are neither entirely white, nor black. Thus, hybridity becomes an outstanding issue in the autobiography. At first, this is the cause of problems and traumas, however, once accepted, it becomes a source of assertion and celebration in their contemporary post-colonial and, in this case, Australian society. Both blackness and hybridity are associated with positive images and, however painful the past may have been, it is recovered in order to deconstruct the imposed cultural constructions which helped to enforce those oppressive dominant discourses. The text accounts for racist episodes which occur both in the present and in the past so that the reader can become aware of the evolution from dominative to aversive racism. Moreover, present racist events are triggered off by past cultural beliefs that are still alive.

All along Morgan's novel, the reader realises how the characters' double perspective, resulting from their mix-breed condition, undermines the dominant discourses of power. For example, in their mixture of the Dreaming with Christianity, the half-casts seem to behave more accordingly to the Christian ideals than the whites, whose actions hypocritically differ from their beliefs. As Arthur, the narrator's great-uncle explains in the account of his story:

God is the only friend we got. God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit [...]. Take the white people in Australia, they brought the religion here with them and the Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Steal, and yet they stole this country. They took it from the innocent. You see, they twisted the religion (Morgan, 2000: 213).

While a child living without her mother, Gladys, Sally's mother feels comforted many times thinking that Jesus protects her, and she even has "apparitions" of Him as a girl and as an adult (2000: 244-301). Significantly enough, Rhonda Ozturk explains:

Gladys's psychic experiences were often a curious mixture of the Aboriginal Dreamtime and Christianity [...]. Morgan believes that the relationship between spirituality of her Aboriginal heritage and her Christian beliefs enhance each other (1995:73).

Gladys behaves as a "good Christian" praying and helping the others, she even sympathises with Jesus Christ's suffering: "I considered Good Friday the saddest day of the year. I couldn't understand how anyone could do such a horrible thing as to kill Jesus" (2000: 261). In contrast, the white behave hypocritically in their treatment of the Aborigines they try to educate in the Christian faith. One of the examples comes from Nan's experience at one of the Church meetings:

One time, he [the minister at Christ Church] went on and on, tellin' us how we must save ourselves for marriage. It was very embarrassing, we couldn't look at him. Most of us had already been taken by white men. We felt really 'shamed. One day we were sittin' in the garden sewing when the boys from Christ Church Grammar School came past. They laughed at us and called us awful names. Then, they threw pebbles at us. I never went back there, I was too ashamed to say why (2000: 337).

Nan also expresses a truth in Christian religion that whites ignored when Aborigines were concerned: "I even heard some people say we not the same as whites. That's not true, we all God's children" (2000: 336). Therefore it seems that these half-castes fulfil Christian

ideals precisely because they mix them with their previous Aboriginal spirituality, which proves the power of hybridity as a weapon to open up people's minds to new experiences. It is not by chance that Sally visits different churches instead of being just attached to one in a narrow-minded way: "She [Mum] wasn't biased when it came to religion. We attended the Roman Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, Church of Christ and Seven Day Adventist Churches" (2000: 62).

In the book, there are other ironic references to the inconsistencies of the white discourse regarding the stereotypes traditionally attributed to black people. For instance, there are several anecdotes concerning the whites' ability to lie, a behaviour which is normally attributed to dark races. Consequently, the Aboriginal characters in the book conclude that whites cannot be trusted.

This is what Nan says when she tells the story of her separation from her mother: "They [whites] told my mother [Nan's] I was goin' to get educated [...]. Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin' out of their promises" (Morgan, 2000: 332). She experiences the same unfulfilled promise when her master, Alice Drake-Brockman refuses to accept Gladys at her house: "Aah, you see, promises, promises. The promises of a wealthy family are worth nothin'" (2000: 343). Arthur also complains many times that whites are unreliable because they do not pay him what they promised when he was working for them (2000: 196). Yet Gladys's experience is the most ironic one. While her white educators try to teach her to tell the truth, she realises that she has to lie in order to survive in a white world:

I think one of the reasons I survived was because I learnt to lie so well. You see, if there was an argument or if something had been damaged and it was your word against a white kid, you were never believed. They expected us black kids to be in the wrong. We learnt it was better not to tell the truth, it only led to more trouble (2000: 264).

Another shocking passage is that of Sally's "discovery" of her Grandmother's blackness. Skin colour has been invisible to her until she realises the political connotations of this fact:

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 were we. What did that make us, what did that make me? I had never thought of myself as being black before (2000: 98).

Her sister, in contrast, is aware of the "social stigma attached to being Aboriginal": "You can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal!" (2000:98). In the following chapters, there are significant anecdotes about being rejected because of her Aboriginality. For example, when one of the deacons of the church tells her to put an end to her friendship with his daughter: "You're a bad influence", he argues, "It'd be better if you broke off your friendship entirely. You do understand, don't you" [...]. "I [Sally] was amazed that he could have such a charming manner and yet be such a dag" (2000: 103). Another similar passage that manifests the prejudices against Aborigines is that in which Sally is about to meet a girl and infers that there is something wrong with her according to most white people's standards: "When we finally met, I understood. [...] She was a very dark Aboriginal girl" (2000: 111).

These examples of racial prejudice foreground the cultural construction of racist discourses to perpetuate white dominant power. As early as the fifth chapter of the novel, Morgan brings to the fore the problematic assimilation of black people into the official notion of Australian identity. She tells her mother that the children at school cannot believe she is from Australia—because her physical aspect does not entirely correspond itself to that of an Anglo-Celtic. Her mother lies to her when she says that they are Indians and, for a while, Sally becomes satisfied with that answer: "It was good to finally have an answer and it satisfied our playmates. They could quite believe we were Indian, they just didn't want us pretending we were Aussies when we weren't" (Morgan, 2000: 39). Notice the irony of the situation: the Aborigines were in fact the original inhabitants/owners of "Australia".

Even though this revision of the past is made to criticise and painfully accept those unchangeable events, there is no anger and resentment in its exposition. As Rhonda Ozturk explains:

My Place examines from the perspective of her specific quest a multitude of issues and injustices to which the Aboriginal people have been subjected during the last two hundred years. What is exceptional about *My Place* is the fact that it is told almost without bitterness or reproach. The result of this tone is a text which acts as a far more effective weapon than those of Aboriginal authors who acrimoniously demand justice or advise anarchy (1995:61).

On the one hand, *My Place* has been criticised as a “too politically correct” book which is very respectful with those whites who caused so much suffering to the author’s family⁷. On the other hand, it can be said that Morgan portrays this situation in a mature way that allows her to confront the past. In this way, Sally Morgan is even able to welcome the consequences of that “contact” between two cultures and celebrate that undeniable miscegenation. And it is precisely her hybrid condition that provides her with a wider perspective, capable of embracing the different cultures that compound Australian society.

White Europeans colonized a land inhabited by Aboriginals, and not only usurped their territory, but also exploited them with violence and killing. There was also “sexual contact” that produced half-breed children who were eventually marginalised, de-culturized (Donaldson, 1991:341) or, as Trees states, “ab/originated”:

In *My Place*, political, legal and economic control is exercised by white people [...]: the sexual use and abuse of their [Aborigines’] bodies; the enforced denial of family rights, restricted use of their language to English and restricted communication to family members (1991:71).

Sally Morgan’s grandmother, Daisy, and great-uncle, Arthur, are examples of this de-rooting process in the post-contact period:

Arthur, through his removal from the station, was denied initiation rites by his elders. At the same time, he was denied access to *white* society in terms of acceptance,

education, and rights of inheritance. His removal to the Swam Native and Half-Caste Mission forced Arthur into 'no-man's land'. He was *ab/originated*. (Trees, 1991: 72).

All the characters telling their own stories are neither full-blooded white nor Aboriginal but half-breed: Sally, her great-uncle Arthur Corunna, her mother Gladys or Daisy, her grandmother. There is no reference in the book to Aboriginal life and traditions out of the white world. There is no mention, for example, to Nan's experiences in her early childhood with her Aboriginal family.

There are however, constant references to the spirit of Aboriginality that haunts the character's experiences along their lives. This spirit has much to do with the *Dreaming*, that is, the Aboriginal communion with the land and nature. Much emphasis is made all along the novel on these characters' love for nature and also on their visions and supernatural experiences such as that of the "bird call", which much differs from Western patriarchal rationality and exploitation of the earth's goods. As Zonana explains:

The "unique qualities" of Aboriginality limned in *My Place* include [...] an intense commitment to family and community, a deep involvement with animals and plants, and, perhaps most importantly, an openness to alternative modes of knowing that include waking visions, dreams and auditory "hallucinations" (1996: 59).

That is why, in her quest to know the past and her origins that will allow her to construct her identity, Morgan chooses the path of Aboriginality, in spite of the fact that she has just "one eighth" per cent of Aboriginal blood. Neither Nan nor Gladys can identify with their white fathers who denied them, and Sally cannot accept a father who asks her to leave her Mum and Nan in order to enter his world (Morgan, 2000: 42). Taking this into account, it is easy to understand Gladys's words when she finally finds "her place" in the Aboriginal community in the North:

'For nearly all my life, I've desperately wanted to know who my father was, now I couldn't care less. Why should

I bother with whoever it was, they never bothered with me [...]. All those wonderful people up North, they all claimed me. Well, that's all I want. That's enough, you see. I don't want to belong to anyone else' (Morgan, 2000: 237).

Hybrid forms and devices also take an important place in the formal aspect of the novel. Using Kathryn Trees words again, *My Place* acts as a *counter-memory* against the white official account of history. Trees bases her argument on Foucault's theory of historiography:

Historiography disturbs what was previously considered immobile;...fragments what was thought unified;... shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself. This understanding of historiography affirms knowledge (the foundation of history) as a perspective concerned not with 'objective' truth but rather with disrupting centralised or unitary understanding of dominant Australian history and recognised culture (1991:70).

Yet this *counter-memory* does not appear as a monolithic "truth". Morgan portrays it as just one more version of the events. That is why, in spite of being an autobiography, several first-person narrators participate in the telling of the story. When analysing the connection between history and literature in the writing of autobiographies, Sarah Nuttal points out:

Most historical discourse lays claim to a sense of "pastness", to a past time which has existed and is independent of the language used to describe it. At the same time, many argue, following the work of Hayden White and others, that history and fiction have much in common, employing narrative devices and systems of rhetoric to construct a verbal image of "reality" (1998: 191).

The way in which this peculiar autobiography is written, then, is very important because it proves that all discourses referring to "real" past events are just subjective versions of that past. In *My Place*,

the reader realises that the only way to have access to the past is by relying on the narrators' memory. Consequently, things are not as transparent as they appear to be.

Besides, although these stories are transcribed by Morgan, they come from an oral source. Orality and plurality of discourses, which clearly recall the Aboriginal sense of community, are also automatically associated with black literary style:

The Aboriginal truth of *My Place* rests in its multi-voiced structure, reproducing the communal nature of traditional orature [...]. *My Place*, then, in its equal privileging of many voices and stories, rests not only in the western tradition alone but, also, in that of Black and Third World writing which, as critic Selwyn Cudjoe notes, 'is presumed generally to be of service of the group [...]. One's personal experiences are assumed to be an authentic expression of the society' (Elder, 1992: 20).

Following the same line of analysis, Peter Dickinson observes that:

Morgan's use of embedded stories/narratives thus produces an essentially hybrid text. As Mudrooroo Narogin points out, *My Place* is written in Standard English as this is [Morgan's] everyday discourse, but when she uses methods of oral history to tape-record the voices of three members of her family, and introduce them into her text, the English blackens (1994: 326).

In *My Place*, there are also occasions on which the narrator seems unreliable, for she relates events and outcomes that are too good and triumphant to be true, as is the case of Arthur's success in spite of being a black man in the extremely racist society of the early 20th century. However, in Morgan's book, there are four stories told by four different narrators and, at some points, though the events told by them are the same, they are told from different perspectives. Taking into account the fact that the recovery of the past cannot but be subjective, the event told will seem more reliable to the reader who is offered several perspectives than to the reader who is only offered one. The use

of this multiple narration technique helps to emphasise the importance given to the idea of the community. Moreover, Morgan's inclusion of multiple voices/narratives as oral discourses connects her novel with the Aboriginal oral tradition, thus mixing the originally Western genre of the written autobiographical novel with the oral transmission of stories in the Aboriginal culture.

In this way, the presence of orality in *My Place*, with the different storytellers that are given a chance to speak, contributes to creating an egalitarian "sense of community" (Newman, 1988: 377) which is set in contrast with the Western idea of individuality. Therefore, the power of this hybrid text comes from the fact that, by using the traditional Western autobiographical style, Morgan reaches a wider readership, especially those who are in power. Furthermore, by including a transcription from oral sources, she asserts her Aboriginal roots.

Nonetheless, some critics have argued that the novel relies mostly in the presence of the main narrator, thus privileging the Western ideology of individualism. Subhash Jaireth has analysed *My Place* in the light of Bakhtin's concepts of *monologism* and *dialogism*. Nobody can deny that *heteroglossia*,⁸ that is, the presence of different voices and narrators is present in the book (Jaireth, 1995: 72). Yet, these testimonies appear independently and in isolation because there is no interaction between them and the main narrative in which they are embedded. This isolation prevents *dialogism*,⁹ as the identity of the principal narrator never loses its privileged status. In this sense, the novel becomes closer to the Western idea of the importance of the individual and his/her quest in finding his own identity in the world, than to the Aboriginal concept of community. Likewise, Attwood argues that the autobiographical mode of *My Place* "is an epistemological position which cannot be divorced from bourgeois individualism" (in Cooper, 1995: 145).

Due to this use of Western literary genres, Edward Hills also foregrounds the fact that with texts such as *My Place*, "there is a danger that the fringe may become centred as soon as it begins to employ the genres of the centre" (1997:100). Consequently, "...although the book provides windows into the recesses of Aboriginal history, it remains primarily a European story with a white focus."

Hence, this hybrid condition of Morgan's novel brings out different interpretations. It is true that the use of autobiography has caused that texts such as *My Place* "have been encouraged, edited, published, sold and widely read by white professionals and a large white readership" (Mueke in Cooper, 1995:143). Nevertheless it is precisely this fact that makes the novel much more powerful. Aborigines have suffered all the misfortunes written in the book, therefore, they already knew what had happened. It is white people who need to read the other side of the story and it is easier that they do so if the text is mainly presented in a Western genre that they can understand.

Making use of Bakhtin's ideas again, we can affirm that, if language means communication, existence means co-being (in Jaireth, 1995:74). Therefore, for *dialogism* to be possible, both sides have to be adapted to the other's code so that each one can understand the other's statements. Morgan has consequently adapted Aboriginal forms of communication, such as the story-telling, and Aboriginal ideologies, experiences and way of being—their spirituality, their love for nature, the *Dreamtime* and their suffering caused by white colonization—to dominant mainstream culture so that those in power are able to understand the "Other". Such mixture, then, could be interpreted not as yet another form of assimilation, but as an attempt at unity and reconciliation so that, hopefully, in the future blacks and whites can "co-be" despite their painful "contact" in the past.

Furthermore, Morgan reinforces the positive notion of hybridity, not only in her literary production, but also in her paintings. That is why she includes one of them on the cover of the book. In order to bring to the centre a story from the fringe, Morgan may have to adapt it to the white publishing industry and readership. Yet, in including her own painting on the cover, she continues asserting her Aboriginal roots beyond the limits of the written text, because her two-dimensional paintings, dealing with the same topic of white and Aboriginal contact, are closely related to Aboriginal artistic expressions.

From the very beginning of the book, Morgan explains how she liked drawing but how she was ridiculed by her Western teachers:

He [her Art teacher at school] held up one of my drawings in front of the class one day and pointed out everything wrong with it. There was no perspective, I was the only one with no horizon line. My people were flat and floating (2000:96-7).

Afterwards she realises that there are similarities between her way of painting and that of the Aborigines. Elder explains the connections between Morgan's painting and narration and Aboriginal art:

Her narrative is as patterned in a non-linear way as the painting on its cover. The most significant design linking this nominal autobiography with Aborigine orature, of which sand paintings are a basic narrative element, is its division into four life stories (1992:18).

The references to Morgan's painting in the narrative and the appearance of her own painting on the cover establish a Bakhtinian dialogue in which hybridity and co-existence between different narrative modes and artistic expressions acquire, then, the same degree of relevance.

All these different interpretations of *My Place* prove that it is a polemical and, why not, hybrid text. Sally Morgan is neither wholly white nor wholly Aboriginal, consequently, her book contains elements from the two apparently antagonistic traditions which conform her Australian in-between condition. Being "too white for blacks, too black for whites" (Morgan, 2000: 337), *My Place* provides several personal experiences which, by offering their particular "hybrid" perspective of historical events, help to deconstruct the power structures that maintained certain racial groups marginalised.

Taking all these facts into account, it can be said, then, that *My Place* constitutes an attempt at portraying the consequences of hybridisation. Although bitterness and resentment do not appear in the account of Aboriginal suffering and exploitation by white dominance and colonization, criticism is present in the book's anecdotes, dialogues, feelings, irony and silences. And it is precisely this lack of anger that provides the text with a mature and powerful dimension, a hope in unity,

and a positive view of hybridity in a multicultural and post-colonial world.

Thus, Sally Morgan's recycling of the past in *My Place* acts as a powerful weapon of both criticism and reconciliation. It is Morgan's "in-betweenness" that helps to deconstruct the very structures of domination in order to improve the present and pave the way for a better future. In a word, it is this plurality and multiculturalism that ultimately help to transform the frontiers of separation into paths of connection.

NOTES

- ¹ As Hills has put it, the writing of autobiography can be an essentially political act: "Autobiographical story can politicize history by focusing the impact of history on the individual life. By exposing the dominant myths as instrumental in the suppression of individual lives and societies, the marginalized can write themselves into the texts of history and can alter, however minimally, the structures that maintain the status quo [...]. This claiming of the past as a site for collective identity, as a series of windows into the present and the future, is an essentially political gesture which both undermines orthodoxy and empowers the minority" (Hills, 1997: 102).
- ² Therefore, Morgan proposes to celebrate it because, bearing in mind Homi Bhabha's well-known concept of the Third Space, hybridity appears as a way of deconstructing the discourses of power based on the self/other dialectic (in Rutherford, 1990: 211).
- ³ To give but one example, "Aboriginal people in the Victoria River Valley of the Northern territory of Australia first encountered European settlers in 1883, when Victoria River Downs, then the largest Cattle Station in the world, was established. At that time there were four or five thousand Aboriginal people living in the area. Fifty years later only 187 remained" (Rose, 2000: 1).
- ⁴ In 1901 Australia was empowered by Britain to legislate in relation to any race of people except 'aboriginal natives'. It was advised that 'aboriginal natives should continue to be excluded from

that law, as such they remained under the jurisdiction of the Department of Flora and Fauna. It was not until 1967 that 'Aborigines' were awarded citizenship (Trees, 1991: 68).

- ⁵ Marlo Morgan's book supposedly provided the authentic knowledge on Aboriginal life that the author had learnt after walking across the centre of Australia for three months with a lost clan of Aborigines. As a "New Age" book, it proposed Aboriginal spirituality as the solution for Western materialism and stressful life. In 1996 a delegation of Aborigines denounced the book's falsehoods and misrepresentations. Morgan had received 1.7 million dollars for the rights to her story; the Aborigines only received an apology. Three years after the publication of *My Own Sweet Time*, it was discovered that the real author was a white male taxi-driver. The book had been published by an Aboriginal-run publishing house and the book had been awarded the Dobbie prize for women's writing in 1995 (Shoemaker, 1998: 339-10).
- ⁶ Some of these theories were: the straightforward polygenist species argument, the amalgamation thesis, the variation on hybridity between 'proximate' or 'distant' species and the negative version of amalgamation (see Young, 1996:18).
- ⁷ Edward Hills makes reference to this situation in the book: "In spite of the fact that the Drake-Brockmans were clearly rapacious and unethical in their treatment of Aborigines at Corunna Downs, a quiet respect for the dignity of the family permeates nearly all the accounts of life on the station. Although they kept private harems, forced Aborigines off their land, separated families (including Morgan's) and dislocated communities, the Drake-Brockmans—especially Alfred—are treated with delicacy and affection" (Hills, 1997:107). However, the mere portrayal of all those horrible events in the book already carries out an implicit harsh criticism.
- ⁸ Heteroglossia, literary "varied speechness", means the inclusion of different voices within a text. Heteroglossia "reflects Bakhtin's emphasis on the understanding of language not as an abstract system (langue) but a mode of social interaction" (Jaireth, 1995:71).
- ⁹ Dialogism means that all the voices exist in a status of equal importance and interacting or "co-being" (Bakhtin in Jaireth, 1995:73) with the others.

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