

Article

Australian Aboriginal Memoir and Memory: A Stolen Generations Trauma Narrative

Justine Seran

English Literature Department, The University of Edinburgh, 50 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JU, UK; E-Mail: J.Seran@ed.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-131-650-3030

Academic Editor: Sonya Andermahr

Received: 15 July 2015 / Accepted: 13 October 2015 / Published: 19 October 2015

Abstract: This article proposes a re-reading of Aboriginal author Sally Morgan’s Stolen Generations narrative *My Place* (1987) in post-Apology Australia (2008–present). The novel tells the story of Morgan’s discovery of her maternal Aboriginal origins through the life-stories of her mother and grandmother; the object of a quest for the past that is both relational and matrilineal; incorporating elements of autobiography and as-told-to memoirs to create a form of choral autoethnography. Morgan’s text explores the intergenerational consequences of child removal in the Aboriginal context and is representative of Indigenous-authored narratives in its suggestion that the children and grand-children of victims of colonial policies and practices can work through the trauma of their ancestors. I examine the literary processes of decolonization of the Indigenous writing/written self and community; as well as strategies for individual survival and cultural survivance in the Australian settler colonial context; especially visible through the interactions between traumatic memories and literary memoirs, a genre neglected by trauma theory’s concern with narrative fragmentation and the proliferation of “themed” life-writing centered on a traumatic event. This article calls for a revision of trauma theory’s Eurocentrism through scholarly engagement with Indigenous experiences such as Morgan’s and her family in order to broaden definitions and take into account collective, historical, and inherited trauma.

Keywords: Australian Aboriginal literature; trauma theory; postcolonial criticism; Indigenous studies; Commonwealth studies

1. Introduction

This article explores how the reflexive practice of autobiographical writing contributes to the decolonization of the Indigenous self and forms the root of individual survival and cultural survivance. In the Australian context, Stolen Generations testimonies exemplify the fundamental link between life-writing and trauma. From the late 19th century to the 1970s, Australia enforced widespread child removal policies aiming at taking mixed-race children away from their Aboriginal mothers and raising them as white [1]. Whatever the reasons given by individual states, from the protection of so-called full-blood Aborigines from dying out to the threat mixed-race individuals represented for White Australia's belief in racist doctrines, for the children who were placed on missions and in service, never to see their family again, for the mothers separated from their children, and for the communities deprived of their young, it had the same destructive impact.

Published in 1987, *My Place* is the life-story of Australian Aboriginal painter Sally Morgan, including the stories of her great-uncle Arthur, her mother Gladys and father Bill (incorporated into Gladys's narrative), and her grandmother Daisy, or Nan [2]. The text is dominated by Sally's own narrative from early childhood memories in the 1950s to the writing of the book in the 1980s. Although Daisy and Arthur are the only ones who were removed from their family as part of the Stolen Generations, the consequences of removal are passed down to Daisy's daughter Gladys, sent away to a children's home as a toddler only to see her mother during school holidays, and Sally, whose quest for the past is motivated by the necessity to know and understand her mother's and grandmother's stories in order to know who she is. This article argues that reading *My Place* as a literary text straddling the generic boundaries between fact and fiction can help scholars of trauma studies to decolonize the discipline through an engagement with hybrid textual forms, alternative conceptions of the self, and marginalized histories.

The use of autobiographical writing expresses a need on the part of the author to look into the self to reveal complex dynamics which I aim to bring to light, following Smith and Watson's exhortation "to investigate the heteronomous meanings of the 'colonial subject' and to explore autobiography as a potential site of decolonization" ([3], pp. xxi–xxii). I therefore propose to re-read *My Place* in post-Apology Australia and break new ground by approaching a relatively well-known Aboriginal-authored text through the lens of trauma theory to reveal the latter's potential and limitations. Most criticism of Morgan's text to date has been focused on identity politics and a majority of critics has been concerned with judging the validity or truthfulness of her depictions of Aboriginality. Since the publication of a slew of commercially as well as critically successful Aboriginal women's life-writing narratives in the 1980s, these texts have largely fallen off the scholarly radar ([4], p. 169). Despite its recent loss of popularity, *My Place* remains a seminal text for the analysis of Stolen Generations trauma within Australian literary culture ([5], p. 14). In the following sections I will explore the literary genres associated with Stolen Generations narratives, including autobiography, memoir, and testimony, then I will examine the issues of trauma and witnessing present in *My Place*, before turning to an exploration of trauma and postcolonial theory in relation to the novel drawing on recent developments in criticism, and finally I will turn to the implications of collective family testimonies of Aboriginal "we-dentity" such as Morgan's for the discipline of trauma studies.

2. Aboriginal Women's Life-Writing: from Autobiography to Collective Memoirs

A crucial feature of Indigenous women's life-writing is the challenge to what constitutes historical discourse through what Bart Moore-Gilbert calls "the strategic erosion of established distinctions between the public/political and private/personal spheres, [...] the critique of the supposed 'objectivity' of History, [and] the traditional primacy of archival material [over] sources such as 'oral testimonies'" ([6], p. 78). The use of oral sources and the repeated doubts over the veracity of facts in *My Place* fall within this critique of history as written by white people, a history that traditionally silences Aboriginal voices and their past. Writing the self is then a strategy to rewrite history through the author's personal vision and her experience of dispossession and oppression.

Indigenous women's life-writing enacts what Mary-Louise Pratt calls autoethnography, a counter-discursive practice involving the appropriation of ethnographic idioms as Indigenous self-representation attempts to replace Western ethnological texts as basis for cultural knowledge ([7], p. 7). Morgan's autobiographical narrative is interspersed with transcripts of the oral testimonies she tapes of her great-uncle, mother, and grandmother. Sally the narrator researches Aboriginal history at the Batty Library in Perth, Western Australia, but instead of using her findings directly in the narrative, for example by quoting historians or appealing to established arguments, she uses her readings of white ethnographers as arguments to convince her family members to speak out and offer a counterpoint to the dominant discourse. Thus she tells Arthur:

"[T]here's almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything. [...] I just want to try to tell a little bit of the other side of the story." ([2], pp. 163–64).

There is a strong political desire on Sally's part to rectify history, to make things right again while reversing the othering process by putting her family's stories at the center. For Lizzy Finn, autoethnography is also "a recuperative act of piecing together a collective memory across generations," and this is exemplified by the transcripts of taped interviews that interrupt Sally's autobiographical narrative to weave together all its textual strands and create a collective familial narrative ([8], p. 20).

The proposition to read Indigenous women's life-writing as memoir is informed by Asian American author Maxine Hong Kingston's definition of the genre, as she lauds two reviewers of her novel *The Woman Warrior* stating that she is "slyly writing a memoir, a form which [...] can neither [be] dismiss[ed] as fiction nor quarrel[ed] with as fact. [...] It is by definition a series of stories or anecdotes to illuminate the times rather than be autobiographical" ([9], p. 64). Memoir as a narrative strategy allows the writer to perform a kind of autoethnography that conflates the personal and the political, the individual and the communal. Lee Quinby's study of the genre of memoir also frames it as a challenge to dominant constructions of the self. She asserts that "memoirs (particularly in their collective form) construct a subjectivity that is multiple and continuous. [...] In relation to autobiography, then, memoirs function as counter-memory" ([10], p. 299). The notion of life-writing forms as allowing for counter-memories, or memories that run counter to the dominant discourse, provides a useful link between literary genres and subjective acts such as remembering.

In *My Place*, Daisy and Gladys's voices are mediated by their daughter and granddaughter Sally, who filters their spoken stories through her words on the page. The complexity of representation in literary practice functions as a challenge to colonial boundaries and allows for the possible coexistence of past and present as contained in the time of writing. This is made possible through the mobilization of memories and their articulation in the book. Gladys's narrative, embedded within Sally's story, paradoxically opens with the statement "I have no memory of being taken from my mother" ([2], p. 241). She goes on to recollect about her time as a toddler and a child at Parkerville Children's Home, summoning memories she is unlikely to possess since according to modern psychoanalysis adults cannot retain memories of very early childhood. Yet Gladys's toddler memories are simultaneously "true" recollections and fabrications on the model of the actual childhood of many Aboriginal girls placed in such homes. Memoirs are ideal mediums for such narratives as they combine the historical authority of testimony with the freedom of individual recollection.

In relation to genre, Kateryna Longley also argues that "flexibility, specifically literary flexibility, is needed so that all genres can continue to be loosened to accommodate differences of personal and cultural vision at any time and in any place" ([11], p. 383). An awareness of the ideological aspect of literary categories is necessary, along with cultural sensitivity, in order to responsibly examine trauma in non-Western texts. For example, Australian Aboriginal life-writing is strongly linked with orality and is often collaborative and collective, as in *My Place* with the weaving of several first-person accounts to form a unified family story embedded in the main investigative plot. Each secondary narrator takes the reader on a journey backward to her or his chosen beginning, and works her or his way forward through to the day of Sally's recording. The fluidity of literary genres displayed in the text thus leads me to adopt flexibility in this study and characterize *My Place* as a choral autoethnography. Consequently, I analyze the text as a work of literature in the following sections in order to reveal its potential to decolonize trauma studies.

As Stef Craps points out, trauma theory tends to impose stylistic criteria onto trauma narratives, as it prescribes "a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia [...]. Theorists," he adds, "often justify their focus on anti-narrative, fragmented, modernist forms by pointing to similarities with the psychic experience of trauma as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma" ([12], pp. 46, 50). The failure of narrative to capture the experience is supposed to bear witness to the extreme character of trauma, yet its focus on fragmentation disregards non-Western notions of communal body and memories, and the quest for unity in texts such as *My Place* centered around the personal and familial expression of colonization and the retrieval of a lost history. Some theorists attempt to police the very language used in the act of telling, with Giorgio Agamben for instance noting that "[t]he language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance—that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness" ([13], p. 39). The preoccupation with putting pain into words in order to make it "real" for others to believe it, and the Jungian certainty that to heal trauma one must transform pain into a logical narrative, also fail to acknowledge the language issue in settler countries, where most Indigenous people learn English as a "native" tongue and write the trauma of oppression in the oppressor's words. Although writing in English for Indigenous authors may be a form of self-empowerment and a way to decolonize the language, it is also understandable that some would opt for silence instead ([14], p. 58). Although it can be a conscious choice and a

coping mechanism, the silence of the colonized is precisely what the settler state counts on in order to avoid making reparations for the past and acknowledging ongoing suffering ([13], p. 55).

Interestingly, in the social sciences, psychiatrist Dori Laub distinguishes between three separate levels of witnessing: “the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing” ([15], p. 75). In this framework, Daisy’s witnessing is on the first level, Sally’s is on the second and we as readers witness on the third level. This is not to dilute the “true” experience of the witness, but actually to show how interconnected witnessing and testifying are in testimony narratives such as *My Place* ([16], p. 235).

3. Writing Trauma as a Witness

Trauma is commonly understood as the repetitive manifestation of an extreme event not fully digested by consciousness, yet Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith argue that this “psychoanalytic model leaves little room for the expression of a critical consciousness on the part of tellers of their knowledge of the politics of oppression” ([17], p. 112). Their remark calls for a revision of the pathological definition of trauma to account for its potentially inherited historical nature, and to take into account non-Western conceptualizations of the psyche, mental health, and ways of healing. In *My Place*, Daisy’s trauma of being removed from her mother as a child as part of the Stolen Generations is compounded with the removal of her elder daughter, Gladys’s sister. The repetition of history is also hinted at by allusions to a possible incest, which the reader pieces together from Daisy’s confirmation that her father is Howden Drake-Brockman, the white station-owner who employs her as a housemaid, along with her refusal to say who Gladys’s father is (since she asserts that everyone knew and nobody talked) as well as Gladys’s realization from an old photograph that she and Howden look uncannily alike.

Stolen children and incest are major causes of trauma, and their place in the novel can be understood using Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s notion of the transgenerational phantom, which they define as “an undisclosed family secret handed down to an unwitting descendant” ([18], p. 16). Nicholas Rand adds that the definition:

“...enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past—whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state [...] or practiced by parents and grandparents—is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations.” ([18], p. 169).

Australia’s official national narrative and Aboriginal individuals have kept the same secrets with different motivations: the former to conceal its own racist history and the latter for individual reasons. Thus Gladys begs Sally: “‘Can’t you just leave the past buried, it won’t hurt anyone then?’ ‘Mum’, I reasoned, ‘it’s already hurt people. It’s hurt you and me and Nan, all of us [...]. I have the right to know my own history’” ([2], p. 152). Sally raises the issue of the ownership of the past, and the fact that the transgenerational phantom is also an absence that results in the pain of the descendant, the one who is hurt precisely by this lack of knowledge of the past that has been replaced with silence and mythologized narrative. Hence Sally’s feeling of incompleteness and her yearning to know her mother and grandmother’s stories and digest them in order to know who she is. In the novel, the transgenerational aspects of the narrative through the matrilineal strand anchor the women of Sally’s

family into Australian history. To Cathy Caruth's fundamental question: "What do the dying bodies of the past [...] have to do with the living bodies of the present?", Morgan answers that they still feed the lives they begat and that their presence must be acknowledged through that of their descendants ([19], p. 26).

As Craps remind us, however, when using trauma theory to examine Indigenous literature we must bear in mind that foundational texts such as Caruth's "show little interest in traumatic experiences of members of non-Western cultural traditions" ([20], p. 26). Despite calls from critics such as Craps, Schaffer and Smith, and Deborah Madsen, trauma studies scholars still focus largely on Western texts, while postcolonial scholars tend to examine political (as opposed to psychological) issues in non-Western texts. This is not to say that one should apply Western trauma theory uncritically to postcolonial fiction without a thorough adaptation of its frameworks to alternative concepts of the psyche that put an emphasis on collective forms of selfhood, for this would amount to a dangerous form of medical imperialism. For example, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a quintessentially Western construct, and as such it is mostly applicable in *My Place* to Sally's father Bill, a white Australian World War II veteran whose experience as a prisoner of war in Europe helped turn into a violent paranoid alcoholic ([12], p. 49).

At this stage a distinction must be drawn between the experience of destructive violence as a product or as a process. As a product it is isolated or episodic, like Bill's highly traumatic yet relatively short time in prisoner camp, but as a process, Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim argue that "violence is cumulative and boundless. It always spills over. It creates and recreates new norms of collective self-understanding. Violence as process is often not recorded because it is internalized; it becomes part of the expectation of the living" ([21], p. 12). Daisy's entire life as an Aboriginal woman reads like a long list of tragedies: stolen from her family as a child; forced to serve a white family without a wage; sexually exploited, possibly by her own father; made to abandon her first daughter and to leave the second one in a children's home. She has internalized ill-treatment as Aboriginal women's lot, and consequently tries to distance herself from her Aboriginality by concealing her (and their) origins from her family. Rosanne Kennedy reads Daisy's attempts at racial passing as a way of breaking the cycle of abuse of Aboriginal women in Australia, for she "refuses to reproduce herself or the conditions of her own marginality" ([22], p. 344). There are echoes of those fateful expectations when Daisy entreats Sally: "Don't ever let a man do that to you. You watch out for Amber [Sally's daughter]. You don't want her bein' treated like a black woman" ([2], p. 337). Daisy's plea supports Madsen's statement that the pathological definition of trauma as an unexpected and extreme experience "fails to account both for the inherited nature of certain forms of historical trauma and equally for the traumatic nature of everyday life for vulnerable people who daily confront with fear and helplessness the absence of safety or security in their lives" ([23], p. 63; [24], p. 101). Sally, who has led a relatively sheltered life despite poverty and her father's threats, attempts to right the wrongs inflicted upon her relatives by reclaiming her Aboriginal identity and rewriting what it means for her to be a black woman, as opposed to her grandmother.

Although Marianne Hirsch first developed her notion of postmemory in relation to the experience of the Holocaust, the genocide, displacement, and dispossession Indigenous people were subjected to by colonial powers have fostered large-scale individual and cultural trauma, leaving significant marks on contemporary Indigenous psyches. Postmemory describes "the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only

as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that [...] constitute memories in their own right" ([25], p. 106). The postmemory of the survivor's children enables a pure form of witnessing that is also faith in the witness's account from one who has not experienced trauma first hand, and whose telling is always mediated by her or his parents' experience.

Giorgio Agamben's work on witnessing traces the etymology of the word to the Latin *superstes* meaning "a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it" ([13], p. 17). I argue that if the victim witnesses the traumatic even "from beginning to end," then the survivor's witnessing goes beyond that, because they have to deal with what comes after, with loss and mourning, and with the knowledge of what destruction and death leave in their wake. Agamben derives his notion from Holocaust survivor Primo Levi's notion of the lacuna of testimony, which posits that survivors are not true witnesses ([13], p. 33; [26], pp. 83–84). The survivor lives with the knowledge and the pain, which they pass on to their children, yet a Eurocentric individualist culture often does not see it as a possibility or a desirable outcome for children to work through their forbears' experience of historical trauma. Where Agamben asserts that the one who bears witness is actually bearing witness to the impossibility of the task of bearing witness, I argue that it is possible to bear witness to the individual and collective consequences of death and trauma through one's children, like Sally who retrieves her mother's and grandmother's traumatic stories and passes them on to the reader (and her own children) through the medium of the book ([13], p. 34).

The children's status as the descendants of those who have known death from the outside, twice removed from the initial trauma, gives them a privileged position to counter the issue brought up by Jean-Francois Lyotard of the doubt of those who have not seen the gas chambers with their own eyes ([27], p. 3). The disbelief of horror and pain has been aptly formulated by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* as "to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt" ([28], p. 7). When this great pain leads to death, only the survivors are left with the certainty of what they have witnessed and that they pass down to their children, who although they did not experience trauma first-hand carry that certainty and the witness's burden of telling a doubtful world. Indeed, it is common for testimony and life-writing texts such as *My Place* that reveal racist discrimination and ill-treatment to be questioned by the revisionist press as inaccurate and inauthentic [29].

In historical studies, Dirk A. Moses' thesis of competing claims to the most traumatic historical tragedy between on the one hand "supporters" of Jewish interests who consider the Holocaust as a unique form of genocide more worthy of scholarly attention than colonization, and on the other hand "supporters" of Indigenous interests wishing to acknowledge colonization as a historical precedent on par with the Holocaust, is disingenuous ([30], p. 36). In literary studies, on the other hand, scholars such as Joe Lockhard have studied side by side Primo Levi and Native American author Gerald Vizenor, for instance, emphasizing what the declarations of survival by Jewish and Indigenous survivors of genocide have in common. Indigenous authors referencing the Jewish experience of displacement and diaspora tend to establish kinship rather than competition [31]. Proponents of the recognition of Indigenous genocides as a European responsibility mainly seek to obtain reparations and legal reforms from the colonial power and the settler state.

Counter to Moses' position, Michael Rothberg in *Multidirectional Memory* advocates moving beyond the zero-sum game of competitive memory seeing public memory as a scarce resource that

groups who demand recognition must be fighting over. Hence Rothberg's introduction of "the model of multidirectional memory, a model based on recognition of the productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance and developed in contrast to an understanding of memory as involved in a competition over scarce public resources" ([32], p. 309). In this model, testimonies of genocide and oppression can be used to foster understanding and solidarity rather than rivalry. This is particularly suited to this reading of *My Place*, as Rothberg highlights two narrative forms appearing frequently in texts about genocides and massacres that mobilize multidirectional memory: "*narratives of detection and narratives of intergenerational conflict and transgenerational transmission*" ([32], p. 285; original emphasis). The detection of Sally's origins through the intergenerational transmission of trauma in a downward movement, from grandmother to granddaughter, and of healing in an upward direction, from granddaughter to grandmother, enacts multidirectional memory at familial and cultural level.

4. Neologising the Critical Apparatus

Faced with the inadequacy of Western trauma theory to account for and provide healing to Indigenous victims and to give satisfactory results according to Indigenous, as opposed to Western, criteria, we may look towards new developments in postcolonial literary criticism to complement trauma theory and adapt it to Indigenous contexts. Following white historian Bain Attwood's criticism, Australian Aboriginal writer and activist Jackie Huggins asserts that "Morgan's Aboriginality is forged through the creation of the text rather than the reverse" ([33], p. 459). This is where communal life-writing comes into play, as Morgan's ties with her Aboriginality and her people's culture and traditions is inextricably tied to her love for her grandmother. Indeed, at the end of the novel after Daisy's death, Sally's sister Jill remarks: "With her gone, we could pass for anything. Greek, Italian, Indian... what a joke. We wouldn't want to, now. It's too important. It'd be like she never existed. Like her life meant nothing, not even to her own family" ([2], p. 354). Morgan's advocacy for Aboriginal rights is tied to the experiences of Daisy, Arthur, and Gladys, and from the discovery of the injustice done to her own relatives, the narrator's awareness expands to encompass Australian Aboriginal collective trauma.

Sally the narrator and writer reclaims her heritage in the name of self-determination, seeks validation from the government through an Aboriginal scholarship, and gains acknowledgement of kinship by travelling north to her family's ancestral land, east of the Pilbara region. Consequently, Attwood has accused Morgan of "claim[ing] her forbears' past as her past and their heritage as her heritage," thus disregarding both specific considerations and the reality of the larger corpus of Aboriginal life-writing ([34], p. 307). Precisely because it encompasses the narratives of her mother and grandmother, *My Place* belongs to the sub-genre of Aboriginal women's life-stories, which according to Francesca Di Blasio tends to revolve around "a repetitive and impersonal destiny" ([35], p. 34). This is also in keeping with Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney's definition of the narrator of testimonial literature as "a speaker who does not conceive of him/herself as extraordinary but instead as an allegory of the many, the people," and thus creates a collective identity ([36], p. 8). *My Place* as testimony brings the story of racism and abuse of Aboriginal women at the heart of Australian culture by de-emphasizing its individual aspects. The story of Sally's female relatives therefore becomes hers at the same time as it becomes the story of a generic Aboriginal daughter-mother and weaves a super-narrative (or ur-text) of abuse and resilience. For Australian Aboriginal

scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Morgan and other Aboriginal life-writers from the 1980s have written “their mothers’ life herstories” ([37], p. 1). The coinage not only replaces “his” with “her,” thus highlighting the female standpoint as Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin remark, but by splitting a very common word it also attracts attention to the presence of the word “stories” in “histories,” and to the fact that History is a communal story made of individual stories ([38], p. 4).

Daisy, Gladys, and Arthur have a distinctly personal experience of what it means to be Aboriginal, and Morgan builds her own Aboriginality through the text, incorporating the disjointed, incomplete stories of her relatives without claiming them as her own, but by embracing them as form of we-identity. This construction of a communal identity is not readily accepted by the dominant culture, and we must bear in mind that *My Place* was written in 1987, the year preceding the bicentennial celebrations of Captain Phillip’s arrival with the First Fleet in Sydney Harbour, five years before the legal recognition of Native Title, acknowledging prior ownership of the land, and twenty years before the Apology and the official acknowledgement of the Stolen Generations in 2008. Finn places the novel back into context: “[t]his is the space in which Morgan begins to write: one where whiteness (white literature, white culture, white history) is the foundation and framework; where to speak is to be dismantled and to dismantle” ([8], p. 16). The very act of writing such a book was and is political, and the choice to identify with her Aboriginal heritage and renounce passing privilege was bound to trigger a backlash against its author, in keeping with the debates surrounding authenticity in the Australian public space. Moreover, Wei Ming Dariotis introduces the term “kin-aesthetic,” which she defines as “the understanding of the ‘Other’ as ‘kin’, as a member of the in-group” ([39], p. 179). Kin-aesthetic uses the metaphor of the nation as family, with people of mixed cultural and ethnic heritage functioning as mirrors that reflect back the other within us. The conflation of individual stories and national past is evident in *My Place* with the central space given to Sally’s family, but also through the presence of themes linked with the silencing and destruction of Indigenous identity in the context of the Australian nation.

Daisy’s story is the final object of Sally’s quest. Her narrative remains the most incomplete, full of holes and silences, and unspeakable secrets she takes to the grave. The few revelations she makes to her granddaughter uncover a fertile ground of silence and secrets, ideal for trauma to grow, and it is to dispel these secrets and fill this silence that Sally decides to write the story of her family. As Finn puts it, *My Place*’s layering of utterances is also an attempt to “go back and piece together a cohesive narrative from the fragments that remain. In order to fill in the gaps, each narrative builds on and is built upon by the next, creating layers of meaning in the form of hybridised utterance” and together they form a communal story of transgenerational trauma ([8], p. 20). For Longley, moreover, “[t]hese blank moments (in Daisy’s narrative) remind both the reader and the writer of the crudeness and invasiveness of the genre of transcribed autobiography” ([11], p. 16). They are both intrusive and respectful, lending credibility to the text for the central secrets of who Daisy’s father and who Gladys’s father were are never disclosed, or rather the reader is given several names by unreliable sources such as Alice and Judy Drake-Brockman, respectively wife and legitimate daughter of Daisy’s employer and possible father (as well as Gladys’s possible father) Howden.

Telling her story via the re-enactment of the past through a form of talking cure allows Daisy to shed the layers of fear suffocating her since childhood and for all of her adult life. The main difference with the Western concept of talking therapy, however, is that the stories are not told to a neutral,

objective professional, but rather shared with a direct descendant who has a personal stake in the story as one constitutive of her own identity. When Daisy insists on being taken to the hospital so she does not die in her daughter's house, in a surprising twist since she always refused to see a doctor, the change becomes apparent. Re-living and telling her story to her granddaughter (and her daughter) has liberated Daisy and allowed her to be whole again, to remember and be re-membered, the retrieved past acting like a prosthetic limb to support her in her walk into death, just as the act of writing the book permits Morgan to finally feel whole.

Caruth suggests that "history is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" ([19], p. 71). In *My Place*, Sally records the stories of her elders and relieves them of their pain (Arthur and Daisy die shortly after they complete their recording sessions), thus reproducing the motif of the younger generation healing the older one and allowing them to pass away having made peace with themselves and their racial and cultural allegiances through their descendant. The younger generation is the bearer of postmemory: "the child who is alive because survival was indeed possible" ([40], p. 28). Survival is not only possible but it is also necessary to ward off erasure, and it is my contention that Indigenous literature allow us to explore the postmemory of subsequent generations, such as Sally's, Gladys's, and Daisy's, as the original traumatic events of colonization recede but their consequences remain.

5. Survival and Survivance

The trauma of the survivor of colonialism, the Indigenous person who is alive today in a settler country, is also a victory, for to have survived centuries of genocide is to live with the trauma of a stolen identity. Each year on the 26th of January, Aboriginal people and allies "celebrate" Australia Day as Invasion Day, Survival Day or the Day of Mourning, a tradition started in 1988 to mark the bicentennial of the First Fleet's arrival and to remember surviving 200 years of colonization ([41], pp. 358–59). Deborah Bird Rose suggests that such "[p]ublic declarations of indigenous survival challenge the most fundamental legitimacy of the nation by demonstrating that it makes war against its own citizens, that violence continues to be foundational, and that indigenous people are the continuing targets of white aggression" ([42], p. 15). By bringing to light white violence through assertions of survival to genocide, Aboriginal life-writing unsettles the settler nation and settler remembrance (or amnesia) of colonization.

The Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples was issued by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (Australian Labor Party) on 13 February 2008 and presented as a motion in front of the Australian federal parliament. It accepted parliamentary and governmental responsibility for over two centuries of oppressive and discriminatory policies with particular references to the large-scale child removal of the Stolen Generations. The Apology was worded as "part of the healing of the country," a remark hinting at a national trauma in the process of being healed and running the risk of appropriating Aboriginal suffering by suggesting that the Stolen Generations did not only impact Aboriginal individuals and communities, but that the very fabric of Australian society bears the marks of their trauma [43]. Following the Apology, however, Rudd's government failed to reverse his predecessor John Howard's (Liberal National Party) suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act to carry out the notorious

Northern Territory National Emergency Response, or the Intervention. If as Agamben states legal trials are unsatisfactory because they do not do enough to overcome horror, then what are we to make of the Apology in a context where racist laws and constitutions are still in effect? ([18], p. 19). Does healing entail accepting the ineffectiveness of one's testimony of survival or looking for alternate ways to make oneself heard?

In the words of Gerald Vizenor, "survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence" ([44], p. 15). Vizenor contradicts the idea of survival as desirable, for it is incomplete and unsatisfactory. It is not enough to merely survive, to escape death. If survival is the opposite of annihilation, then survivance is the opposite of loss, defeat, and oblivion, the avowed goals of Indigenous genocides aiming at killing those who resist and assimilating those who cannot. Vizenor also uses the obsolete term *sovenance* to differentiate it from remembering, as "Native *sovenance* is that sense of presence in remembrance, that trace of creation and natural reason in native stories" ([44], p. 15; original emphasis). Vizenor's focus is on presence and action, on the will of native writers to re-inscribe themselves into the greater national and global narratives and to bring along elements of their native culture in order to assert their ongoing presence and relevance in the contemporary era. Along with Dariotis' kin-aesthetic, Vizenor's survivance places the minority writer at the center looking outward, asserting and reinscribing kinship and belonging on their own terms.

The concern with passing down memories from ancestors to descendants through the medium of the writing self is present in *My Place* through Sally's desire to write the book for her children so they know who they are, and to reform a matrilineal identity that was disrupted by Daisy's initial removal. The continuing presence of the ancestor, in this case of the living author-narrator who is in the process of becoming an ancestor herself, is the through line that gives law to the world. The cyclic renewal of generations allows for the renewal of cultural memory, remembering what needs to be remembered and forgetting what needs to be forgotten, in order to ensure the survival of the family and the wider community as well as the survivance of their culture. The possibility of renewal is embedded in the multi-cyclical, or spiralling, nature of the text, with its layering of utterance and time shifts interrupting the linear narrative of Sally's investigation.

The novel's structure anticipates aspects of *Bringing Them Home: the 'Stolen Children' Report* in 1997, with its detailed summary of the widespread impact on Aboriginal communities of child removal policies. Gillian Whitlock argues that "the emotive force of *Bringing Them Home* testimony engaged readers in a particular way, one that was generated by the figure of the child as victim, most specifically through the tropes of the stolen child, and the rhetoric of 'coming home'" ([45], p. 203). The motif of archetypal return is often subverted in Australian Aboriginal women's writing and rejected as insufficient and overly nostalgic, as opposed to their own narratives that look simultaneously to the past and the present and advocate for a better future. If the return to pre-contact cultures is rarely upheld as possible, nor indeed desirable, by Aboriginal activists, it is because of its assumption that Indigenous cultures are static and monolithic. The three extended flashbacks in *My Place* containing the stories of Arthur, Gladys and Bill, and Daisy are actual return trips into the past, both in the historical sense and in the sense of the mythic past before the birth of the author when trauma tore their family apart. Remembering is a return into past memories in much the same way as a pilgrimage to visit the birthplace of one's ancestors is a return to a theoretical past, unknown to the

narrator, and fictional to the reader, that effects the decolonization of the writing/written self and community in the Australian settler context. It is also a return to the present through the acknowledgement that these memories are indeed reflecting a past era.

Survival in *My Place* is thus framed in terms of both the retrieval of familial memory and the physical return to an idealized land base. Indeed Sally and Gladys undertake a pilgrimage to a place they have never seen but that is entrenched in the memory of her family: namely Corunna Downs station, which Daisy left when she was removed from her mother and placed into service. Returning to Corunna Downs allows for both women to experience first-hand the living conditions of their extended family and to inhabit, albeit briefly, the same space as their grandmother and mother when she was a child. This is a crucial part of the journey, for on their way back to Perth, Gladys and Sally feel “[l]ike we’d suddenly come home and now we were leaving again. But we had a sense of place, now” ([2], p. 230). This sense of place is inextricable from that of belonging to the people who inhabit the place, as the landscapes in the North are described by Daisy watching the film of the trip according to the human activity that used to take place there ([2], p. 235). Morgan therefore proposes reconnecting with the ancestral land as a possible way to heal the trauma of removal, even the double removal of Daisy who was lost and lost her elder daughter as part of the Stolen Generations. Her severed ties with the Pilbara region are reconnected through her daughter and granddaughter’s pilgrimage; even if she does not set foot there, her flesh and blood do, and Daisy herself works through her trauma by the proxy of their family bond. Since the phantoms of child removal and incest were passed down to Gladys and Sally, they have the power to break the circle and propose a form of healing to Daisy.

6. Conclusions

Thus, I have argued that by presenting a form of healing of individual and collective trauma as a transgenerational dialogue anchored in Australian history, Morgan echoes a holistic approach to the psyche as a collective consciousness shared by kin, rather than a transcultural collective unconscious. Trauma studies would benefit from a broadening of the definition of trauma and from further engagement with postcolonial theory and Indigenous criticism to interrogate and move beyond a Eurocentric trauma paradigm. Indeed, in Indigenous contexts where intergenerational transmission has been interrupted by colonization, it befalls the younger generations to relieve the older ones of the wrongs inflicted by colonialism by helping them re-live their life-stories to bridge the gap between the past and the present. Memory in *My Place* functions as a multidirectional channel for traumatic returns and renewals, and as such it resonates with new developments in postcolonial and memory studies and offers a productive site for scholarly discussion. As Nancy Van Styvendale notes, the trauma of Native people is “[c]umulative, collective, intergenerational, and intersubjective” as well as “trans/historical” ([46], p. 203). As one of the earliest published text addressing this issue, *My Place* plays a pioneering role in the narrative transmission of transhistorical Indigenous trauma, and Stolen Generations memory in particular, with Sally’s autobiographical testimony creating what Stephen Muecke calls “the conditions for the other stories to appear in the appropriate sequence down a line which represents in a crucial way the *deferment of (narrative) authority*” ([47], p. 134; original emphasis). Not only does Sally’s story open a literary space for Arthur, Gladys, and Daisy’s

testimonies, but the novel itself garnered critical and public interest which created the conditions for the publication of subsequent Australian Aboriginal women's life-stories.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Peter Read. *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969*. Surry Hills: Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981.
2. Sally Morgan. *My Place*. London: Virago, 1988.
3. Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992.
4. Graham Huggan. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001.
5. Tim Rowse. "The Aboriginal Subject in Autobiography; Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*." *Australian Literary Studies* 16 (1993): 14–30.
6. Bart Moore-Gilbert. *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation*. London: Routledge, 2009.
7. Mary-Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2008.
8. Lizzie Finn. "Postnational Hybridity in Sally Morgan's *My Place*." *Moveable Type* 4 (2008): 11–28.
9. Maxine Hong Kingston. "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers." In *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue*. Edited by Guy Amirthanayagam. London: Macmillan, 1982, pp. 55–65.
10. Lee Quinby. "The Subject of Memoirs: *The Woman Warrior*'s Technology of Ideographic Selfhood." In *De/Colonizing the Subject: Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 297–320.
11. Kateryna Longley. "Autobiographical Storytelling by Australian Aboriginal Women." In *De/Colonizing the Subject: Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 370–84.
12. Stef Craps. "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma theory in the global age." In *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Edited by Gert Buelens, Samuel Durrant and Robert Eaglestone. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 45–61.
13. Giorgio Agamben. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.
14. Bill Ashcroft. *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London: Routledge, 2001.
15. Dori Laub. "An Event without a Witness: Testimony and Survival." In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. New York: Routledge, 1992.
16. Rosanne Kennedy. "The Narrator as Witness: Testimony, Trauma and Narrative Form." *Meridian* 16 (1997): 235–60.
17. Kay Schaffer, and Sidonie Smith. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

18. Nicholas T. Rand. "Introduction." In *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1994.
19. Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1996.
20. Stef Craps. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013.
21. Bruce B. Lawrence, and Aisha Karim. *On Violence: A Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
22. Rosanne Kennedy. "Australian Trials of Trauma: The Stolen Generations in Human Rights, Law, and Literature." *Comparative Literature Studies* 48 (2011): 333–55.
23. Deborah Madsen. "On Subjectivity and Survivance: Rereading Trauma through *the Heirs of Columbus* and *the Crown of Columbus*." In *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Edited by Gerald Vizenor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2008, pp. 61–87.
24. Laura S. Brown. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 100–12.
25. Marianne Hirsch. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29 (2008): 103–28.
26. Primo Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved*. London: Abacus Books, 1989.
27. Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
28. Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
29. Keith Windschuttle. "Why There Were No Stolen Generations (Part One)." *Quadrant Magazine*, 1 January 2010. Available online: <http://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2010/1-2/why-there-were-no-stolen-generations/> (accessed on 12 September 2013)
30. Dirk A. Moses. "Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': Genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust." *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (2002): 7–36.
31. Joe Lockhard. "Facing the Windigoo: Gerald Vizenor and Primo Levi." In *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Edited by Gerald Vizenor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 209–19.
32. Michael Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
33. Jackie Huggins. "Always Was, Always Will Be." *Australian Historical Studies* 25 (1993): 459–64.
34. Bain Attwood. "Portrait of an Aboriginal as an Artist: Sally Morgan and the Construction of Aboriginality." *Australian Historical Studies* 25 (1992): 302–18.
35. Francesca Di Blasio. "A path of words: The reception of autobiographical Australian Aboriginal writing in Italy." In *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*. Edited by Peter Read, Frances Peters-Little, and Anna Haebich. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008.
36. Georg Gugelberger, and Michael Kearney. "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America." *Latin American Perspectives* 18 (1991): 3–14.
37. Aileen Moreton-Robinson. *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000.
38. Sonya Andermahr, and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin. *Trauma Narratives and Herstory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010.

39. Wei Ming Dariotis. "Developing a Kin-Aesthetic: Multiraciality and Kinship in Asian and Native North American Literature." In *Mixed Race Literature*. Edited by Jonathan Brennan. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
40. Marianne Hirsch. "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (2001): 5–37.
41. Heather Goodall. *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996.
42. Deborah Bird Rose. "Hard Times: An Australian Study." In *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*. Edited by Klaus Neumann, Nicholas Thomas and Hilary Ericksen. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999.
43. Kevin Rudd. "Kevin Rudd's apology." *Creative Spirits Video*. Available online: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/sorry-apology-to-stolen-generations> (accessed on 17 May 2015).
44. Gerald Vizenor. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1998.
45. Gillian Whitlock. "In the Second Person: Narrative Transactions in Stolen Generations Testimony." *Biography* 24 (2001): 197–214.
46. Nancy Van Styvendale. "The Trans/Historicity of Trauma in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*." *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008): 203–23.
47. Stephen Muecke. *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies*. Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1992.

© 2015 by the author; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).