

Research Article

## The Story of the Stolen Generation and National Sentimentality in Sally Morgan's *My Place*

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**Abstract:** Australian Aboriginal literature is a new arena in the Australian literary scenario. Aboriginal women's writing has gained significant recognition in recent years for its diverse themes and concerns related to Indigenous studies. One such writer is Sally Morgan, a mixed-blood Australian whose works have garnered immense acclaim in recent years in Australia's literary world. Her maiden work, *My Place*, is both an autobiography and a testimonial about the stolen generation of Australia. The objective of this article is to learn about the Aboriginal people and to uncover the hidden history of the Australian Stolen Generation. It will also explore the bleak past of the afflicted inmates at the foster homes with reference to Daisy, Arthur, and Gladys, featured in *My Place*. In the course of the study, the buried past of the Stolen Generation will not only be unearthed, but the murky lives of contemporary Australian Aboriginal people will also be brought to light.

**Keywords:** Australian; Aborigines; stolen generation; mixed-race

## Introduction

On the great Australian continent, Aboriginal children have been removed from their families since the earliest times of contact with the British. This exploration examines the discussions, feelings, and lived experiences of members of the Stolen Generation in Australia, primarily in the 20th century, to create a new narrative and theoretical understanding of these removal acts. Aboriginal writing in Australia began as a revolutionary attempt to rewrite the history of the land and its people against the fictionalized white-washed history that came from the whites. There are also mixed-race Aboriginal women writers in the literary scene whose personal writings have gained much more attention from readers who wish to read about the history and lives of the Stolen Generation in Aboriginal Australia. Lucie Wanderburgova says, "What is also quite interesting is the fact that most of the narrators of the Stolen Generation issues have been women and that the best known testimonies regarding removals have been autobiographical works" (Wanderburgova 11). Some of the notable women's writings are Margaret Tucker's *If Everyone Cared*, Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* (1978), Ella Simon's *Through My Eyes* (1978), and Ida West's *Pride against Prejudice* (1987).

## The Mixed Race descendant writers

The role of mixed-race descendant writers in transcribing the life of their ancestors, the affected members of the Stolen Generation, through biographies, testimonies, and life writings, is exemplary. Such mixed-race descendants, though not belonging to the Stolen Generation, are equally affected as Stolen Generation members, for they are deprived of their ancestral roots due to survival strategies that resulted in an identity crisis.

One such writer is Sally Morgan, who, although not a member of the Stolen Generation, as a mixed-race descendant, feels it is her duty to give a voice to the concerns of both full-blood and mixed-blood Aboriginal people through her writing. Her autobiographical work, *My Place*, is considered one of the best-known works by an Aboriginal writer. Lucie Wanderburgova underscores the educative power of the work "My Place became part of an Aboriginal studies programme and belongs to compulsory literature in Australian public schools (Wanderburgova 16). She uses the quotation of Schaffer and Smith, who say that *My Place* was "the first to be actively celebrated and heavily marketed, critically promoted" (Wanderburgova 61).

## **My Place: A representation of the Traumatic Lives of the Stolen Generation.**

Sally Morgan's *My Place* is a representative work in various aspects. It is both an autobiography and a testimonial writing. The writer, through her autobiography, represents her community of mixed-race descendants who do not belong to the Stolen Generations, while also representing the affected members of the Stolen Generations through her testimonies. On the whole, the work represents mixed-race descendants, irrespective of whether they belong to the Stolen Generation. What is more important in dealing with the issue of the Stolen Generation is that the facts should be given without fiction. Authenticity is crucial in addressing such a pressing political and social

issue. Sally Morgan's autobiography features real-life characters sharing real-life experiences, thereby representing the neglected Aboriginal people and their mixed-race descendants.

The novel *My Place* carries life writings of three generations of mixed blood aborigines in Sally Morgan's family that includes Sally Morgan's life as a Mixed-blood free Australian, her mother Gladys, a Stolen Generation member, and Sally Morgan's grandmother Daisy and her brother Arthur, who were also members of the Stolen Generation. The testimony of Gladys, Daisy, and Arthur presents an accurate picture of the lives of Stolen Generation members in foster homes and their sense of identity as Aboriginal people.

The objective of this article is to identify the aborigines and to trace the veiled history of Australian Stolen Generations. It will also explore the bleak past of afflicted inmates at the foster home with reference to Daisy, Arthur, and Gladys, featured in *My Place*. In the course of the study, the buried past of the Stolen Generation will not only be unearthed, but the murky lives of contemporary Australian Aboriginal people will also be shed light on.

The British colonial invasion of the Aboriginal land of Australia happened in the year 1788. They called themselves the 'protector' of the native community and the civilizing masters of the ignorant mob. The white colonizers used various strategies to wipe out the native race, and they almost succeeded in their attempts when the aborigine population began to decline and its ratio reached an all-time low. However, the entire race could not be wiped out as mixed blood children of Aboriginality began to mushroom in their blood. This new race of mixed-blood population posed a threat to the colonial masters as they could not be led to live with their aboriginal community, which would increase the aboriginal population; nor could they be allowed to live in the white community, as those mixed-race children had a small quantity of black blood in them. Hence, they were removed from their Aboriginal communities, who came to be branded as the Stolen Generation of Australia. According to Lucie Wanderburgova, the term 'Stolen Generation' was first used by Peter Read as the title for a magazine article, which was then followed by a book, *The Stolen Generations* (1981).

Children and babies were removed from their families either by force or trickery to be placed in 'girls' or 'boys' homes, foster families, or missions. They were totally cut off from any kind of contact with their Aboriginal families and were severely punished if they did try to run off to their community from white control. Instead of education, they were trained to be domestic workers. At the age of 18, they were released into the white society, often scared for survival in white society due to the hostile experiences in such foster homes and missions. Such forced removal of mixed-blood children from their Aboriginal families fills the dark pages of the history of Australia.

In the novel *My Place*, the testimonies of Gladys, Daisy, and Arthur clearly show that only children of mixed descent were removed by the authorities from the Aboriginal clan, on account of the 'white blood' in them. Blacks were not "considered fit to raise their child with white blood". For the same reason, full-blood Aboriginal

children were not removed. The worst condition of being Aboriginal was therefore more prominent in the mix blood children, as members of the Stolen Generation.

Such mix-blood children were either removed by force or through strategic means. In *My Place*, we learn that Daisy, Arthur, and Gladys were all removed by strategic means under the pretext of giving education. Arthur shares how he was removed from his family, “they told my mother and the other we’d be back soon. We wouldn’t be gone for long, they said” (Morgan 231). The Aboriginal people ignorantly hoped that their children would be back someday. The ignorance and the helplessness of the Aboriginal people were also misused for the removal.

The same helplessness was felt when the children were removed by force. “The most heart-rending image is the one which conveyed small black children crying and begging to be allowed to stay with their mothers, but being harshly pulled away as they clung to their mothers. The same situation occurs in Doris Pilkington’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, when the three young girls were forcefully removed from their home. The threat to the uncertainty of life was also experienced by the Aboriginal community when children were suddenly abducted illegally without proper notification. It is indeed right that they are termed the Stolen Generation, for in many cases, children were literally stolen from the community without notice. There are also cases where parents themselves willingly accepted the removal of their children for various reasons. Their incapability to feed and raise their children due to poverty, and their desire for the children to grow in better living condition, free from diseases and malnutrition, let them willingly accept the removal as evidenced from the report “We have spoken with people who, even today, honestly believe that it was right to transfer indigenous children to white families because this would give them the material benefits they would not otherwise have” (Bringing 230). The mixed-race children were removed and segregated further. The racist consciousness was so powerful among whites that they separated children according to the proportion of color in them. Arthur tells his experience of how an English authority visited the mission and separated the ‘darker kids’ from the ‘lighter kids’ for he didn’t like them being together (Morgan 233). Such constant separation deprived children of any intimacy or companionship among themselves.

Under the disguise of ‘protectors’ for the aborigines, the white authorities exercised a stranglehold of power in their lives that resulted in distrust. Lucie Wanderburgova, in her thesis, says, “The officials were labeled as protectors and their task was to control their lives and the geographical location of aboriginal people of mixed percentage” (Wanderburgova 32). The historical figure, A O Neville, the chief protector of natives, Western Australia, 1915-1940, himself failed to protect the Aborigines and turned against them by activating legal policies like ‘Miscegenation’ and removal of ‘half caste’ Aboriginal children from their mothers. Arthur, too, says that Neville was still the Protector of Aborigines. Any blackfella that had dealings with Neville got no good words to say about him. He wasn’t protecting the aborigines, he was destroyin’ them” (Morgan 265). The fear of authority and removal is constant throughout their lives.

Due to removal from the Aboriginal mothers and because the white masters did not want to own their half caste offspring, these mixed blood Stolen Generation students grew up without the knowledge of who parented them. The difficulty Gladys had in knowing her white father, the mere 'blank' against the name of her father on her birth certificate, makes the view evident. Also, Sally says, "Hardly any Aboriginal people had birth certificates those days" (Morgan 193). Daisy faces the same split identity. "As Daisy Brockman, she is the daughter of the station owner; as Daisy Corunna, she is the daughter of 'station' that is daughter of no one in particular" and "her white father's denial places her in a position of an illegitimate half cast child" (Kennedy 4,5).

The identity crisis faced by mixed blood children does not end here. They face split identity in their foster homes, where they had their Aboriginal names changed, the basic source of their Aboriginal identity, and then were deprived of using the Aboriginal language, by the replacement of the colonizer's language, English. They were also forced to change their Aboriginal religion to Christianity. The change of name, language, and religion resulted in the loss of one's basic identity. Arthur informs, "the first thing they did was Christianize us (Morgan 232). In fact, the very first line of Daisy's testimony reflects a sense of loss of identity: "My name is Daisy Corunna, I am Arthur's sister. My Aboriginal name is Talahue" (Morgan 402).

Once the name, which is the basic identity of a person, is removed, the next step is the removal of one's mother tongue. The children in the foster home were not allowed to use their Aboriginal language and were restricted from using it. Arthur in *My Place* undergoes a similar experience when he is deprived of using his own language and forced to talk English. He recalls saying, "I wasn't allowed to talk blackfella after that," and adds 'I liked my language, but I got a good hiding if I spoke it. I had to talk English" (Morgan 227). Children were also taught that it was a shame to use the Aboriginal language. Daisy feels ashamed of using her language in front of people and secretly uses it while communicating with Arthur. Aboriginal people today mostly speak English, with a few Aboriginal phrases and words that contribute to Australian Aboriginal English, thereby contributing to the decline of the original Aboriginal languages.

All the above factors resulted in the deep psychological and emotional injury that the children were unable to escape from. The experiences left them psychologically and emotionally crippled for life, as a stolen person observes, "it's like a hole in your heart that can never heal" (Bringing 154).

### **Bringing Them Home Report**

The national inquiry was initiated in response to lobbying by Aboriginal activists and organizations, which helped members of Stolen Generations make contact with separated families. Sir Ronald Wilson headed the national inquiry. It was neither a legal trial nor a truth commission. It did, however, expose to public judgment the historic treatment of Indigenous people, particularly women and their children, and the regime of compulsory assimilation, which gave it the status of historic 'Trauma Trial'.

'Trauma Trials, Felman argues, grant 'authority...to trauma. The national inquiry was groundbreaking in articulating and transmitting the traumatic memories of child removal and identifying the devastating effects on Indigenous lives and communities that persist to this day. It legitimized the new idiom in Australian culture –the Stolen Generation, which provided the collective framework of perception. On 13 February 2008, the then-Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, finally issued the long-awaited apology on behalf of the Australian government to the affected members of the Stolen Generations.

**Conclusion:** It is an undeniable reality that members of the Stolen Generation, who are now leading free lives, still feel detached from their family, language, cultural, and spiritual roots. Their basic Aboriginal identity is questioned. The separation is so much that they are not able to identify with their own Aboriginal kith and kin, even after reunion. Life in missions and foster homes has left a profound impact on their lives, causing more mental trauma and spiritual ache that can never be healed.

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