

MA in Literary Studies

Department of English

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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**The Representation of Diasporic Subjectivity in Two Late 20th
Century Autobiographies: Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Michael
Ondaatje's *Running in the Family***

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature

2020

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Abstract

Autobiography is the most widely used and most generally understood term for life narrative that is westernly claimed. It has gained fame in the colonial periods as it helped the colonized subjects narrate their diaspora selves and in so many cases journey back in search of roots and history. My thesis aims at presenting the effects of modernity and colonization on nourishing the sense of hybridity, diaspora and identity crisis in two late 20th Century autobiographies, *My Place* (1987) by Sally Morgan (Australian,) and *Running in the Family* (1982) by Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lankan-Canadian).

My Place is an autobiography of a young woman, Sally, who comes to claim her identity as an Aboriginal Australian and aims at acknowledging the Aboriginal history within the Australian national discourse. On the other hand, *Running in the Family* is a fictionalized memoir that maps the return of the migrant Ondaatje to the familial and now postcolonial “Ceylon” of his child-hood, in the late 1970s. In my study of the postcolonial self as represented in both works, I adapt Deconstructive Post-colonialism, making clear how Jacques Derrida’s Deconstruction approach lies at the heart of Post-colonialism and postcolonial tendency to decolonize the self.

My thesis focuses on the postcolonial discourse and the hybridizing effects of the assimilation policies of colonization in both works and how it leads to blurring and splitting the self and complicating that journey of self-rediscovery. It also presents Sally Morgan and Michael Ondaatje as examples of the colonized subject's writing back to the empire and articulating its hybridity through destabilizing and deterritorializing the language of the center.

In addition, my thesis questions the outcomes of such journeys of self-rediscovery in terms of both the cultural and biological self-identification and emphasizes the impossibility of an absolute return to any one of them. Both Sally Morgan and Michael Ondaatje end up facing the same questions which lead but to an open end and more contradictions.

Finally, I discuss how both authors employ history, collective stories and heritages, and memory to retain the missing parts of their past and trace back their identities, hoping to find some answers about their true selves. However, they end up staggering between past and present, individuality and collectivity. My thesis thus tackles the unreliability of history and authenticity of memory and deconstructs the concept of ultimate one truth.

Introduction

“All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, ‘to tell their stories their own way.’”
(575)

From Stern’s *Tristram Shandy*

Autobiography is the most widely used and most generally understood term for life narrative. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines ‘autobiography’ as the biography of a person narrated by himself or herself¹. The word “autobiography” derives from the Greek combination: *auto* means “self,” *bios* “life,” and *graphe* “writing”(Olney 237). Despite being named early in the 19th C., first-person autobiographical writing originates in antiquity. Saint Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions* is the first Western autobiography ever written in Latin around AD 400². Rising to popularity in the early nineteenth century, autobiography has proved to be an unstable genre, problematic to define; and in many ways, it remains a subject of critical contention. Simple and apparently satisfactory definitions such as ‘an account of a person's life by himself/ herself’ do not

¹ “Autobiography.” Meriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Meriam-Webster, [http:// www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/autobiography](http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/autobiography). Accessed 29 May 2017.

² “Autobiography.” Wikipedia. Wikipedia.org, n.p, [http:// www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiography](http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiography). Accessed 29 May 2017.

³ In the title of my thesis I used the word “autobiographies” to describe both works, as it is the general word used

adequately encompass the variety of styles and purposes with which autobiographical writing can be said to exist. It has, therefore, a tendency to outstep proposed critical boundaries making it at once difficult to classify, and rich with possibilities.

It would be more appropriate to start with a thorough explanation of the differences between autobiography and other genres closely related to autobiography such as biography, personal novel, journal or diary and memoir. However, the differences among those different genres might become blurred in many examples, especially in the modern age.

To start with, a biography is a detailed description of someone else's life. A biographer is somebody who writes other people's lives, whereas a life narrator is somebody who writes his or her own life. So the element of subjectivity is absent from biographies. When it comes to the novel, both the life narrative and the novel share some qualities we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting and so on. Many people often confuse life narrative and fiction narrated in the first person voice (novels), especially that many of the 19th c. novels are presented as life stories of fictional characters. However, in "The Autobiographical Pact," Philippe Lejeune confirms that "what defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name"(19). So, when the names of the author and the narrator are identical, this marks the life narrative.

There is another difference in terms of the relation to time and time boundaries. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that, because of its fictional aspect, a novel has no temporal limits i.e. the incidents have the flexibility to happen in the past, the present and the future. However, they argue that

This does not mean that life narrators always and simply offer a retrospective narrative in chronological order of the life lived to the point of its writing. They can range far into the past, even the cultural past before the writer's birth, and they may offer an imaginative journey into the future. (9)

This indicates that life-narratives can break away from the traditional temporal structure depicting something in the present time or even imagining something that might happen in the future. However, Smith and Watson reassure that, in spite of all of that, life narrators are bound by the limits of their own “temporal, geographical and cultural milieux”(9).

While a diary—which is a *daily* record of personal matters— usually lacks the retrospective point of view of the autobiography, a memoir is more closely associated with autobiography. However, the slight difference between a memoir and an autobiography is that the former tends, as Roy Pascal claims, to focus less on the self and more on others during the autobiographer's narration of his or her life (5).

In my thesis, I will tackle two 20th-Century life-narratives: *My Place*, which is categorized as an autobiography and *Running in the Family*, classified under a fictionalized memoir³. *My Place* is a life narrative of a young woman, Sally, that comes to claim her identity as an Aboriginal Australian only to realise the effects of the colonial practices on the older generations of her family, and subsequently herself. On the other hand, *Running in the Family* maps the return of Ondaatje, the migrant writer, to the familial and now postcolonial geography of the “Ceylon” of his child-hood, in the late 1970s.

Obviously enough, as an act of writing that has always been hand in hand with the inner human self and the concept of identity, autobiography—like the individual identity—underwent the same hybridizing effects of the cultural changes throughout the centuries. Since autobiography was mainly claimed as a Western genre, that meant its preoccupation with writing the aspired Western individuality and hegemony, presenting the autonomous self of the narrator who viewed himself/ herself in terms of their unique attributes and qualities. However, a different, more recent kind of autobiography came to light, especially in the wake

³ In the title of my thesis I used the word “autobiographies” to describe both works, as it is the general word used for life narration. In the same vein, “autobiographical” is a general adjective too. However, although it might seem more appropriate to use the words “life-writing” or “life-narration”—as they serve the purpose of my thesis of breaking away from the Western terminology of the ‘autonomous self’—I insist on using the term ‘autobiography’ (with its suffix ‘auto’ which means ‘one’ or ‘self’) in order to emphasize the existing contradiction between such a genre and the new fragmented self it tries to represent. Similarly, I use the word ‘subjectivity’ (which again means ‘selfhood’) after the adjective ‘diasporic’ to stress the conflict and tension between the two words (which reflects the postcolonial reality) and to highlight the inadequacy of such Western concepts to represent the diasporic self.

of colonization and its political discourse, as Penny van Toorn affirms in the case of the emergence of indigenous life writing: “[T]oday’s indigenous life writings are part of an older discursive formation that dates back to early colonial times, and incorporates traditional indigenous paradigms and protocols of oral communication”(1). Life writing was a way of challenging the subaltern’s inability to testify (Spivak 308) through narrating themselves and their stories; reserving their oral traditions; remembering lives; revealing secrets, suppressed and unspoken knowledges and memories. This applies to much of the recent indigenous life writing which, according to Toorn, “is motivated by a similar desire to get Australia’s hidden black history onto the written record” after being long forgotten from the colonial memory (16).

In the same vein, postcolonial autobiographies are in fact inseparably connected with the problematic Western philosophy of the autonomous subject, truth and meaning which was no longer able to represent or carry the ‘burden’ of the newly emerging postcolonial subjectivity which is flux, never stable, multiple and heterogeneous. This meant the birth of hybrid postcolonial autobiographies which Caren Kaplan calls “out-law genres,” such as autoethnography, which “mix two conventionally ‘unmixible’ elements—autobiography criticism and autobiography as thing itself”(208). Those out-law genres allow the postcolonial subjects to “assert cultural agency”(Smith and watson 45). They propose new concepts of

subjectivity—a new reconceptualization of subjectivity— as transcultural, fragmented, hybrid and diasporic. In addition, they denounce the Western aspect of individuality, making space for a hybrid form that includes and holds collectivity and orality at heart.

Adopting Deconstructive Post-colonialism in my study of these two works, the relationship between post-colonialism and deconstruction needs to be explained. In general, one cannot ignore that the origins of many of the key concepts and concerns of postcolonial theory trace back to the earlier French theorists. Many postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are clearly indebted to many French theorists such as Louis Althusser (Marxism), Michel Foucault (Poststructuralism), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Poststructuralism), and Jacques Derrida (Deconstruction/Post-structuralism)—to name only those we have come to associate with postcolonial theory.

Deconstruction, originated by Derrida, questions the ability of language to adequately represent reality. It highlights the resistance of language and text against having one fixed meaning because its meaning is always “deferred.” In his “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Stuart Hall further explains Derrida’s idea of

deferral of meaning⁴ through the use of the word “differance” instead of “difference”:

Derrida uses the anomalous 'a' in his way of writing 'difference' - *differance* - as a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the word/concept. It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the *trace* of its other meanings. [...] This second sense of difference challenges the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings, (229)

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, moreover, preferred to translate Derrida's controversial French statement 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte', mentioned in his book *Of Grammatology*, as “There is no outside-text”⁵. This translation might present a clearer understanding of Derrida's idea that “there is nothing outside context, there is no perception or experience which is not bound up with effects of text or language”(31).

⁴ Christopher Norris also explains Derrida's idea of “difference”: Its sense remains suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer', both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. [...] Where Derrida breaks new ground, and where the science of grammatology takes its cue, is in the extent to which 'differ' shades into 'defer'. This involves the idea that meaning is always *deferred*, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification.(31)

⁵ A much quoted and much misunderstood translation is “there is nothing outside the text”. This translation is said to be misleading because Derrida's point is not that there is no such thing as a 'real world', but that there is no access to 'the world' except through language which is not limited to being only verbal, but can be anything that works as a system of signs. In other words, 'the world' is conceived but inevitably through discourse.

Nevertheless, was Derrida's deconstructive approach concerned only with the language of texts? Should it be perceived only from a textual perspective? In fact, Derrida's statement, that deconstruction works to denounce the idea of the ruling illusion of Western metaphysics⁶, gives us the answer:

Metaphysics – the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo- European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his reason, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason. Which does not go uncontested.[. . .] White mythology – metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest. (*Margins of Philosophy*, 213)

Later on, Robert Young reaffirms in his essay, "Deconstruction and the Postcolonial", the argument that Jacques Derrida's 'own' position, as a subject to French colonialism, cannot be somehow ignored or considered irrelative to the deconstructive approach he articulates. Therefore, his work can be seen, even if somewhat indirectly, as challenging the political tensions at the heart of colonialist ideology he was subjected to :

Derrida, neither French nor Algerian, always anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of Western ethnocentrism from *Of Grammatology's*

⁶ Derrida insisted that "there was nothing 'which would be considered the essence of the West in Western philosophy', that [he] didn't believe in the continuity of the philosophy of the West, that the unity of 'Western philosophy' was an illusion, the product of the effects of a representation, a dogma." (Young, 188)

very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice, developed deconstruction as a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonization within the metropolis. (193)

Similarly, Bennett and Royle argue, that Derrida's idea amounts to more than just textual terms and expands to account for power and politics because "political, social, economic and historical forces are bound up in language, in discourse, in representation"(32). In other words, the deconstruction theory with its process of alienating and postponing meaning of a text breaks out from its alleged, textual limitations to address other critical, cultural questions which are of a high importance to the post-colonial approach, such as identity, truth, history and colonial ideology and discourse.⁷

In "Interrogating Identity," Bhabha emphasizes the relationship of deconstruction to postcolonial theory by re-inscribing Derrida's deferral of meaning in a postcolonial context to portray the state of cultural alienation and postponement of meaning of the postcolonial self as well:

My insistence on locating the postcolonial subject *within* the play of the subaltern instance of writing is an attempt to develop Derrida's passing remark that the history of the decentred subject and its dislocation of

⁷ According to the postcolonial theory, self is a fiction, an illusion constituted in discourse. The true self can never be discovered, unmasked or revealed because there is nothing at the core. At any given moment, the Self is different from itself at any other given moment. Moreover, since the Self is split and fragmented, it can no longer be conceptualised as unitary. There is no ultimate, unitary 'truth' which is also clearly declared by Derrida: "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions" (217).

European metaphysics is concurrent with the emergence of the problematic of cultural difference within ethnology.(59)

This shows us that postcolonial approach of decolonization is effectively a form of deconstruction, a postcolonial one. It also asserts that “the ‘postcolonial’ and deconstruction are always already inhabited by, or exposed to, one another” (Syrotinski 4).

In this thesis, I follow the premises of Deconstructive Post-colonialism in my study of both autobiographies, *My Place* and *Running in the Family*. My thesis aims at unraveling the postcolonial discourse and its relation to power; breaking down the old notions of autonomous truth, self, and meaning as illusions of capitalist culture; and deconstructing the self into multiplicity of subject positions, none of which can claim an ultimate truth. It also focuses on analyzing the different factors of autobiographical subjectivity inscribed in these two postcolonial life-writings: identity, self-representation, memory, history, and truth.

The first and second chapters of my thesis highlight the factors of identity and self-representation in both works. They show how both writers challenge the concepts of a unified, sovereign subject and reveal the undeniable role of discourse, ideology, cultural practices and power on them and their communities as postcolonial subjects. First and foremost, these two chapters tackle the colonial discourse of assimilation as reflected in both life narratives, and how it frames the

reconceptualization of fragmented selves of both Sally Morgan and Michael Ondaatje and their postcolonial communities. They also present the postcolonial experience of both of the authors as “diaspora experience”⁸. The experience of diaspora naturally and fully shapes the ideas in both Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* and Morgan’s *My Place*. Both books seem to suggest seeking for alternative ways of negotiating their in-between place which is volatile and marked by flux . Homi Bhabha calls this space a “Third Space” and asserts that, in such a space, “essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures” are untenable (58), which can be described in Derrida’s deconstructive sense of *différance*, as ‘a deferred meaning of cultural identity’.

Moreover, the first and second chapters analyze how both authors textualize the struggles and experience of living cultural diversity and diaspora in the text itself and the language used when writing the self. Both authors challenge the Western modes of linguistic representation that are not adequate enough for the postcolonial subjectivity and present new politics of representation. In both *My Place* and *Running in the Family*, we see two postcolonial authors who set off in a journey

⁸ In his essay, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall insists that “the diaspora experience” does not mean “the old, the imperializing, the hegemonising form of ‘ethnicity’” that “refer[s] us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea.” He rather means a diaspora that is defined “ by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by hybridity”(235).

back in search of ancestral roots, but end up instead articulating a variety of selves all along the way of their self-rediscovery.

As Smith and Watson suggest, there are multiple “I”s presented through the autobiographical act of writing: the “real” or historical “I”, the narrating “I”, the narrated “I”, the ideological “I” (59)⁹. Postcolonial life-writing opens a new space in texts where those multiple “I”s can multiply, interlock, separate and have a dialogue. In both autobiographical texts, the first-person pronoun “I” is neither unified nor stable. It breaks into far too many pieces to adequately represent the fragmented, split and multiple identities it enunciates. For example, the narrating “I” might make many shifts from addressing the readers directly to indulging the collective and articulating the community by speaking multiple voices. Here, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogism (xxiv) and heteroglossia (xxi) replaces the unitary “I” of the individual with multiple dialogic voices of the group.

The narrated “I” becomes also multiple, fragmented, and heterogeneous in autobiographical self-writing. The readers see many narratees represented in the

⁹ The historical “I” is simply the author who exists outside the text and the story boundaries. “This “I” is unknown and unknowable by readers” Smith and Watson say, “and is not the “I” that we gain access to in an autobiographical narrative.”(59) In other words, it is the real person of the author that lives/lived as external a subject of reference to the autobiography. The “I” available to readers, the one that they see in the autobiographical text is a combination of the other three “I”s: one explicit (the narrating “I”) and two implicit (the narrated and ideological “I”s). The narrating “I” is the one that tells the story and plays the role of the narrator and thus constructs the narrated “I”. Thus, the narrated “I” is the version of self as enunciated and recollected by the narrating “I” and “the protagonist of the narrative” (60). The concept of the “ideological I”, suggested by Smith and Watson, signifies “the concept of personhood culturally available to the narrator when he tells the story”(61). That is to say, it is the historical, cultural and political discourse of the narrator, which constructs the meaning of self/selves he articulates as narrated “I”s.

text by the narrating “I” “the ideological stakes of those representations in the present of narration” (Smith and Watson 64). At some instances, the self might alternate roles as narrating “I” and narrated “I” in the context of narration or might reach a clash between these two “I”s that reflects the clash between past and presents selves.

The third chapter of my thesis deals with the representation of Autobiographical subjectivity in both works through history, memory and truth. Both authors try to recapture their fragmented pasts and identities by reaching back to history, family, home and native/oral traditions. Since their attempts to recall the past and history are mainly dependent on memories, myths and collective stories, the aspect of authenticity and ultimate truth is to be questioned especially in the light of postcolonial discourses. We can see how both writers challenge the traditional concepts of truth and history, each in one’s own way. Both show a desire to strengthen one’s identity through the act of writing, thus shedding light not on history's truth but on the idea that history is produced or created in telling and a rejection of fixed and stable meanings.

Furthermore, the third chapter examines how both works describe that gap between the author’s experience of place and the language available to describe it. Both authors detached from his/her own language because it “has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power” (Ashcroft et

al. 9). Therefore, coming back to experience and write one's 'new home', the language of the colonizers seems inadequate to do so as it is. It needs to be deterritorialized. According to Gills Deleuze and Félix Guattari, deterritorializing a language is making it vibrate by "an asignifying *intensive utilization of [it]*" (22). Having understood the role of language as a medium of power, postcolonial writers define their writings by replacing the language of the colonizer, reconstructing it and adjusting it to capture the postcolonial reality of home and postcolonial diaspora of self. The "intolerable wrestle with words and meanings," as the postcolonial theorist, D.E.S. Maxwell, puts it, "has its aim to subdue the experience to the language, the exotic life to the imported tongue"(qtd in Ashcroft et al. 24).

In both works, the act of writing and the use of the English language—language of the colonizer—are deterritorialized in many ways varying from including words and translations in their texts, interweaving oral materials and traditions into the fabric of the written text, revolting against the traditional chronological order of events and authorial 'I' in life narratives—in *Running in the Family*— and always merging individuality with the we-group of their communities. This "appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages," Ashcroft et al. point out, "marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (37).

My thesis ends with a conclusion that cultural identity proves to be, just as history, doomed to endless repositioning; it is always creolized and hybrid. That is to say, a fixed identity becomes a mirage and home a mere imagination. In other words, trying to achieve a balance between their multiple biological selves and cultural ones, both writers seem to settle in a no-where land, a third space, staggering in an in-between position.

Chapter I: Reterritorialization in Sally Morgan's *My Place*

Sally Morgan¹⁰ was born in the poor urban fringe of Perth, Western Australia in 1951. She grew up in suburban Manning with her mother, Gladys; grandmother, Daisy (or Nan); and her four siblings : Jilly, Billy, Helen and David. Her father is called William Joseph (Bill) who was working as a plumber. He had been a prisoner of war in Germany during WWI before he met Gladys. He was suffering from alcoholism and had been sick the whole story.

Morgan's book, *My Place*, was written in 1987, a year before the two-hundredth anniversary of Captain Phillip's arrival¹¹ with the first fleet in Sydney Harbor. This is ironic, of course, because as this book is an attempt to recover the indigenous heritage of Australia, the country is preparing to celebrate the start of the British colonization. It is also worth mentioning that *My Place* dates five years before the legal recognition of the native title acknowledging prior ownership of

¹⁰ I wanted to note that in my thesis, I address both my selected writers by using their first names and their surnames interchangeably but on the purpose of differentiating between the different "I"s I am discussing or analyzing: the historical or real "I", the narrating "I", the narrated "I" and the ideological "I". I referred to both authors by their surnames when addressing them as the historical "I": the authorial "I" which is located outside the text. However, I used their first names when addressed as the other three "I"s, which exist inside the text. At times, and depending on my own critical reading, when it felt like addressing the author "I" (even if beyond the text) and other three "I"s (fused together inside of the text) at the same time, I used a slash between the first name and surname.

¹¹ He arrived on January 18, 1788.

the land¹², and twenty years before the apology and the official acknowledgement of the Stolen Generations in 2008.¹³

My Place describes Sally Morgan's dawning realization, in her teen years, that her family was different and that she knew very little about their history. So in 1982, she set out to gather some information and travelled back to her grandmother's birthplace. Initially, she met strong resistance from her family, which only made her more curious and resolved; and as she began to discover the facts, she discovered the enormity of the injustices buried in the history of this country. "It could all have been done differently", Morgan points out in her interview with Mary Wright, "Aboriginal people didn't have to be treated that way" ("A Fundamental Question" 93). What had started out as an indefinite search turned into an overwhelming spiritual and emotional pilgrimage as Sally and her family were confronted with their own suppressed history and fundamental questions about their identity.

However, before tackling question of national self-awareness and Australianess, we must take into consideration the diversity of Australia before and after

¹² The native title act 1993 is "the recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have rights and interests to land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs as set out in Australian Law" as Kimberley Land Council explained in "what is native title?": www.klc.org.au/what-is-native-title

¹³ On February 2008, the Parliament of Australia issued a formal apology to the Stolen Generations of Australia's Indigenous peoples . the Stolen Generations refer to the forcible removal of Aboriginal children—"not of full blood"—from their communities, alienating them from their families and tribes by called federal and state government agencies). It was delivered by Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. You can watch the video on: www.youtube.be/xiLnsFyAVqE

colonization. It is known from the work of archaeologists that human occupation of Australia dates back 65,000 years¹⁴. The first people probably came from South-East Asia¹⁵ and they were called ‘Indigenous,’ meaning First nation people. This term is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal people inhabited the whole of mainland Australia and Tasmania while the Torres Strait Islanders lived on the islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea, in what is now called the Torres Strait Islands. Both mingled with each other and engaged in trades.

The European expeditions to Australia started in 1606 with the Dutch and Spanish navigators explored different parts of it. The first British explorer, James Cook, arrived in 1770. However, it was in 1788—officially to reduce the criminal population and unofficially to make use of the human resources—that the British government sends out a fleet of ships to create a penal colony¹⁶ in New South Wales. Obviously enough, this bridgeheads for further British colonisation. In 1827, Britain claims the entire continent. Until the 1830, about 58000¹⁷ convicts were brought to Australia and were sent to work in a colony as they formed the majority of the colony’s population, and the flow of convicts increased until it

¹⁴ The Australian archaeologist from the University of Queensland in Australia, Chris Clakson, was the lead author of the study. Link: www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/science/humans-reached-australia-Aboriginal-65000-years.html.

¹⁵ According to the Australian Museum, the most widely accepted viewpoint is that the first humans came from a recent migration of Homo Sapiens through South-east Asia. Link: www.australianmuseum.net.au/learn/science/human-evolution/the-spread-of-people-to-australia/

¹⁶ a place where convicted criminals are sent to because Britain’s prisons were overcrowded

¹⁷ Link: www.britanica.com/place/Australia/An-authoritarian-society

reached 160,000 in 1868. They were seen as a source of labour to build the colony, rather than just being sent away from Britain as punishment for their crimes. From 1788, Australia was treated as a colony of settlement, not of conquest. Aboriginal land was taken over by British colonists on the premise that it is a “terra nullius”¹⁸. It took the British colonizers many years to understand the different environment of the colony and diseases and malnutrition were widespread during the first decades of the settlement. By the end of the 1850s, there were six separate Australian colonies: New South Wales, Tasmania (originally settled in 1803, but separated from New South Wales in 1825), Western Australia (established in 1829), South Australia, including the Northern Territory (established in 1834), Victoria (detached from New South Wales in 1851), and Queensland (detached from New South Wales in 1859) (Wickens et al 4-7). Even after colonization, Australia was home to many immigrants from diverse countries. This diversity framed by the notion of nationalism European colonialism brought in has been really important in shaping the modern, postcolonial Australia.

Obviously enough, Sally Morgan’s *My Place* is a life writing of a third-generation-Aboriginal, postcolonial self. Even coming late to the realization of the colonial discourse she lives in—as well as that of her mother and grandmother before her—Morgan’s autobiography unveils the impact of the political discursive

¹⁸ It is a Latin term meaning a land that is uninhabited and thus, belongs to no-one. The British colonization declared Australia as a terra nullius to justify their acquisition of the land by occupation without any treaty or payment.

practices, either on the identities of her family members or on other details that constitute the context of her life—even on a subconscious level— as nonwhite Australian. Moreover, as Sally/Morgan claims her book as an attempt to record her story and history, *My Place* poses many other critical questions: at the end, was Sally/Morgan really able to fully identify with her newly discovered self and cultural legacy? Was she able to make an absolute ‘return’ or ‘recovery’ of her Aboriginal past when experiencing it with her still-inside-colonial-discourse self?

I. Colonial Discourse and Assimilation

The formation of identities, Michel Foucault points out, is a function of historically specific discourses. Understanding the Foucauldian concept of discourse¹⁹ will make it much easier for us to analyze the colonial discourse of de-Aboriginalization and its reproduction of ideologies²⁰ of domination such as racism and sexism. This will lead us to a better understanding of the formation of Sally's identity as well as that of her family members. However, we first need to understand the relation of discourse to power. Discourse does not tell us who has power and who does not, Foucault argues, discourse is itself a medium of power. Thus, if we control discourse, we control power:

In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power.
(*Power/Knowledge* 94)

Apart from the traditional, visible mode of power which is the repressive one that involves mental or physical violence (eg. the police, judges, law), the most important and effective modes of power, according to Foucault, works in a subtler, less visible way(*Discipline Punish* 170) and is called the normalizing power.

¹⁹ Foucault uses the term "discourse" to denote the social practices that (re)produce knowledge and meaning. These social practices constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. (Weedon, 108)

²⁰ Ideologies are largely acquired, expressed, and spread by discourse.

“Normalization”(184) is the process where the individual is not just categorized but also controlled and even constructed by the power vested in institutions and social practices, or what Foucault calls, “disciplinary punishment/penalty/power” (171-183)²¹. It basically depends on establishing a regime of representation and positions of power through internal implementation of knowledge²² as the norm (for example, inferiority, slavery, racism, etc) or what Stuart hall called “[i]nternalization of the self-as-other” (“New ethnicities” 445).

In *My Place*, this process of normalization is applied through the assimilation policy and its ideologies of generational and gender divisions. This assimilation policy took many levels: educational, religious, racial and linguistic. Generational division is one of the apparent results of the protection²³ and assimilation²⁴ policies which mainly aimed at Aboriginal children, not of full blood. The Australian historian, Richard Broome, suggests that the European colonial strategy

²¹ “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (170).

²² Foucault explains the essential role of knowledge in the politics of power: “every point in the exercise of power is a site where knowledge is formed. Conversely, every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power” (*Power and Norms* 62).

²³ The protection policy was stated by the Australian Federal and State Government in 1937. It supported the forcible removal of Aboriginal children—“not of full blood”—from their communities, alienating them from their families and tribes. They were called the *Stolen Generation*. It was put in many territories to control the relation between Aboriginal people and Europeans. Colonizers perceived mixed generations resulted from different kinds of sexual intercourse between native people and colonizers as something threatening to the state of civilization the Europeans brought along. White or fair-skinned Aborigines had to live with the stigma that they are the children of a white parent who disowned them or the product of sexual abuse. They were most likely associated with treachery and inauthenticity and were accused of not being Aboriginal enough, nor European enough. That is why such policies took action in the form of segregating that separated full-blood Aborigines from Europeans to prevent any further contact and keep the European “purity of race” with its privileges intact.

²⁴ The assimilation policy is based on the idea that Aboriginal savagery and permissivity should be tamed by absorbing and assimilating it into the white culture. That is why they exposed them to the influences of the European culture and increased the distance between them and their communities and traditional culture.

aimed at the ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal children because they “were less steeped in their own culture, and thus had less to lose and possibly more to gain from the European presence”(63). In other words, they are more adaptable to living and integrating in the modern European society.

In *My Place*, Sally’s family seems to live a state of doubleness resulting from the clash between their Aboriginal identity and the “white life” imposed by the assimilation policy. Each one of them shows a different degree of embedment in that policy because of their different ‘contexts’ of lives. As removing half-caste children from their parents was the first step towards assimilation, we can see that the effect of this process falls the heaviest in the case of Nan and Arthur.

Nan, as the oldest one in the family, is the closest one to her Aboriginal roots and the most damaged one. She lived in an era of oppression and abuse against the Aborigines by the white colonizers. She was a half caste who grew up working as a maid for the white Brockman’s family. For her whole life, she has “been made to feel that anything that was Aboriginal was bad” (Morgan, “A Fundamental Question” 106). Stuart Hall further explains this when he points out the serious role of “cultural power and normalization” in shaping our perception of selves as “the Other” and affecting “the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 225).

In a racist society where white is superior to black, whiteness stands for power, privilege and advantage; it stands for beauty. That is why a desire to become white has developed. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon says, “the black man wants to be white the white man slaves to reach a human level” (11), emphasizing the role of power and superiority that are associated with being white. He later confesses bitterly : “However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (12).

The state of diaspora in Nan’s case develops to a state of self-denial and alienation from her own Aboriginal identity and heritage. She showed “a constant effort to run away from [her] own individuality to annihilate [her] presence,” to use Fanon’s words (60). That sense of alienation shows clearly when she repeatedly refers to her brother Arthur as a “blackfella” in order to indicate his triviality and uncivilized manners. Arthur, in turn, ascribes this to the effect of white assimilation on his sister: “she’s been with whitefellas for too long” (Morgan, *My Place* 161). Nan’s obsession of being white takes a whole new level when she has a conversation with her rent man discussing nature. Her comment, “and here are you and I, both white, and we couldn’t do that,” makes sally wonder if she is actually equating being white with the power of God (113).

Nan represents all the Aboriginal women of her era; all wanted to “look like a white woman, with fancy hairdos and dresses”(348). This reflects the ideology that leads to unconscious naturalizing of constructed values “I am white: that’s to say that I possess beauty”(Fanon 45). Nan also confirms the role white men played back then as ambassadors for black women to get them acknowledged or admitted into the white world: “It was a big thing if you get a white man to marry you” she tells Sally (Morgan, *My Place* 356).

However, opening up to Sally about her own story, Nan becomes aware of that state of diaspora she is living and feels tormented between her repressed and silenced Aboriginal self and her imposed white self, inscribed by assimilation:

I’m ’shamed of myself, now. I feel ’shamed for some of the things I done. I wanted to be white, you see. I’d lie in bed at night and think if God could make me white, it’d be the best thing. Then I could get on in the world, make somethin’ of myself. Fancy, me thinkin’ that. What was wrong with my own people? (356)

Similarly, Nan’s daughter, Gladys, gets her share of the white ideology of servant-master relationship. One day, June, the daughter of the white people Nan used to work for, gives Gladys a doll to play with. It turns to be “a black topsy doll dressed like a servant. It had a redchecked dress on and a white apron, just like [Nan]’s.” Gladys immediately realized that this doll symbolizes her, a servant, like her mother (280). Here we see how normalizing the Western modes of

representation as “white means master and black is servant” works. Internalizing the “knowledge” that links black color and Aboriginality to inferiority is what contributes to Gladys’s self-perception that “it was something [they] were made to feel ashamed of” (282).

It is obvious that Nan’s transmission of this trait of silencing their history to Gladys is a main result of separation and assimilation policy. She convinced Gladys that if she talked about who she really was, “terrible things will happen to [her]”. So thinking about her sake as well as her mother’s, Gladys decides that she’d better keep quiet: “I was really scared of authority. I wasn’t sure what could happen to me,” she says (297). Sally’s Mum and Nan had to live a lie, to be something they were not, just to survive.

Moving to Arthur, he highlights a different side of assimilation, the religious one. He assures that the first thing the mission people did to the half-caste people was Christening them. They also gave them English names; and that’s when Arthur gets his name (200). They taught them the white man’s manners, got them educated and separated them (half-castes only) from their blackfellas (195). Apparently though, Arthur is still aware of the hidden discourse of colonialism running in the veins of Australia:

You see, the trouble is that colonialism isn’t over yet. We still have a White Australia policy against the Aborigines. Aah, it’s always been the same. They say there’s been no difference between black and white, we all

Australian, that's a lie. I tell you, the black man has nothin', the government's been robbin' him blind for years. (228)

In the case of Sally, we can see that this history was almost wiped off. As a daughter of a quarter-caste or “octoroon”²⁵, she is raised to live without any realization of her past; she was even taught to believe and tell other people they were Indian. As a lighter-skinned Aboriginal person of “mixed blood”, she has been partially—perhaps almost entirely— de-Aboriginalized by the assimilation into the white mainstream. She did not directly suffer from the injustices of family displacement and trauma her grandmother went through and her mother tried to keep her unaware of. Due to the fact that she starts her identification with her Aboriginal heritage as a mature person, the first third of *My Place* almost reads like any suburban person's life in Australia, or what the indigenous scholar, Jackie Huggins calls “ the life of a middle-class Anglo woman”(62). This, in a way, proves the cross-generational effectiveness of the politics of assimilation on identity formation.

In *My Place*, Sally's first confrontation with the undercover remnants of assimilation policies is at school: the discursive ideology in which she has been schooled and which has judged her as marginal. The symbolic title of the second chapter “Factory”, which refers to Sally's school, says it all. The witty choice of the word “factory” might hold a specific connotation of schools in Australia and

²⁵ Someone whose great grandfather or great grandmother was Aboriginal.

the world in general, as one of what Louis Althusser called “the Ideological State Apparatuses.” ISAs are institutions such as schools, religions, family, legal systems, politics, sports, etc. which generate ideologies which we, as individuals (or groups), come to believe or internalize. Althusser further explains in his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” that “the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’” (133).

In the same vein, the title itself might refer to the term “factory model schools” or “industrial era schools” that emerged in the educational discourse in the mid to late 20th century referring to the characteristics of European education of the late 18th c. and in north America in the mid-19th c. . This phrase is typically used to criticize ‘factorizing’ purpose of schools that are “designed to create docile subjects and factory workers”(Brooks). This, Carl Kaestle points out, does not mean that “[schools] were mimicking factories, or preparing children to work in Factories. Rather, both the workplace and the schools, as well as other nineteenth century institutions, were partaking of the same ethos of efficiency, manipulation, and mastery”(90). Sally’s first description of it as “ a place dedicated to taking the spirit of life” (*My Place* 19) adds to that mechanizing nature the title gives in the first place.

What supports this conclusion is that, during Sally's school years, the history of Aborigines has never been mentioned in its courses or social atmosphere. This can be seen as something totally glossed over and erased from the educational system as the white colonizer's ideology is still to prevail. In his book, *Why Weren't We Told?*, the Tasmanian Historian, Henry Reynolds, also refers, in turn, to the "great gaps" in what he was taught at secondary education about the history of Australia: "It seems from today's perspective that I learnt very little about Australia itself"(2). "Australia ... had been badly let down by its historians," he sadly confesses to emphasize the absence of the Aboriginal history from the national discourse of Australian history(95). As a young child, Sally was not aware of these ideological tendencies to detach her from her identity as Aboriginal. For her, school was her first step to join the larger community of Australia.

Another clear form of the colonial discourse is normalizing the ideology of "Australianess" among the native people of Australia through internalizing a terminology of identification that only fits within the white myth of "nation". Australia is the birthplace of hundreds of spoken languages and clan groups, and an incredible diversity of religions, races, and histories, all squeezed inside the homogenizing myth of the nation the West invented. When discussing the terminology of using "Aboriginal" and "(I)indigenous" to label the native people of Australia, one cannot ignore the colonial assimilative tendencies that are at

heart of this terminology. The word 'Indigenous' with a capital 'I' is used by the federal government to refer to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. On the other hand, the word 'indigenous' with a small 'i' is used to refer worldwide first nation people. Clearly enough, this Westernly-coined terminology does not serve but to blur the line between the different cultures of both Aboriginal people and TSI which are in fact two distinct peoples. It clouds over the uniqueness of each culture under the mirage of the Western concept of a "nation".

For most indigenous peoples in Australia, they identify by their tribes' names, as they always used to be before colonization. They never looked at themselves as a "nation", rather a group of diverse and several tribes who shared the same land and lived together in peace. They were a community; they never needed a "nation" to define them or contain them. In *My Place*, we can see Sally coming to realize the white terminology that separates between the different shades of black, that has different terms for native, primitive, marginal. This is when her sister, Jill, reveals to her that they are "Boongs" or Aborigines with what the term carries with a negative "social stigma" in the white Australian community (Morgan, *My Place* 102).

The words "Aboriginal" "(I)ndigenous" and "native" were invented by the Europeans since the 16th century to mean "first inhabitants" and were used to identify the countries they have colonized. The word "Indian" and "nigger" or

“black” can be also added to the list as they were (and are still) used to call the first people of North America²⁶ and people of African race, respectively. This puts much emphasis on the essential role of language in constructing identity, meaning and self-representation. That is when Derrida’s statement in his book *Of Grammatology*—“Il n’y a pas de hors-texte” which means “there is no outside-text” (qtd in Bennett and Royle 31)— makes sense, denying any meaning or perception of self outside the text and context of language. “The classical economy of language and Representation”(qtd in “Cultural Identity” 229), internalized by the European colonizers, is based on stabilizing meaning and representation only within its colonial fixed binaries : self/other, superior/inferior, civilized/uncivilized, master/slave, etc. In other words, the linguistic domination of 'English' as the nation-language of master-discourse can also be said to normalize white dominance and exclusion, as well as marginalization and oppression of the native people:

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established. Such power

²⁶ Christopher Columbus landed on the Caribbean, mistakenly thinking that it was India, so he called the native people there, “red Indians”.

is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. (Ashcroft et al 7)

If you control discourse (once through language), you control power, to repeat what Foucault states. So, apparently, by internalizing the language of the colonial , they try to control the discourse on Aboriginality and self-representation of the “presence Aboriginal.”

Moving to the text of *My Place*, Sally/Morgan is seen to speak “not only from the authority possessed by the white texts she has consulted in the Battye library, but also from the sworn, firsthand, oral testimony of her Aboriginal kin” (Collingwood-Whittick 48). In other words, As a result of her assimilation, she employs the mainstream research methods of documentary evidence in addition to the Aboriginal resources of knowledge, stories. In an attempt to facilitate reflecting that non-indigenous assimilation of the text, the authenticity of the textual articulation of Sally’s Aboriginality had to be mediated for the mainstream reader. This mediation might have been done through the use of the autobiographic genre as well as other mainstream filters such as a friend, a publisher and reviewer. This is what Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan explain as the case of almost all indigenous life writing in Australia and New Zealand in the postcolonial period:

The tastes and cultural values of dominant literary audiences impinge on indigenous life writing not only at the moment of reading but also during the prior stages of composition and editing, when the power of the dominant

audience is brought to bear on Aboriginal writers by literary agents, editors, book designers, and other mediators and collaborators. There has been some controversy about the politics of black/white collaboration at the writing stage. (16)

Although some people might argue that this will make her text less authentically Aboriginal, one should not forget that the mere act of writing the Aboriginal self (and writing it in English language) is a kind of assimilation itself and that there is no meaning outside the discourse of language. So it is rather impossible to detach oneself utterly from the discourse of white “Australianness” as it became internal to the self-conceptualization of postcolonial Aborigines. Consequently, the text of *My Place* reflects Sally’s hybrid and dual articulation of the story as a result of her double inscription in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal discourses. Aware of her inevitable inscription in the linguistic discourse of the colonizer, Sally/Morgan seeks a new self-representation through disturbing and breaking away from the limits of linguistic economy of the colonial. In order to write her creole self, she needs creole modes of representation that “transcultur[e] European materials”(Pratt 188). In other words, she appropriates and deterritorializes the language of the centre/colonizer in order to represent her split and disjuncture between multiple cultural realities she lives in. Ashcroft and others explain this idea saying:

One way to demonstrate an appropriated english is to contrast it with another still tied to the imperial centre. This contrast very often stands as a direct indication of the extent to which post-colonial writers have succeeded in constituting their sense of a different place. (58)

This ‘appropriateness’ of language is mainly done through inserting indigenous words in the English text. For example, at the end of her book, the writer inserts a glossary of the Aboriginal terms she used along with their English translation, such as “Boolyah man,” “Cooee,” “Dag,” “Dugite,” and many others. Moreover, the language of the text is appropriated through transporting oral tradition and stories into the new medium “writing”. The material of *My Place* can be said to be mainly based on the different stories Sally recorded, such as the three long stories of Arthur, Mum and Nan, in addition to the multiple stories collected from different Brockman’s family members and the Aboriginal people of the Plibara community. Consequently, Sally’s text turns into a collective space of different—though sometimes conflicting—“I”s that surpass the individual unified and stable “I” of the author. It produces a hybrid form of collectivized life-narrative through breaking the individual narrating “I” to make way to other Aboriginal voices in the past to arise and speak. Having understood the role of language as a medium of power, her autobiography defines itself by replacing the language of the colonizer, reconstructing it and adjusting it to capture the postcolonial reality of home and postcolonial diaspora of self.

Moving to another aspect of assimilation reflected in *My Place*, the discourse of gender stands out to be highly important. It is worth mentioning that most pre-contact Aboriginal communities were matriarchal: women held the positions of clan mothers and they were the ones that made all the major decisions. Other than that, women and men were equal and both respected. With the intrusion of European colonial powers, their prejudice, sexualization of Aboriginal women and patriarchal ideologies²⁷, gender inequality started to creep into the fabric of the Aboriginal communities destroying the male-female traditional harmony and balance and leading to gender division. Aboriginal women were mainly viewed by the white colonizers as sex symbols who “filled the gap left by the lack of white women” (McGrath 235). The sexual intercourse between Aboriginal women and white men—either by force or consent—fragmented the Aboriginal identity as it resulted in half-caste children who were not claimed by their white fathers and were detached from their full Aboriginal roots by being assimilated into the white discourse (the Stolen Generations).

In spite of all these white ideologies imposed by the colonial assimilation policy, some of the Aboriginal traits make it to prevail and keep there through generations of hybridity and de-Aboriginalization. Those traits can be seen

²⁷ An example of that patriarchal ideology is how work was offered only for men, following the typical European cultural model. This kept women stuck in the wheel of the patriarchal ideology of dependence on men as solely responsible for financial income. Moreover, Aboriginal women were mostly perceived as sexual objects for colonizers.

transferring from one Aboriginal generation to another withstanding the hardships of the white brain-washing of the hybrid generations of Aborigines. From that perspective, *My Place* can be seen as a story of survival and resistance of some of the Aboriginal traits, most importantly, the role of women, family and land.

On the one hand, *My Place* succeeds to articulate the surviving sense of matriarchy in family. We see Sally's mother, Gladys, and her grandmother, Daisy (Nan) as strong, resistant figures in different ways. Gladys explains that matriarchy is "a bit of an Aboriginal trait, because when you look at any family, there's always the mother and grandmother there"(Morgan, "A Fundamental Question" 100). She, after her husband dies, works really hard to make ends meet for her family by taking three or four part time jobs at a time. On the other hand, Daisy, despite the sufferings and bitterness she experiences in her past, cannot be seen but a fighter. Being able to reach that period of her life, make a family and manage to keep that family together is an achievement of a strong woman. No matter what secrets she keeps hidden, just understanding the sacrifice she took by hiding the awful truth to herself for the sake of her children and grandchildren will get us to see how powerful she is from the inside. Sally, in turn, figures as a strong independent woman who makes decisions and manages her life. Although her husband, Paul, seems supportive all the way through her quest of identity, she is

always the one in charge. Even when deciding to write a book, Sally's Mum and Nan figure more in terms of caring about and getting involved in her project²⁸.

Obviously enough, marginalizing women in general, and Aboriginal women in specific, did nothing but strengthen the matriarchal trait in the Aboriginal half- and quarter-castes blood. Having been fathered –legally or by force—by white men who refused to acknowledge them, and being left with their Aboriginal mothers and grandmothers, Aboriginal hybrid generations come to learn that their heritage is carried through the women. They are the ones who have the sacred mission of keeping the Aboriginal traditions safe by transferring them to their children and grandchildren, etc.

On the other hand, the sense of family also managed to prevail and get stronger through generations as it played an important role to keep them strong and fighting. Family has been something forever sacred for Aboriginal people, as the Canadian anthropologist, Diane Barwick states: “to be Aboriginal is to be born to, to belong to, to be loyal to family”(154). Family has been an important armor in face of the unaccepting outside environment and the main factor in pulling them together in any hardship. For example, as Arthur and Daisy were both taken away from their mother, they experienced difficulties adjusting without having an

²⁸ unlike her brothers who do not seem to have any vital part in the whole thing; or her father who spends most of his time in the hospital before his death.

Aboriginal family supported childhood. After many years of separation and suffering in the white-ruled society, Arthur could not but go to see his sister, Daisy. Their family bonds were stronger than to be broken by the hard circumstances of their reality: “ she was my sister, my family. I wanted my little sister daisy to know she had a brother who was getting on in the world” (Morgan, *My Place* 218).

Nan (Daisy), in turn, explains how she lost her sense of belonging and identity away from her people: “I needed my people. They made me feel important. I belonged to them” (354). In addition, in Sally’s case, it is clear how the death of her father, Bill, emphasized the sacred family role in her life: “we felt our family was the most important thing in the world”(38). She starts to feel very strongly about her family sticking together as she says,” I knew it was us against the world, but I also knew that, as long as I had my family, I’d make it.” (54)

II. The outcome of the quest (biological vs. cultural Aboriginality)

It seems like each incident Sally faced and accordingly narrated from the beginning of the book was a step of a ladder leading to the turning point in her identity realization. Clashing with her father's speeches of the importance of freedom and her naïve belief that "Australia was a free country"(Morgan, *My Place* 17) were her unexplained and ambiguous feelings of alienation to the environment she lives in. She opens her autobiography with a scene of her going to the hospital to see her sick father. From the very beginning, we are presented with the first implemented—but not yet clear to Sally—sense of awareness of difference, otherness and nonbelonging: "I was a grubby five-year-old in an alien environment"(6). Sally explains that she faced the same sense of difference at school too, when her friends used to ask her about her dark skin.

In an interview Mary Wright had with Morgan and her Mother Gladys over her book, *My Place*, Morgan remarked that school was the sphere where she started questioning her origins, mainly by the many questions of her friends about her race and identity ("A Fundamental Question" 97). That is, I believe, where her nonexistent perception of the concept of race and her sense of the "one-nation Australia" were first challenged: "The kids at school had also begun asking us what country we came from. This puzzled me because, up until then, I'd thought

we were the same as them”(Morgan, *My Place* 38). Even after asking her mother about it and getting the answer “tell them you’re Indian,” all she was thinking about is finding an answer that “satisfies” the other kids and make them accept her. The authenticity of that answer was not a big concern for her at the time: “Even then I didn’t realize why they asked me. I thought I was like everyone else, and everyone else thought I wasn’t” (97).

This moment is what Stuart Hall describes as the start of split of self through imposing the discourse of the Other on the process of identifying the self: “This doubleness of discourse, this necessity of the Other to the self, this inscription of identity in the look of the other finds its articulation profoundly in the ranges of a given text” (“Old and New Identities” 48) or what Homi Bhabha briefly explains : “to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus” (44). That is to say, Sally now comes to realize her other self, the self constructed by her white school community, as “different” as “other, as “outsider”.

When Sally’s Mum tells her that “white lie” that the dark skin comes from the ‘fact’ that they are of Indian descent, Sally was excited because “ it sounded exotic” (38). She has not come to realize her Aboriginality yet and the bad connotations that come along with it. Now that she finally has “an answer” about what they ‘are’ which made sense for her friends at school, Sally seemed to start enjoying school. It seems as if finding an excuse for her difference—having darker

skin—bridged the gap between her and her environment, but not the one between her present white-hybrid identity and Aboriginal one. The clash between the two realities—her Aboriginal family and the non-Aboriginal Australians—took place, leading to the turning point in her self-realization. “You’re not to bring people inside, sally. You got no shame. We don’t want them to see how we live,” Nan tells her seeing them as a threat to their life (82).

In the interview, Morgan told Wright that the turning point in her life, after which she started to seriously question her origins, was when she came home one day and saw her grandmother crying. She continues that “this was unusual of her, because she tended to suppress that sort of emotion”(“A Fundamental Question” 97). That turning point was marked by the painful confrontation of Nan with her materiality of her color in front of Sally for the first time: “You bloody kids don’t want me, you want a bloody white grandmother, I’m black. Do you hear, black, black, black!” (101)

After the many earlier manifestations of Nan’s pretense to be white, appear as white to others, and behave white, all her armors break down at this particular moment, giving Sally the first real spark to start her quest of identity. Freshly hit with the news, Sally’s perception of race is now complete: “for the first time in my fifteen years, I was conscious of Nan’s colouring. She was right, she wasn’t white”(102). That confession rendered Sally unsure about her own colour/identity,

confessing in turn that she “had never thought of [herself] as being black before.”(102)

This realization urged Sally to start asking questions about her true identity, about her true place in this world. Her newly sparked desire was, however, faced with continuous rejection and unwillingness to cooperate on the part of her mother and her grandmother. They both showed a kind of fear or embarrassment to talk about their past with its harsh and terrible memories: “there’s no point in digging up the past, some things are better left buried”(Morgan, *My Place* 103).

The chapter titled “A beginning,” which is placed at the middle of the autobiography, marks a beginning of Sally’s journey of getting to know her newly discovered roots at the middle of her life. This chapter is symbolically proceeded by Sally’s Mum finally breaking silence about their Aboriginality. It also denotes the beginning of change in Nan’s attitude. We see her ‘first’ signs of identification with her past, particularly her skin color:

To Nan, anyone dark was now Nyoongah²⁹. Africans, Burmese, American Negroes were all Nyoongahs. She identified with them. In a sense, they were her people, because they shared the common bond of blackness and the oppression that, for so long, that colour had brought. It was only a small change, but it was a beginning. (149)

²⁹ Sally explains the meaning of the word “Nyoongah” as the Aboriginal people of south-west Australia. (Derived from man or person.) Also the language of these people(*My Place* 152).

That slight change in Nan's attitude sparks a new possibility of reconciliation. Sally feels desperately in need to do something to identify with her newly-found heritage; and she realizes that the first step in coming to terms with that part of themselves, is accepting it; and for that she needs to learn as much as she can about their past and heritage.

Being born in an era relatively more open about the topic of Aborigines, an era of "reconciliation"—as the whites claim it— and raised by a family where women figure more, Sally/Morgan grows up to be a strong independent woman herself. She follows the lead of her mother and grandmother but more openly and loudly. Given the advantage of her less strict Australia and her lighter skin color, Sally/Morgan decides to speak up for her Mum and Nan, for all Aborigines. She independently wants to do that mission that none of her ancestry dared to do before: tracing her newly discovered past and writing a book about it.

In *My Place*, breaking the silence is vital to storytelling, but ironically enough, silence—as a result of colonization— becomes also that feature of Aboriginal history that Sally wishes to uncover. *My Place* represents Aboriginal silence and absence of voice from the postcolonial discussions of the history of Australia as a direct cause for a one-sided white version of history. Clearly enough, Sally/Morgan's Mum and Nan kept silent all this time and decided not to reveal

their “Aboriginality” because of the bad connotations it holds in the white society and the serious consequences that may follow up.

In her interview with Wright, Gladys summarizes her back-then serious concerns about her children being taken away by the government: “ I was very scared of the authority. I was always scared I might have the children taken away. That would have destroyed me”(“A Fundamental Question” 107). She never wants to live the same experience again, having to be separated from Nan by earlier racial legislation³⁰. That law—that children fathered by white men could not be looked after by their Aboriginal mothers—still operated in the suburban Perth of the sixties. “It wasn’t enforced as rigorously as it used to be, but it was still in place, and it still frightened people,” Morgan asserts(107). In other words, keeping the past buried keeps them safe from exposing their family to the injustices and crimes committed by the colonizers against Aborigines, while staying connected to that past had negative effects and connotations, even in Sally/Morgan’s white postcolonial community.

Nevertheless, the silencing-history process, which started with Nan, has an essential role in blurring biological and cultural identity and belonging of her family. For example, silencing parts of the truth about Gladys’s past—like her real “white” father— deprived her from her cultural heritage as a half-caste, creole and

³⁰ The 1905 Western Australian *Aboriginal Protection Act* and its corollaries had empowered the federal state to take children of mixed descent from their aboriginal mothers.

hybrid Aboriginal, and from realizing the space she occupied as an “other” and the social stigmas implemented within it. Gladys’s alienation from her Aboriginal past of oppression and cultural heritage of “otherness” is pretty much obvious in the incident when a lady at the bus stop describes her as a “poor thing” when Gladys openly and spontaneously tells her that she is Aboriginal:

I didn’t know what to say. She looked at me with such pity, I felt really embarrassed. I wondered what was wrong with being Aboriginal. I wondered what she expected me to do about it [...] I suddenly felt like a criminal. I couldn’t understand why I felt so terrible. Looking back now, I suppose she knew more about how Aboriginal people were treated than I did. She probably knew I had no future, that I’d never be accepted, never be allowed to achieve anything. (297)

Here, Gladys experiences herself as inscribed in the gaze of the Other, which brings us back to the idea of “doubleness of self” created by the look of the Other Bhabha and Hall talked about. Even Frantz Fanon relates to this discourse of identification by the violent gaze of ‘the Other’, as he describes in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* a similar incident of him as a young Antillean, facing a white Parisian child and her mother. When the child pulls the hand of the mother and says, "Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!"(112), Fanon reflects:

the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I

demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. fi burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. (109)

Similarly, Sally/Morgan was struggling to reoccupy the cultural “I” from which she has been forcibly deprived and to counter the ideological stigmas she was taught to believe. However, being detached from her Aboriginal cultural heritage for so long rendered her diasporic and stuck between her past and present identities. Even coming to terms with her skin color was not enough to make her come to that realization. After all, Aboriginality is more than just a skin color, it is a culture and a history of traditions, beliefs, violence, colonization, massacres and separation that Sally/Morgan was too “white” to experience. Still young and full of naive beliefs of Australia as a free country, she , at first, “couldn’t see no reason why [her Mum and Nan] would pretend to be something they weren’t”(Morgan, *My Place* 111). Sally’s ignorance is highlighted by Nan when she tells her “ you don’t know nothing, girl. You don’t know what it’s like for *people like us*. We’re like those Jews, we got to look out for ourselves” (110 italics mine).

When Sally experiences her first real confrontation with the outside world about her Aboriginality , it was with the senior officer of the Aboriginal scholarship. “My grandmother’s Aboriginal and it’s a part of me too,” Sally tells the interviewers, “our family was Aboriginal but we’d been brought up to believe differently”(148). She acts bravely and “[leaps] in feet first”(ibid), overcoming the shyness and

awkwardness her family has always felt about their past. Nevertheless, having only her newly found genetic Aboriginality, she finds herself culturally ignorant. That immediately puts her in a position of uncertainty. She vaguely perceives Aboriginality in her culturally-hybrid self as a victim of the policies of absorption and assimilation and as a result of Nan's silence. Tormented by the disturbing possibility of the one-way assimilation path, she is conflicted between biological Aboriginality and cultural one:

Had I been dishonest with myself? What did it really mean to be Aboriginal? I'd never lived off the land and been a hunter and a gatherer. I'd never participated in corroborees or heard stories of the Dreamtime. I hardly knew any Aboriginal people. What did it mean for someone like me. (153)

Taking into consideration that *My Place* which starts as an attempt to restore Sally's Aboriginal heritage ends up trying to "unearth" the history colonization buried and overlaid, how much of a success Sally/Morgan's journey was in unveiling the secrets and breaking the silences? One might argue that Sally's journey with her family into the motherland, the Pilbara, seems to help them retrieve a different kind of genetic Aboriginality which was not dependent on their pure racial identification but rather on their acceptance into the local Aboriginal

kinship system³¹. Indigeneity today, Marcia Langton points out, is “more social than racial: an Aboriginal person is defined as a person who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal, and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives as Aboriginal” (29). The Plibara community identified with Sally and her mother using “the blackfella’s way”(Morgan, *My Place* 236) of identification with a relative, as Jack, Arthur’s friend, called it: that is, finding any kind of relation however distant or race-irrelevant.

It was clear that even if not having any close blood relations, the Corunna station made all Aboriginal people working there as one people. The circumstances they underwent there and the memories they shared united them and made them relatives. This is what Arthur emphasizes on earlier to Sally: “All the people round there, we all belonged to each other. We were the tribe that made the station. The Drake-Brockmans didn’t make it on their own” (198). Sally and her mother start to identify with all those people and acknowledge them as their “big” family up north, which added to their sense of belonging: “nothing was said, but I knew [Mum] felt like I did. Like we’d suddenly come home and now we were leaving again. But we had a sense of place now”(248-249). However, with the truth about

³¹Contrasted with the European social preferences for nuclear families, the Aboriginal family structures of an extended family seem to stand out as cohesive forces that bind Aboriginal together in all parts of Australia. This extended family system often includes quite distant relatives because it depends on kinship relations among people. That is what is known in the Aboriginal community as “The classificatory system of kinship.”

Gladys's biological father not revealed even after the family's journey, can we really say that Sally/Morgan's articulation of Aboriginality goes beyond that sort of kinship-based genetic identification with her people?

One of the key pieces of information, which still haunts the narrative because of Nan's silence, is the identity of Gladys's biological father. Nan refrains explicitly from identifying the father of her daughter. Although she acknowledges at the end that Howden Drake-Brockman, the white upper-middle-class owner of the Corunna Station, is her own father, she refuses to reveal Gladys's biological father:

Now how this all came about, that's my business. I'll only tell a little. Everyone knew who the father was, but they all pretended they didn't know. Aah, they knew, they knew. You didn't talk 'bout things then. You hid the truth. (359)

Morgan's book presents different records leading to two sides of the story, leaving it to the reader to decide. On the one hand, Judith Drake-Brockman, daughter of Howden, and her mother Alice stick to the story that Maltese Sam³² was Nan's father and a guy named Jack Grime was Gladys's father. Nan and Arthur, on the other hand, state clearly that Howden Drake-Brockman was their father; and some people at the Corunna Station denied that Maltese Sam ever fathered Nan. On top of that, the book drops two big hints that Howden is both Daisy's and Gladys's father. The first one is when Sally and Gladys return from

³² A Torres Strait Islander or Melanesian man who was working as a cook on Corunna Downs Station.

their visit to the Corunna Station. Sally takes out a photograph of Howden as a young man and places it next to Gladys 's face. That is when they both get shocked by the strong resemblance: "Give him black, curly hair and a big bust, and he's the spitting image of you!" Sally comments (256). The second one is when both Arthur and Nan describe how Howden Drake-Brockman, Nan's own father, was fascinated by Nan's daughter Gladys. "He held her in his arms and said, 'She's very beautiful,'" Arthur tells Sally while narrating his story. Nan then later states to Sally, "When I came home from hospital, he said, 'Bring her here, let me hold her.' He wanted to nurse Gladdie before he died"(359).

Nan's deepest 'white' secret of a possible familial incest traces us back to a whole history of sexual oppression and abuse of the white male settlers at frontiers against Aboriginal women who were described as 'black velvet',³³ with which Nan clearly identifies: "Now there was plenty of stockmen up north, then, and they all wanted girls"(348). *My Place* sheds light on the colonial context of making racial boundaries through the sexualization of Aboriginal women. The colonial discourse of sexualizing the colonized, Ann Stoler argues, lies at the heart of the imperial project:

³³ Ann McGrath explains that the term: " 'Black Velvet' was the term used to describe Aboriginal women with whom white men has sexual intercourse. The expression originated as nineteenth century English military slang, and it is also the name of Irish drink consisting of mixture of stout and champagne or cider. Henry Lawson used it in the Australian context in 'Ballad of a rouseabout', published 1899. Territorian Bill Harny, writer and ex-Aboriginal welfare officer elucidated: "the surface of the skin was smooth, a feature that gave us bushies the saying of 'Black Velvet' " (233). Apparently, the use of this colloquial language was culturally inscribed as a means for white colonizers to boast ownership over Aboriginal women's bodies.

looking at sex—who had it with whom, where and when—takes us closer to the microphysics of rule as it pushes us to rethink what we think we know about the arenas of colonialism's macropolitics. (16) [In other words, we can argue] that the management of the sexual practices of colonizer and colonized was fundamental to the colonial order of things and that discourses on sexuality at once classified colonial subjects into distinct human kinds while policing the domestic recesses of imperial rule.” (145)

Stoler's argument is, in fact, based on Foucault's ideas in *The History of Sexuality*, in which he also asserts that sexual discourse must not be thought of as a drive that needs to be controlled and suppressed by power but rather a "dense transfer point for relations of power"(103), and “a means of social control and political subjugation”(123).

And here, it might be appropriate to refer, glancingly, that integral to the colonial discourse of sexuality was the silencing and repression of the colonized women's voices by imposing the politics of separation and assimilation. Normalizing silence internalizes raptures, ambiguities, and submission of the hybrid Aboriginal self against the autonomy, purity and dominance of the colonial self. So, the presence of colonial discourse is enabled by the Aboriginal effective absence³⁴, as Stuart Hall puts it “Everything that can be spoken is on the ground of the enormous voices that have not, or cannot yet be heard” (“Old and New

³⁴ I derived this idea from Edward Said analysis of the silent Orient in his *Orientalism*: “In discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence” (208).

Identities” 48). The discourse of silence, represented in the unanswered implications of incest Sally and the readers face at the end, poses another dimension of Sally/Morgan’s self-discovery in specific, and of the issue of Australianness and authentic Aboriginality in a broader sense. This dimension is rooted in the heart of the colonial discourse of sexual abuse against Aboriginal women. Consequently, coming to terms with the colonial discourse of interracial sex between white settler men and Aboriginal women becomes an integral part of female subject formation (i.e. Sally, Gladys and Nan).

Nevertheless, death appears as a threat for Aboriginality in *My Place*, especially if it was proceeded with silence. Although Arthur breaks his silence and tells his story before he passes away, he does not reveal much about the identity of Gladys’s real father. In addition, even in Nan’s story, substantial amount of information remains silenced because Nan refuses to reveal the whole truth about her past, especially about Gladys’s father:

I don’t want to talk no more. I got my secrets, I’ll take them to the grave. Some things, I can’t talk ’bout. Not even to you, my granddaughter. They for me to know. They not for you or your mother to know. (367)

Nan’s death—that renders that question of incest unanswered and turns into the narrative’s lack of closure—eventually leaves Sally more uncertain than ever with a lot of questions of identity haunting her book:

Well, we're only just coming to terms with everything, finding ourselves, what we really are. And now, she's dying. She's our link with the past and she's going. [...] 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. (373)

The Australian historian, Keith Windshuttle, criticizes the validity and reliability of Morgan's claims and brings *My Place* under scrutiny because Morgan and her mother refuse to respond to the claims that her book is a fabrication and will not undergo a DNA test to verify the factual base of her claims(319). However, Since Nan's death meant burying the truth about the biological origins of the family in incest and thus denying Sally/Morgan a full genetic identification, would taking up a DNA test simply solve her identity crisis?

My place's lack of closure and Sally's never-fully-answered quest of identity—if put together with Morgan's later refrainment from resolving the ambiguities of her biological roots by taking the DNA test—can reflect Sally/Morgan's realization of the impossibility of retrieving a full biological identification with the past. In other words, her quest of coming to terms with her *Presence Aboriginal*³⁵ doubts a final or even literal return to “an *origin* of [her] identities, unchanged by... years of displacement, dismemberment transportation”(Hall, “Cultural Identity” 231).

³⁵ Derived from Stuart Hall's concept of *Presence Africaine*, in his article, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”(231).

Therefore, she chooses to reconfigure her identity by re-inscribing into Aboriginality as a process³⁶ and social practice rather than biologically-determined descent that authenticates (thus excludes) Aboriginality in terms of percentages of blood. She tries to re-identify a cultural identity that Stuart Hall describes as the “unstable point of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture”(226). Consequently, her identity must be “re-experienced through the categories of the present” and “transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present”(Hall, “New ethnicities” 448).

As a postcolonial, octoroon Aboriginal, and female, Sally/Morgan’s self is reconfigured through the colonial policies of assimilation. The prevailing colonial discourse of silencing that succeeds to haunt the text’s end, its narrator’s/ author’s self-discovery, and its stories, marks a cultural fracture in the female self-formation as it fails to identify with the interracial discourse of Aboriginal women. In *My Place*, the cultural/biological ambiguities created by such policies dislocate the text, its author, its narrator(s), and its narrate(s) as both in and out of place in postcolonial Australia. However, seeing Sally/Morgan’s identity formation as a social and cultural process rather than a reclaimed, fixed racial identification (familial incest), gets us a step closer to understand the multiple gaps left open and many questions left unanswered in her autobiography.

³⁶ It is something that is being produced and reproduced all the time.

Chapter II: Reproducing Personhood in Michael Ondaatje's

Running in the Family

Sri Lanka³⁷—formerly known as Ceylon—is an island country that lies in the Indian Ocean to the south of India. At a crossroad of maritime routes breaking through the Indian Ocean, it has been really famous for its Monsoon winds that affect its human culture as well, bringing immigrants and merchants who have sought it as the source of pearls, Jewels, spices and tea. That meant more exposure to cultural influences from other civilisations. Sri Lanka is known to have a rich ethnic, religious and linguistic varieties. For example, it has many ethnic groups such as Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Parsis and Veddas.³⁸ Accordingly, there are many religions that are practiced such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity; and two main languages: Tamil and Sinhala.

³⁷ As noted by Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*, this island has had so many names, the current being Sri Lanka. Therefore, when referring to the modern day country, I will use "Sri Lanka"; when referring to events happening in the text, I will use "Ceylon", as used by the author/narrator and since it covers the period prior to the change of the name. when expressing and emphasizing the duality and split between the two, I will use "Ceylon/Sri Lanka."

³⁸ Sinhalese are believed to have come from northern India and now account for 74 percent of the people in Sri Lanka. Tamils came from southeastern India and now comprise up to 18 percent. Muslim trace back to Arab traders of the 8th C., and account for 7.5 percent of the population. Burghers(a community of mixed European descent), Parsis (immigrants from western India), and Veddas make up less than 1 percent of the population. Veddah or Veddah people were the Sri Lanka's aboriginal inhabitants prior to the 6th century BCE. They are ethnically allied to indigenous jungle peoples of southern India. They adopted Sinhalese and now no longer use their own language as they have been largely absorbed into the modern Sinhalese population.(Ross, 59)

Sri Lanka (Ceylon) has a long colonial history. European colonization began with the Portuguese invasion in the early 16th century. Ownership later transferred to the Dutch Empire and eventually to the British in 1815, who still held colonial rule when Ondaatje was born (Ross 17-25). During World War II, the British operated a military base from Ceylon to defend against Japan's incursions across Asia, which Ondaatje's father participated in as a member of Ceylon's local military. Shortly after World War II, in 1948, Ceylon won its independence from Britain.

Written between 1978 and 1982, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* takes place almost entirely in postcolonial Ceylon. Ondaatje was born in Colombo in 1943 to parents Mervyn Ondaatje and Doris Gartiaen, the youngest of four children. He was born into a group of mixed Dutch, Sinhalese and Tamil origins. His parents got divorced when he was young, and he rarely saw his father as a child. After 14 years of marriage, his mother, Doris, took the children and left with no money and no help. She supported herself and her children by working at a hotel. Although Ondaatje was born in Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) and his ancestors lived and died there, he himself left family and country behind and moved to England with his mother when he was 11. He relocated to Canada as a young adult and pursued his higher studies there.

In postcolonial literature, the concept of 'exile' signifies a separation or alienation—either forced or self- —from the homeland or a cultural and ethnic origin. As a Sri Lankan/Ceylonese exile who now lives in Canada, Michael's alienation from his native culture, not to mention his lack of knowledge about his father, Mervyn, leaves him feeling as if he skipped past his own childhood and grappling with issues related to his identity, belonging and home. Salman Rushdie explains that migration is a very disruptive experience resulting from uprooting which leads immigrants to re-define their self-perceptions and collective identities:

The effect of mass migration has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things ; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves.(*Imaginary Homelands* 124-125)

Migration results in a sense of loss but, as Rushdie argues, “the writer who is out-of country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’”(12). This uncertainty inspires him to make two investigative journeys back to his homeland, Ceylon, and his extended family to rediscover his own sense of identity and

determine his place in the world. The stories Michael Ondaatje gathered on both trips became the subject of his 1982 fictionalized memoir, *Running in the Family*. The quest of self-rediscovery that Ondaatje/Michael seeks through his memoir is mostly done in the frame of representing the dual articulation of self/Ceylon through the colonial discourse, reproducing the self through the collective stories of his people and sensory details of the old Ceylon, and imaginatively reunifying with the concept of home through the act of retelling it through fiction, memory and desire. This chapter questions if the exile Michael's journey back home leads to a healing of self and a return "home".

I. Colonial discourse and diaspora of Self/Ceylon

Ondaatje/Michael portrays the essential role colonial assimilation plays in forging a new socio-cultural identity, leading to and reinforcing the diaspora of identity and conflicts and contradictions of self. In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje/Michael includes maps, various poems and writings by other people in his presentation of the colonial presence (and discourse) and its effects on the new Ceylon, mainly to illustrate the contradictions and paradoxes of the aftermath of colonialism. Even though Ondaatje/Michael refers several times in his text to the injustices of colonialism and the effect it had on the construction of his family's identity, there are a few clear clashes in which Michael comes face-to-face with the paradoxes and contradictions that contributed to the construction of his own identity. In an interview with Linda Hutcheon, Ondaatje points out that his texts attempt to weave a map that articulates the history of colonialism that is integral to his narrative of himself and his family:

I wanted to establish a kind of map; I wanted to make clear that this was just part of a long tradition of invasions and so forth. So the map and the history and the poetry made a more social voice, became the balance to the family story, the other end of the see-saw. ("Michael Ondaatje: Interview" 201)

To start with, Ondaatje/Michael presents the colonial ideology of “romanticization of Ceylon³⁹” to illustrate how it contradicts with the native reality of Ceylon. *Running in the Family* offers the biased and imagined representation of Sri Lanka by the colonizer which interchange between exotic and savage in its description of local details. For example, Ondaatje/Michael starts his chapter, “The Karapoths”, with some quotations about Ceylon by different English writers: Edward Lear says that he finds the place “picturesque” but has unbearable noise of nature and “botherly-idiotic” “brown people;” D.H. Lawrence writes that Ceylon is nice to see but ultimately unlivable; and Leonard Woolf states, “All jungles are evil”(Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* 17). By inserting these English writers’ quotes, he presents the racism and prejudice of the Englishmen’s writing and the fact that they were foreigners to the land that the heat of the weather “drove them crazy” for “heat disgraces foreigners.” He also shows the European explorers’ view of Ceylon as a wonderful “paradise,” romanticizing their experiences on the island. Then, he includes a Ceylonese poem by the folk poet, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, that reads:

*Don't talk to me about Matisse ...
the European style of 1900, the tradition of the studio
where the nude woman reclines forever
on a sheet of blood*

³⁹ From the concept of “romance of the exotic” Stuart Hall mentioned in his “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” which is derived from Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. (233)

*Talk to me instead of the culture generally —
how the murderers were sustained
by the beauty robbed of savages: to our remote
villages the painters came, and our white-washed
mud-huts were splattered with gunfire.(35)*

This clearly shows how native population's memory of violence contradicts the romanticized tale that Europeans told of their arrival. This contradiction demonstrates the manner in which "history" as told by the Europeans is unreliable, one-sided, and incomplete mainly because of its reliance on the discourse of "Orientalism." Edward Said remarks in his book *Orientalism* that the existence of the Orient is rooted in its articulation and representation by the West in a romanticized way: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since **antiquity a place** of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories **and landscapes**, remarkable experiences"(1). However, he goes on arguing that this Orientalist discourse of romanticization and domesticating the exotic enabled the West to dominate, have authority over the Orient and restructure it as inferior:

without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (4)

In the chapter ‘The Karapothas’, another clash is presented between the romanticization of Ceylon as the place of exotic spices and foods and the real Western colonial intentions to put hand on these natural resources and to rob the island. The use of the word “Karapothas” to call foreigners—which literally means “beetles with white spots who never grew ancient [in Ceylon] who stepped in and admired the landscape, disliked the ‘inquisitive natives’ and left”(Ondaatje, *Running* 32)—metaphorically delivers an image of the foreigners, just like pests, robbing and destroying the local resources of Ceylon:

They [the Europeans] came originally and overpowered the land obsessive for something as delicate as the smell of cinnamon. Becoming wealthy with spices. When ships were still approaching, ten miles out at sea, captains would spill cinnamon onto the deck and invite passengers on board to *smell Ceylon* before the island even came into view. [...] This island was a paradise to be sacked. Every conceivable thing was collected and shipped back to Europe: cardamons, pepper, silk, ginger, sandalwood, mustard oil, palmyra root, tamarind, wild indigo, deers’ horns, elephant tusks, hog lard, calamander, coral, seven kinds of cinnamon, pearl and cochineal. *A perfumed sea.* (32)

Portraying the captains’ spilling cinnamon on the decks of their ships and asking their passengers to ‘smell Ceylon’ highlights the colonial discourse of representation, articulation, or –using Edward Said's terms—orientalization of

Ceylon through establishing and intensifying the mythical sense and vision of the mysterious East and promoting its romance of the exotic for Western consumption.

Following a different approach of deconstructing the European romanticizing perspective of Ceylon through involving the Ceylonese side of the story, Ondaatje/Michael includes a poem called “the Cinnamon Peeler” (42) that presents the sacred and unique relation between Ceylonese people and scents. It also shows how these scents interrelate with the different aspects of their lives like love and marriage. So, denouncing the romanticized representation of the Ceylonese exotic scents, the poem deterritorializes them as part of their tradition and identity.

A second theme employed by Ondaatje/Michael in the text to discuss the colonial discourse in Ceylon is maps. Since maps are usually used as guides to identify one’s home and location, it is important to reflect on the maps inserted or discussed in the colonial discourse of *Running in the Family*. Maps are used by Ondaatje/Michael can be seen as out of impulse to map a territory and pin his identity to it and gain a sense of belonging. However, as a postcolonial writer, does his hybrid, diasporic identity fit into the geographic boundaries of a map? Ondaatje/Michael opens his work by a map of his country, which is consciously left unnamed. However, even before we turn the page, we are confronted by two reports about the heart of darkness: Oderic of Pordenone notes in his journal “I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads,” while the

columnist of the Ceylon Sunday Times, Douglas Amarasekera, insists that “Americans could put men on the moon because they knew English, while the Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor thought that the earth was flat”(i). Both of them ironically contradict the previous unnamed map with the Western discourse of mapping other people’s realities. Reading those two pages respectively seems to suggest a defiance of any possibility of pinning Michael’s identity outside the disjuncture of map, of place.

Later, reflecting on other “false maps” hanged on his brother’s wall in Toronto, which “reveal rumours of topography,” Michael presents the multi-cultural rape of his island that “seduced all of Europe”:

The shapes differ so much they seem to be translations—by Ptolemy, Mercator, François Valentyn, Mortier, and Heydt—growing from mythic shapes into eventual accuracy. Amoeba, then stout rectangle, and then the island as we know it now, a pendant off the ear of India. [...] And so its name changed, as well as its shape—Serendip, Ratnapida (“island of gems”), Taprobane, Zeloan, Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon—the wife of many marriages, courted by invaders who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language. (24)

The multiple transformations and shifting of the shape and name of Ceylon over the years signals the colonial history of the place whose identity was plundered and normalized by its many conquerors leading to a postcolonial nation-state torn between the “old” Ceylon and many other “new” Ceylons.

Ondaatje/Michael then goes on to shed more light on the colonial discourse of normalization and assimilation of Ceylonese presence. It “is nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state. It is “always-already fused , syncretized, with other cultural elements. It is always-already creolised [...] ever present”. It becomes the site where the other presences are “recomposed – reframed, put together in a new way [...] the site of a profound splitting and doubling” (Hall, “Cultural identity and Diaspora” 233):

This pendant, once its shape stood still, became a mirror. It pretended to reflect each European power till newer ships arrived and spilled their nationalities, some of whom stayed and intermarried – my own ancestor arriving in 1600, a doctor who cured the residing governor's daughter with a strange herb and was rewarded with land, a foreign wife, and a new name which was a Dutch spelling of his own. Ondaatje. A parody of the ruling language.” (Ondaatje, *Running* 24)

Sri Lanka itself is projected as a multicultural nation consisting of people of various cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds: “Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations” (9). Ondaatje’s/Michael's grandparents were from rich and aristocratic families, descendants of the Dutch colonizers of the island a couple of hundred years earlier. So, one cannot but notice the Dutch roots in names like 'Ondaatje.' The Ondaatje family belonged to the social, middle class called the 'Burghers', who are of mixed Europeans and Tamil blood. They enjoyed all the privileges of the

English lifestyle, mimicking the English behavior, attitudes and superiority, separating themselves as a higher class from the rest of the population. This reflects Homi Bhabha's idea of colonial mimicry that "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" ("Of Mimicry and Man" 85). It is when colonized subjects imitate the colonizer's attitudes, behaviors and life style. This behavior of the Burgher characters in the novel can be explained as an attempt to hide their non-European side of identities and emphasizing the external markers of European identity when forming their sense of belonging. For example, we see the accepted knowledge of Tamil/Ondaatje's superiority to other ethnicities in Ceylon in Lalla's breaking the news of her daughter's (Doris) engagement to a Tamil (Mervyn Ondaatje): "What do you think, darling, she's going to marry an Ondaatje ... she's going to marry a Tamil" (Ondaatje, *Running* 66).

The discourse of adhering to a 'superior' identity is also exemplified in Bampa's⁴⁰ obsessive imitation of the manners and habits of the English, which had a detrimental effect on his marriage as well as his personality. Bampa was dark and his wife was very white and he is described as having "a weakness for pretending to be English and, in his starched collars and grey suits, was determined in his customs"(20). Apparently, his desire to perceive himself like an Englishman

⁴⁰ Philip Ondaatje, Ondaatje's grandfather

suggests that he sees the European foreigners as somehow superior to him and his family. That is why he seems fragmented between his place as an Anglicized Ceylonese and his place as a Ceylonese.

However, even when mimicking the colonizer, the colonized subjects are never able to reach the colonizer's exact place, so they end up representing a difference. That's what Bhabha makes clear when he says "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*"("Of Mimicry and Man" 85). So, as a form of colonial discourse, mimicry is based on creating that "ambivalence" of representation which leads but to intensify the otherness and inferiority of the colonized. For Michael, the truth was that no matter how burghers behaved as the English people, they are never going to be English. All creole races will always be characterized as "the Other" in terms of "pure Englishness":

There was a large social gap between this circle and the Europeans and English who were never part of the Ceylonese community. The English were seen as transients, snobs and racists, and were quite separate from those who had intermarried and who lived here permanently.[...] Emil Daniels summed up the situation for most of them when he was asked by one of the British governors what his nationality was-- 'God alone knows, your Excellency.' (Ondaatje, *Running*, 31-32)

No matter how much of an extravagant life style they live, burghers, like other hybrid races, will always face the dark sides of their a state of in-betweeness and

hybridity: the lack of identity, the ambivalence of being at the same time powerful and powerless, the double articulation of native and foreigner(Anglicized Ceylonese), and the fact that assimilation will never make them equal; in the view of infinite purity of “Englishness”, they will always be the Other, the inferior other:

the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence. By "partial" I mean both "incomplete" and "virtual." (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 86)

The anxiety inherent due to such racial ambiguity and trauma is clear in the self of Mervyn Ondaatje. Michael records, ‘My father always claimed to be a Ceylon Tamil, though that was probably more valid about three centuries earlier’ (Ondaatje, *Running*, 32). Mervyn Ondaatje dangles amidst multiple cultures, having an identity which is, ‘...at once plural and partial’(Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 15). Here, Mervyn is portrayed as struggling between spaces. Therefore, *Running in the family* portrays the aftermath of colonial discourse of assimilation and its “ambivalence”: “Almost the same but not quite[...] Almost the same but not white”(Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 85,89). Consequently, it questions the notion of a pure and stable Sri Lankan/Ceylonese identity and instead assumes the space of hybridity, duality and multiplicity.

Ondaatje/Michael’s multiplicity of identity is first to be seen in his dual articulation of his country name. It is deliberately referred to by Ondaatje/Michael

in his text as Ceylon. His use of the colonial name of the country, “Ceylon,” rather than the name it gained after independence, “Sri Lanka,” all along the text, only to use “Sri Lanka” at the end in his acknowledgement—which is still practically inside the framework of the text—indicates the disjuncture of place as an author, narrator and narrate between past and present and of double inscription of his home inside and outside his text. Like Ceylon/Sri Lanka, his place of birth, Michael himself, is hybrid. Having his Dutch ancestor coming in 1600 and marrying a foreign wife and a Sinhalese after that, his family remained with a Dutch name which is “parodying the ruling language”(Ondaatje, *Running* 24). Mixed within his family name are two languages, two histories, two different experiences of culture and place. By simultaneously linking self to mixed heritage, Michael chooses to occupy the space of hybridity and Ashcroft’s veranda⁴¹ , thus resisting attempts to confine him to an essentialist notion of identity.

In an interview with Robert McCrum in 2011 in the Guardian, Ondaatje states: “I am a mongrel of place. Of race. Of cultures. Of many genres”. “I am not much of a Tamil now,” he adds, “I can’t speak the language apart from a few rude words”(“Michael Ondaatje: The divided man”). Such a racial mix complicates Ondaatje’s status as a Sri Lankan(Ceylonese) born Canadian writer who explores the colonial past from his postcolonial present. Ondaatje’s/Michael’s multicultural

⁴¹ According to Ashcroft, “Verandahs are the very model of the ‘contact zone’ where inhabitants and strangers may meet with ease Metaphorically, speaking, verandahs represent that space in which discourse itself is disrupted and the very identities of the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ become negotiable.”(the empire writes back).

inheritance makes his status hybrid and hyphenated ‘Sri Lankan(Ceylonese)-Canadian’. This shaky position of self-identification is clear when he states, “I really don’t want to become the representative of my country”(Ibid). Michael seems to realise that it is not possible for him to obtain a definitive identification with Sri Lanka, his home, though he still has plenty of family there. He rather seems to settle on a no-where place between real and imagined homes and with an identity that traverses cultural and national boundaries and encompasses both central and marginal positions.

The real face-to-face clash between Michael and the paradoxes that constitute his diasporic identity is manifested when he writes: “I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner”(Ondaatje, *Running* 31). This statement reflects his consciousness of his at once plural and partial identity and of his duality: of being both “native” and “foreign”. Ondaatje’s/Michael’s status as a Ceylonese man who’s lived the majority of his life in Canada complicates his identity—his return to Ceylon is both a return home as well as a kind of an invasion by a Canadian foreigner. This is reinforced by Michael’s children’s intolerance of the heat (32), which he claims is the mark of the foreigner. That feeling of double placement the statement “I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner”(31) implies is stressed with opening the same chapter with Lear’s observation:

The brown people of this island seem to me odiously inquisitive and bothery-idiotic. All the while the savages go on grinning and chattering to each other.[...] The roads are intensely picturesque. Animals, apes, porcupine, hornbill, squirrel, pigeons, and figurative dirt! (31);

in addition to Lawrence's statement: "... Ceylon is an experience—but heavens, not a permanence" and Woolf's quotation: "All jungles are evil"(31). These quotations by three English artists can be said to represent the outsider Michael became in contrast with the poem of the folk poet, Lakdasa Wikramasinha, that concludes the same chapter and probably stands for the insider Michael who denies the outsiders' (even the outsider Michael's) existence in his country.

What is more, the sense of fragmentation and conflicted sense of identity is reflected in the clash between his past and present identities that pops up at many places in the memoir. Michael shows an internal struggle of identity and embracing his past from the very beginning. The contrast between the dream's jungle and Canada's winter suggests that Michael's current environment is dramatically different from his father's home. Michael notes, "It was a new winter and I was already dreaming of Asia," indicating that the environment he currently lives in is not the one that he naturally belongs to. We see how Canada's harsh winter,—during which he wraps himself in a quilt to keep warm (2)—is contrasted with Ceylon's "delicious heat," (31) indicating that despite living in Canada, Michael's body is not suited to the cold climate. In the midst of the comfort and order of his

life in Canada, Michael knew that he “was already running [to Asia]”, that he “would be travelling back to the family [he] had grown from—those relations from my parents’ generation who stood in [his] memory like frozen opera”(1). Due to his distance, the memories of his family seem like a “frozen opera.” So he decides to return to his homeland to breathe life into these memories and touch his family into words.

Ondaatje’s/Michael’s place as an insider-outsider as a result of assimilation is also manifested in *Running in the Family* through the clash between the wildness of the Ceylonese jungles and the modern aspects of Canadian life Michael brought with him when he came. When Michael and his family drive into the Wilpattu jungle, a “wild black pig in a white rainstorm” appears to Michael and his family while they were soaping themselves down with a bar of “aristocratic” soap. According to Michael, “[t]hat soap was aristocratic and kept me feeling good all through the filthy hotels of Africa, whenever I could find a shower”(65). However, the pig is portrayed as “concerned about the invasion, this metamorphosis of soap, this Volkswagen, this jeep.” When Michael loses that bar of soap, he imagines the pig and his friends soaping themselves with his “aristocratic” soap. It is as if the Ceylonese jungle is mocking Michael’s attempt to import some elements of modern civilisation.

This highlights the insider-outsider dilemma of Ondaatje's/Michael's diasporic self that strives to reach his original homeland to which he belongs and does not belong at the same time. We can see that Ondaatje writes from the angle of a lived duality – from the situation of those writers who are, in the words of Ondaatje's English patient: "born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives"(*The English Patient* 176). For Ondaatje, identity—either personal or public, individual or national—is always overlapping and changing.

Running in the Family seems to focus on tracing the familial when exploring the role the colonial discourse might have played in shaping Michael's own identity paradoxes. In other words, although the text succeeds to pronounce the colonial discourse in Sri Lanka and postcolonial effects on his family, there is rarely a direct confrontation between Michael and the reality of his self-fragmentation and in-betweenness. Instead of being directly involved in the text and the narrative, Michael's fragmented self is mostly perceived indirectly through his narration of his family's and Ceylon's postcolonial fragmentation and out-of-placeness.

II. Retrieving identity through the communal, sensory details, and the imaginary:

In addition to its concern of discovering the colonial discourse in Ceylon, *Running in the Family* succeeds to articulate self through a collective nature inherent within the Ceylonese culture as opposed to the individuality of Western genres. Throughout his memoir, Michael presents himself as part of a collectivity or a Ceylonese cultural-self as if his individuality is always merged with the we-group in his society, and his concern represents theirs.

Running in the Family begins with a nightmare that Michael has while staying at a friend's house in Canada about his father, Mervyn. In the dream, Mervyn is surrounded by vicious dogs in the jungle. When Michael wakes, he realizes that he does not know who his father truly was, or much about his family history at all. It is obvious that Michael has long felt a sense of alienation towards his father due to the little information he knew about him. This epiphany makes Michael further realize he knows little about his family history: "In my mid-thirties I realized that I had slipped past a childhood I had ignored and not understood"(Ondaatje, *Running* 2). His quest of identity stems from a desire to reconnect to his past, family and culture, especially to his father, Mervyn Ondaatje. It seems that detangling the

mystery of his father and his parents' relationship is the way to approach his self-realization.

Actually, the title itself holds an embedded pun within its textual composition: the first meaning can refer to the genealogical inheritance of features that are “running in the family,” which stresses the role his family has in his own identity. The second meaning can be a reference to the act of writing-the-self, which renders the author in a journey back “running into the family,” an encounter with a community based on relation, history and traditions. Consequently, accompanied by his sister Gillian, Michael tries to “trace the maze of relationships in [their] ancestry”(3). They meet with old relatives like Aunt Phyllis, who reminisce about memories and stories of the past, particularly about Michael's parents. His quest for his parents—mainly his father—is motivated by a longing to define his identity in terms of genealogical continuity through filling the genealogical gap in his the past—his father.

When Michael, Gillian, and their families visit a church in Colombo built in 1650, they find the gravestones of many early Ondaatjes. Seeing his own surname engraved in ancient stone makes Michael feel “the excitement of smallness.” This feeling can be read as a nationalist attachment to his roots, perceiving himself as one member in the long legacy of the Ondaatje family and the past of his ancestry.

Michael's feeling of not knowing himself due to not knowing his family suggests that one's sense of identity is deeply tied to the family legacy into which they are born. Michael confirms this when he writes, "At certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed. [...] So our job becomes to [...] with 'the mercy of distance' write the histories"(85). His statement suggests that his family history, and particularly the absence of his father, influences his own life as an adult in significant but unseen ways, and thus understanding that history is essential to understanding himself.

This sense of belonging to a larger group of people might be analysed out of his reoccurring vision he sees after days of conversations, memories, and stories about his family members in Ceylon:

I see my own straining body which stands shaped like a star and realize gradually I am part of a human pyramid. Below me are other bodies that I am standing on and above me are several more, though I am quite near the top. (4)

Michael's vision suggests that he now recognizes himself as simply one member in a long family legacy, standing upon the shoulders of those relatives who went before him just as his children stand on his. In other words, through finding and recognizing their place in their familial and cultural legacies, an individual defines their own identity as a person who is influenced by the past and who will contribute to the future of their lineage.

It is worth mentioning here that in order for text to become the site of an exploration of self through Diaspora and the communal, language of the center needs to be deterritorialized and re-placed “in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place”(Ashcroft et al 37). In other words, in order to write Ondaatje’s/Michael’s in-and-out state of belonging which seeks articulation through the collective, his text adapts “a range of appropriations which establish a discourse announcing its difference from Europe”(ibid). As he confesses in his interview with McCrum, “I can’t speak the language apart from a few rude words,” Ondaatje is aware of his double inscription in language. This linguistic struggle, Rushdie points out, is an integral characteristic of the third-world writers’ writing in English, which reflects “other struggles taking place in reality, struggles within ourselves and in our society”(16). Similar to Ondaatje and Rushdie, Edward Said, who was a Palestinian migrant himself relate to the same position in between two languages:

I have never known what is Arabic or English, or which one was really mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other. Each can seem like my absolutely first language, but neither is. (*Out of Place* 4)

One of the evident—although rare—methods Ondaatje appropriated the language of his text was by the inclusion of several Sinhala letters and translating their shapes into everyday objects (“sickle,” “spoon,” “lid,” “cooking utensil”). The self-portrait of the Sinhala language extends the notion of referentiality to reach a kind of connection between its alphabet and the external reality of Ceylon it depicts:

I still believe the most beautiful alphabet was created by the Sinhalese. The insect of ink curves into a shape that is almost a sickle, spoon, eyelid. The letters are washed blunt glass which betray no jaggedness. Sanskrit was governed by verticals, but its sharp grid features were not possible in Ceylon. Here the Ola leaves which people wrote on were too brittle. [. . .] When I was five — the only time in my life when my handwriting was meticulous — I sat in the tropical classrooms and learned the letters ඔ, and ඛ, repeating them page after page. How to write. The self-portrait of language. ෂ. Lid on a cooking utensil that takes the shape of fire.(33,34)

Ondaatje also inserts in his English text two Sinhala sentences along with their English translations: “**කොප්පල්ස්ටන් තිවසෙහි වහලයට නැගී පොල්ගෙඩි වීසි කොරවී**” which means “I must not throw coconuts off the roof of Coppelstone House,” and “**බාර්නබස් පියතුමාගේ කාරයේ වසර්වලට සිටින පුත්‍ර කොරවී**” which is translated into “We must not urinate again on Father Barnabus’ tires” (34).

Ondaatje’s text also deterritorializes its language through unsettling the authority of the Western systems of self-representation: destabilizing fixed

meanings⁴², adapting multiple-voiced and fragmented narration which is challenging the boundaries of the authorial “I” and chronological order, slipping between past and present, and intertextuality⁴³. The text narrates the diasporic self through the fragments of confused rumors, humorous anecdotes, poems, newspaper clippings, maps, dialogues, and photographs.

The book is composed of apparently unstructured and randomly placed sections of varied lengths, interspersed with poetry and photographs of different places, people and incidents in Ceylon and pictures rescued from his family album. Clearly enough, those photographs help capture and relive the fragments from his past. In his narrative, Michael moves backward and forward through time, shuffling between events and memories. This style of narration, which mirrors in a way the way Aunt Phyllis and other relatives recount their memories of the family, produces the memoir as a personal story rather than a precise historical record. Ondaatje’s text does not offer any definitive truths presenting fragments of memories and incomplete details and descriptions.

In addition, the work is packed with the stories from the first-person voices of people other than the narrator. We often see Michael narrating events that he was not present for as if he were. He enacts a self who listens rather than the self who

⁴² there can be no true or fixed identity, there is no origin or original, no singular author, no ultimate knowledge, and representation is no longer a matter of veracity or accuracy. Notions of truth and authenticity are outdated

⁴³ employing a variety of texts and genres by different authors to prove a broader point.

speaks and voices, letting his meaning mediated by communal consciousness and impulses arising from group sensibility. Moreover, at many instances, the speakers are left unknown. For example, in section “APRIL 11, 1932”, an anonymous person recalls the trip to Doris and Mervyn’s wedding. Moreover, in the section, “Dialogues”, there are eleven different passages told by a group of anonymous speakers.(81)

Apparently, this method serves two aspects. On the one hand, it aims at reflecting the perplexities and experiences of today's intensely fragmentized world and its accompanied inconsistencies and feeling of incompleteness. Within multicultural discourses, there is a need for affirmation of self and origin. This affirmation starts with a deconstruction of the self, undermining its foundations, waiting for it to topple, foreshadowing its collapse and exposure. On the other hand, Michael's multiple identities in his slipping between various roles of author, writer, and character create in a way an impression of the book written by a community rather than a single author. When he acknowledges at the end of the novel that “ [a] literary work, is a communal act. And this book could not have been imagined, let alone conceived, without the help of many people," he warns the reader against reading the narrative as a standard autobiography. "I must confess that the book is not a history but a portrait or 'gesture'...in Sri Lanka a well told lie is worth a thousand facts" (98). He seems to justify postmodern

interpretations of his textual practices: multiple narrative voices provide the reader with different perspectives, none of which can claim to superior truth, while the absence of singular narrative authority can be read as a an effort to consume the self within the communal.

When reading *Running in the Family*, one cannot but notice how Ondaatje presents his experiences as a stream of consciousness without a particular context or explanation. That is done mainly through his dwelling on many sensory details of his surroundings in Ceylon — human bodies, stone statues, natural habitats which are described at length. Throughout the memoir, we get to see him experiencing different activities in different places like reading old newspaper clippings, watching people butcher an animal, driving through the city, being at the beach, dining with friends, watching a thunderstorm and monsoon, and describing a spider crawling across his toilet. Throughout involving those sensory details in his narrative, Ondaatje/Michael draws the reader into his world by describing what it is to experience Ceylon directly, rather than only narrating events or history. For example, in the poem, “To Colombo”, we are presented with so many sensory details of driving from the high Sigiriya hills down to Colombo, passing alongside men, bulls, and terraced rice paddies, inviting us to experience them ourselves. Similarly, “The Cinnamon Peeler” poem ties the scent of cinnamon to the act of love between a man and a woman. After the woman becomes the cinnamon

peeler's wife, the unshakable smell becomes a bold and public mark of their love: "I am the cinnamon / peeler's wife. Smell me." Michael's sensory description of the scent of cinnamon as part of the Ceylonese traditions again provides the reader with a sense of Ceylon rather than an objective description of it and suggests that those sensory details form a part of the identity he is trying to rediscover.

Furthermore, in the section, Monsoon Notebook (i), Michael gives a detailed sensory description of his surrounding in Ceylon starting with the newspaper clippings getting wet in his hands, to listing the different smells, ending with the different things and people around him (27). In Monsoon Notebook (ii), we see Michael sitting in his kitchen in Canada listening to long audio recordings he made of the jungle sounds and bird calls in an attempt to transport the memory of Ceylon to his place at Canada (62). Witnessing the world, forming memories, and remembering sensations are the primary ways to preserve a moment through time. Interweaving all the sensory details Michael witnessed about postcolonial Ceylon with different parts of his text aims at obtaining an overall sense of his environment and preserving it in his memory. Such a preservation is needed in his on-going process of Michael's self-discovery. He reflects that "[t]here is nothing in this view that could not be a hundred years old, that might not have been here when [he] left Ceylon at the age of eleven"(97). This once again suggests

inevitable strong influence of the details of Ceylon, and the environment he was born in and that his parents lived their lives in, in shaping one's identity.

At the end of the memoir, Michael ends up absorbing every sensory detail of his surroundings: "My body must remember everything, this brief insect bite, smell of wet fruit, the slow snail light, rain, rain, and underneath the hint of colors a sound of furious wet birds whose range of mimicry includes what one imagines to be large beasts, trains, burning electricity"(97). His two journeys back to Ceylon seem to hold within their layers an Michael with a renewed juxtaposition to the place where he was born. Instead of regaining the guilt of a prodigal in him, this renewed juxtaposition to Ceylon takes the form of engaging in an act of affectionate witnessing: "I witnessed everything"(27). It sparks his inner urge "to talk to all the lost history like [a] deserving lover"(19). According to Homi Bhabha in his book *Location of Culture*, displacement creates a feeling of 'unhomeliness' which is an estranging condition urging one to take a fresh perspective of the home and the world, which not only helps lessens the pain of dislocation, but also eases the adoption of a new identity in an alien land.

When it comes to narrating his postcolonial Ceylon through all the sensory details here and there in his memoir in an attempt to come to terms with his *presence Ceylonese*, it is fair to say that this could not be done without indulging the element of fiction. His *presence Ceylonese* is no longer there because it has

been transformed and thus cannot be simply recovered. So, to rediscover “the new Ceylon”, “the Ceylon of diaspora” which is the result of a long series of transformations, discontinuities, displacement and slavery, the element of fiction was employed to describe that imaginative journey home. That why Ondaatje’s work is classified as a fictional memoir.

In post-colonial societies, the rediscovery of one’s cultural identity can be seen as what Frantz Fanon called a passionate research, “directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others”(qtd in Hall, “Cultural Identity” 223). *Running in the Family* traces the return home of the migrant writer to a realm of family and myth. It is as if he is trying to reclaim his own world and lost identity by recapturing the world of his parents, Ceylon in the early decades of the century. Ondaatje/Michael’s text apparently seeks to restore “an imaginary fullness or plentitude, to set against the broken rubric of [his] past”(225). That is to say, while trying to retrieve the past, Michael ends up instead as reconstructing it as well through reinventing multiple images of his past, imagined and modified. This is what Stuart Hall calls an act of an “imaginary reunification” that could be explained as “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas”(224).

Ondaatje/Michael builds an "imaginary country" and tries to impose it on the one that exists. Of course, in the process of the fictional recreation of the land he inevitably faces the problem of history: what to retain, what to discard, how to hold on to what memory insists on giving up, how to negotiate his divided subjectivity - how to reconcile the "then" and "now" of the migrant. To return to Sri Lanka/Ceylon after a long absence is to "experience the shock of "doubleness" of similarity and difference" (227). This journey to "return" to his Sri Lankan/Ceylonese identity which went by the long route through England and Canada, ends in another 'Ceylon', a 'Ceylon' "retold through politics, memory and desires" (232).

The biggest missing piece of his past that dominated the text was the truth about his father. Having not known him in his childhood, Ondaatje/Michael is quite aware of the impossibility of obtaining an authentic picture of his father. Therefore, he tries to rediscover his father through writing, putting together the image of his father by vivid dreams, exaggerated memories and anecdotes, and photographs. At the end of his memoir, Michael admits failure in reconstructing of the Mervyn he had lost: "There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him. To know him from these stray actions I am told about by those who loved him. And yet, he is still one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut"(Ondaatje, *Running* 96). The Mervyn he recreates is, just like

Ceylon, retold through fiction, memory and desire. This is what Salman Rushdie explains in detail in his *Imaginary Homelands*:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

By concluding his work like this, Ondaatje/Michael stresses that the journey of self-identification will forever lead to open conclusions: ““You must get this book right,” my brother tells me, “You can only write it once.” But the book again is incomplete. In the end all your children move among the scattered acts and memories with no more clues. Not that we ever thought we would be able to fully understand you”(Ondaatje, *Running* 96). He will never truly perceive his authentic father figure but chooses to consciously blur the line between fact and fiction by recreating and keeping good memories about him as a way of redeeming his own perception of him.

Chapter III

History, Memory and Truth in *My Place* and *Running*

In the Family

In his essay, “Is Nothing Sacred?” Salman Rushdie points out that the writer writes to provoke and to question “everything in every possible way”(428). As we have discussed in the previous chapters, both authors, Sally Morgan and Michael Ondaatje, narrated their quest of self through the act of writing, describing their spiritual journeys back home. As diaspora/postcolonial writers, the burden of their life-narrative articulated a hybrid text that denounces the Western modes of representation. As an individualist and Westernly claimed literary form, the autobiographic genre is said (or meant) not to be able to carry the ‘burden’ of the traditional, the oral (illiterate) and the uncivilized—taking into account that the invention of printing was considered the start point of civilization. However, in spite of all the suspicions and criticism, Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* and Morgan’s *My Place* succeed to break all the standards and prove that the autobiography is not alien to the native forms of expression and communal consciousness, even if it is Westernly imported.

Both their quests which end up questioning an essentialist, pure concept of identity, also extend to doubt other media used and aspects involved in their process of self-discovery. Stuck in the perplexities and dualities of their in-betweenness, between the present and the past, history appears as the first destination in their journeys. Reconnecting with history is done through reconnecting with collective, ancestral traditions and oral heritage mainly through remembering. However, the collective and oral burden that Morgan's *My Place* and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* are devoted to bear needs to be re-domesticated through the text; and this is done by employing different narrative techniques align to the Western form, and carrying a different content than the Western one.

I. History through myths, nature, and orality:

One aspect of that content re-domestication is inserting some of the myths and superstitions in their cultures. For example, in the section, “tongue”, Ondaatje employs one of the local myths of his Ceylonese culture, namely the myth of “thalagoya.” It states that if a child eats the tongue of the kabaragoya’s smaller relative, the thalagoya, they will someday become a brilliant speaker. However, the tongue must be swallowed whole, sandwiched between two slices of banana. Uncle Noel is presented as an example of someone who does this as a child and becomes a successful lawyer as he grows up, which implicitly suggests that possibility of truth in myths and superstition. This questions the same Western terminology that uses “myth” and “superstitions” to denote the absence of truth as opposed to “facts” that are based on truth.

Another myth is presented in the section, “Kegalle”, when Ondaatje states that after Mervyn—his father— dies, a strange grey cobra appears in Rock Hill. Although Maureen tries many times to shoot it, he misses every time. The grey cobra does not attack anyone but just wanders around the property or follows one of the daughters. It rather keeps the other snakes away from the farm. That is when Maureen and her daughters realize that this cobra is Mervyn, back from the dead to look after them.

Similarly, in *My Place* Aboriginal music is presented as a medium through which the spirits of Aboriginal ancestors communicate with the living. Nan and Mum repeatedly hear music from the large swamp in their backyard of their house, which was full of wild life. In spite of the fact that there are no people there, Nan believes that Aborigines are living there and “having corroborees every night” (311). Gladys explains the experience herself,

I often sat and listened to it with her after that. I’ve never been to a corroboree, but that music had always been inside of me. When I was little, I was told Aboriginal music was heathen music. I thought it was beautiful music; whenever I heard it, it was like a message, like I was being supported, protected. (311)

She assures Nan that “there’s no one down there [in the swamp], it’s a spiritual thing”(311).

For Nan, music and songs seem to be the vessel that preserve the spirits of dead Aboriginal people:

Well, we was listenin’ to music. It was the blackfellas playin’ their didgeridoos⁴⁴ and singin’ and laughin’ down in the swamp. Your mother could hear it.[...] You see, we was hearin’ the people from long ago. Our people who used to live here before the white man came. (365)

⁴⁴ The didgeridoo is commonly considered the national instrument of Australian Aborigines

She also believes that those spirits are there to protect them. That's why the music stops playing when Billy, Sally's father dies. It is as if he, with his psychological problems caused by the war, made him a source of danger on his own family.

Arthur, in turn, opens up to Sally about his belief in their ancestors' spirits and their permanent guidance of the living. That guidance is clear to interfere when he chooses his wife, "I think the spirits of her people must have chosen her for me." (223). He also believes that he has "healing powers", but Daisy's got them stronger than him. "You see, it runs in our family. The spirit is strong in our family. When I die, someone will get my powers," he continues (229).

Sally also gets her own experience of communicating with her ancestors' spirits when she is up north. After she hears the story of her Aboriginal ancestors and relatives from Jack, Sally feels deprived of knowing such great women in her family. later that night, she has a vision of three Aboriginal women and a child standing outside her window. She realizes that they are Annie— Nan's mother, Rosie—Nan's full blood sister, Old Fanny—Nan's grandmother and Lily (Lilla)—Nan and Arthur's half-sister:

Suddenly, it was as if a window in heaven had been opened and I saw a group of Aboriginal women standing together. They were all looking at me. I knew instinctively it was them. Three adults and a child. Why, that's Rosie,

I thought. And then the tears came. As I cried, a voice gently said, ‘Stop worrying, they’re with me now.’ Within minutes, I was asleep. (245)

Moreover, in her interview with Wright, Morgan stresses the importance of dreams in her act of writing and painting as she uses them “as part of the creative process.” They contribute to the spiritual side of her writings. That kind of belief might seem supernatural or be called superstitious by the white society they are living in because “[the white man] only believes what he can see. He needs to get educated. He’s only livin’ half a life”(“A Fundamental Question” 356).

Another aspect that characterized both works was the role nature of home played in their cultural self-rediscovery and preservation of heritage. It is clear how both writers perceive the nature of their homes in a special way as attached to their precolonial reality. In *Running in the Family*, Michael develops a deep relation to his surroundings, describing in detail the smells and scents distinctive of his land. Through absorbing all the sensory details of his Ceylon, he seeks to preserve memories of the nature in the island: "My body must remember everything, the brief insect bite, smell of wet fruit, the slow snail light, rain, and underneath the hint of colours..."(28)

Likewise, land and wildlife are another manifestation of Aboriginality in Sally’s *My Place*. They hold a very deep meaning to Aborigines who have a spiritual, physical, social and cultural connection with their land. This stems from the

Aboriginal concept of Dreaming which describes the journeys of the spirits of ancestral beings to make rivers, mountains, animals and other natural resources. In other words, Aboriginal people's spirits make and exist in the present day landscape: "when a person dies some form of the persons spirit and also their bones go back to the country they were born in [...] Aborigine people believe that they share their being with their country and that is within it." (Bird Rose, 163-165).

Clearly enough, that strong connection with their land and its wildlife is something Nan and Arthur inherited from their parents and grandparents: "I take after my old grandfather, I'm tender-hearted. I don't believe in stealing anything from its mother," Arthur explains(197). They, in turn, pass on this Aboriginal trait to their children and grandchildren. For example, Mum is also presented as passionately interested in the world of nature. At the same time, Sally shows an affection towards nature, even not conscious yet about its relation to her aboriginal history: "spring was always an emotional experience for me. It was for Nan too." (*My Place* 8) Later, Nan stresses to Sally that such traits are purely Aboriginal and come with the Aboriginal blood: "You kids loved the bush, you got things passed down to you from Gladdie and me. Things that you only got 'cause we was black" (367).

What is more, both *My Place* and *Running in the family* claim oral traditions and roots where traditional songs, oral literature, and stories played a vital part of their cultures. They helped preserving their culture and recording their history through generations, even during and after colonization. In both works, we see a return to the oral, which took many forms, to revive and stress the importance of orality in their journey of self-rediscovery. Walter J. Ong explains the powerful role of the spoken word forms in binding the listeners together: “when a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker;” unlike the act of writing and printing that, according to him, “isolates”(73). What is more, through his impressing digging of the oral roots inherent in every single text, he argues Jacques Derrida’s famous point that “there is no linguistic sign before writing,” by his strong statement that “thought is nested in speech not in text” (73). In other words, without sounds, the words on the paper have no meaning.

Nonetheless, Ong stresses that, in a world of literacy, the role writing as a medium of power and the inevitable destination of orality into the written text which ensures preservation and continuity: “orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing. There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of

powers forever inaccessible without literacy”(14). This is clear when Sally clarifies her motivation to write *My Place*:

there’s almost nothing *written*⁴⁵ 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. There’s a lot of our history we can’t even get at [...] I just want to try to tell a little bit of the other side of the s tory. (180)

She makes it clear that her book was not just to explore her family history and discover where she came from but more to provide a record : “we have been deprived of that crucial knowledge as children, and I didn’t want my own children to be deprived. I felt that it was a record for them and if no one else read it, it kind of didn’t matter”(Morgan, “A Fundamental Question” 94). But the question here is: how is that inscription of oral heritage inside of a written text done in both works?

There are two levels of that inscription that need to be taken into consideration: the fact that both writers write in English the language of the colonial power, and the process of writing itself. Writing their selves and histories in the language of power and empire, both writers remake their English text to serve their “own purposes”(“Imaginary Homelands” 16). As Fanon puts it: “A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that

⁴⁵ Italics mine

language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power”(16). They turn the table right back on the colonial power, and this is what Rushdie called “the Empire-writes-back technique”.

Morgan and Ondaatje appropriate the English language by re-using it as a multi-sided weapon “which establish[es] a discourse announcing its difference from Europe.” Both texts include terms and sentences in their original languages that were situated in the text to be rearticulated and intensified. The writing process itself is appropriated too by inserting the fluidity, orality and plurality of their cultures as well as identities as opposed to the Eurocentric individuality. In other words, their urge to articulate home and identity is textualized into the very fabric of their texts, as elements of myth and fiction are parts and parcel of their ongoing search for their unresolved identity crisis.

In one of her TED talks, “the danger of a single story”, the Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stresses Bakhtin’s idea of the importance of multiple stories:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can repair that broken dignity(17:37- 17:55).

In the same vein, both works are replete with examples of the oral tradition of their cultures and stories of and about their people, rising together to render the text a collective story put into a written text to be heard and preserved. This method of narrating the self through the stories of and about the others forms what Stephen. J. Greenblatt calls an “artistic expression” which “the subjective consciousness of an isolated creator” can never achieve. Rather “Collective actions, ritual gestures, paradigms of relationship, and shared images of authority penetrate the work of art and shape it from within” (89)

In the Aboriginal culture of Australia, songs and stories are used to teach their children about their culture : the Creation , Dreaming, their ancestors, the nature of the country, significant laws and customs. Therefore, *My Place* seems to knit together the oral testimonies and stories of many people, mainly Aboriginal. Rich with many Aboriginal stories—There are even stories nested within stories. Parading as a Western autobiography, *My Place* pays her debt in sharing, guarding and preserving part—even small—of Aboriginal oral heritage into a white literate Australia.

Obviously enough, Sally interweaves personal narratives with collective stories not strictly her own. Since she has very little knowledge of her aboriginal history, she determines to trace down her real identity. In an attempt to write a book telling the world about the forgotten aboriginal culture and traditions, her grandmother is

her main and closest source of information—thus autobiographical knowledge. However, after realizing that she will not get that much out of her grandma, she looks in the library for some documents about the Australian aboriginal history. She also traces back her ancestry and relatives and travel to many places in order to interview them and gather as many stories as she can. In addition, her grandma frequently refers to nature and traditional songs that are considered an integral part of the Australian Aboriginal culture and that clearly help her grandma to remember more incidents from the past.

Starting her quest of identity, Sally admits having no context of Nan's life, realizing later that Nan's story is the only way to get the knowledge she needed. Although it was very difficult for Nan to speak out because she was afraid all her life, but after she tells her story she thinks that “ maybe it's a good thing. Could be it's time to tell. Time to tell what it's been like in this country”(367). Nan's decision to tell her story gives her “a sense that she had a value as a human being” (Morgan, “A Fundamental Question” 95). Of course, Sally's continuous attempts to break her family's silences, especially Nan's, can be seen as a message to all other Aborigines to speak up. Telling their stories is the only way to keep the Aboriginal alive in the continuous process of assimilation and integration.

After their journey to the north and hearing stories of her older family members, Gladys shows an urgent desire to tell her story and ‘bare her soul’. Opening up to

Sally, she blames herself for all those years of silence and fear. She realizes now how her story can make a difference : “If I stay silent like Nanna, it’s like saying everything’s all right. People should know what it’s like for someone like me’ (258). Overcoming her fears, she feels happy for making a first step in passing the Aboriginal heritage on. “ If we all keep saying we’re proud to be Aboriginal,” she says, “then maybe other Australians will see that we are a people to be proud of.”

Arthur, in turn, by telling his own story, feels as if he contributed to the preservation of Aboriginal history:

I want to get my land fixed up so my children can get it and I want my story finished. I want everyone to read it. Arthur Corunna’s story! I might be famous. You see, it’s important, because then maybe they’ll understand how hard it’s been for the blackfella to live the way he wants. I’m part of history, that’s how I look on it. Some people read history, don’t they? (230)

Similarly, in his memoir, Ondaatje first employs the nature of the memoir to tell his story through the stories of his family and relatives in his hometown, Ceylon, which he knew mainly from fragments of stories he had heard as a child. Interspersed with poetry, pictures of life in Ceylon and snapshots rescued from the family album, the work is replete with the stories and first-person voices of people other than the narrator. There are also sudden shifts from the narrator's first to third person narration which can create an impression of the book written by a

community rather than a single author. And this absence of singular narrative authority can be read as an effort to diminish or erase the self. Through the very act of retelling tales about his family or his country, the narrator becomes a protagonist who participates in the cultural memory of the community. Instead of positing himself through his own story, he locates primarily as the repository of what others have to tell.

The multivoiced nature of the “I” in *Running in the Family* allows different ideological perspectives and different centres of consciousness to interact. The work succeeds to manifest a Bakhtinian instance of polyphony at the service of Ceylon as it makes way for the voices of Ondaatje’s Ceylonese family and relatives to rise as a songline in the Ceylonese history. *Running in the Family* is, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it:

constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other (18)

My Place also highlights the importance of stories in passing the Aboriginal Law⁴⁶ that is derived from ancestral people down the successive generations. Nan, for example, spends a lot of time with her grandchildren, tells them stories about her own childhood and tries to teach them her Aboriginal language in an attempt to

⁴⁶ dreaming

pass on her heritage to them. Consequently, every night Amber, Sally's daughter, reads bed time stories to Nan, which are about Aboriginal children in the Western Desert. Sally is also surprised when Blaze, her son, says "get me a drink" in his Nan's Aboriginal language. (340) This all finally pays off when Blaze comes after school to inform his family of the big announcement he made to his friends at school. "I've got some good news this morning. I'd like you all to know I got a bit of blackfella in me," he declared to his friends(342)

Ondaatje also highlights one of the Ceylonese storytelling techniques to keep stories alive and be remembered for a longer period, which is exaggeration : "If anything kept their generation alive it was this recording by exaggeration. Ordinary tennis matches would be mythologized to the extent that one player was so drunk that he almost died on the court." (78) Apparently, he also uses exaggeration of stories to help entangle his crisis of identity. He romanticizes the unknown by employing fantasies and emotional truths to present the things that he did not know. For example, in the section "the passions of Lalla", Ondaatje's maternal mother, Lalla, is depicted by Ondaatje as lively, vibrant and fun-loving rather than an annoying, excessive character as she could have been received by Mervyn or Ondaatje's sisters. When he portrays even her worst deeds like stealing flowers from gravestones, urinating in public and even the nature of her death, an exaggerated and romanticized picture of her is presented rather than the real one.

Another example which is mostly related to Ondaatje's re-discovery of self, is the exaggerated representations of the nature of his father. In an attempt to get a larger perspective of his father's personality and experience with drinking, Ondaatje record brief, anonymous memories of him from different speakers, mainly friends and family. In spite of the darker, more vulnerable side of him as an alcoholic who once stopped a train and ran "naked into the jungle", his actions are most of the time are presented as eccentrically unique. For example he is perceived as a heroic figure who discovered Japanese bombs on the train and saved all the civilians on-board by forcing them to detrain.(70) Ondaatje continues to exaggerate and romanticize his father's character as a man who even when hitting the rock bottom, he does it uniquely. He employs the element of fiction in recapturing the persona of his father of the past that he knew very little about. And because that is impossible, romanticization through the fictional is the way to do that. So In search of fixity and fetishism of identities, roots become stuck in the romance of the past.

II. Flaws in memory and storytelling and the use of fiction:

Whenever autobiographies are in question, the issue of memory pops up. As one of the most important cognitive faculties that contribute in the composition of the autobiographical act, memory has been traditionally viewed as a product of the brain or mind. However, recent critical studies have showed the inevitable role of culture on this mental process. Remembering is not “an entirely privatized activity but an activity situated in cultural politics,” (9) Smith argues. This politics determines what is recollected and forgotten both personally and collectively and is essential to “the cultural production of knowledge about the past, and thus to the terms of an individual’s self-knowledge.” (9)

We cannot ignore the powerful influence of cultural ideologies and discourses on the practices of autobiographical remembering as the former create a fixed framework for the latter. This framework is represented by the two main variables – internal and external—which are strongly influenced by culture. That is to say, memory develops as a personal—internal—expression and a collective—external—production at the same time, and both are culturally-modulated. For example, a life narrator usually incorporates multiple ways of accessing memory: some of them are personal (dreams, family albums, photos, family stories, objects); some are public (documents, historical events, collective rituals and traditions).

What determines, nevertheless, the prevailing remembering techniques employed in the text is culture. Consequently, in a culture where individuality is at core, the type of memories recalled are autonomous, “self-focused” and would probably focus on the individual’s own perspectives and roles. They help individuals reaffirm their unique identity by distinguishing themselves from others. On the contrary, in a culture where community matters the most, the autobiographical knowledge is collective, relational and rooted through others. Individuals, when remembering the past, focus on information about the group and drive collective details and resources into discussion.

Given the fact that the cultural self has an essential part in framing the process of remembering and determining the resources used to obtain the autobiographical knowledge, both of my selected autobiographers could not help but consume the autonomous selfhood within the collective one in the process of remembering they followed. Therefore, they remember their cultural practices and narrate their own realities and histories in a way that situates them each as a creative and reverential voice bridging the multiple cultures and positions they shuttle across. However, understanding their own cultural identities as inconsistent, they both realize that their memories, their experiences made out of these memories, and thus their source texts are inconsistent too, not accessible nor verifiable in any literal sense.

The whole process of self-narration raises many questions about the reliability and comprehensiveness of details mentioned and memories recalled; especially that this genre is meant to recount and present the life and reality of the self-narrator. Francis R. Hart supports this idea by stating that “unreliability is an inescapable condition, not a rhetorical option; truth, like form and intention, is a problematic goal to be sought in various ways” (488). This applies to history too, as Salman Rushdie remarks that events in history must be always be subject to questioning and deconstruction: "History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of giving many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance, as well as on our perspectiveness and knowledge"(Xliii).

To what extent do stories tell the truth, and what kind of truth do they present? Emphasizing the flaws of memory, effects of cultural and political discourses on remembering, the inevitable subjectivity of the human nature and the purpose of writing in the first place, the concept of a unitary and institutionalized truth has been challenged by the both authors. The autonomous sense of identity, the concept of history is destabilized along with concepts of flawless memory and ultimate truth.

This is mainly presented in *My Place* through the many stories that contribute to the book’s own subjective truth. In other words, as each story we tell is guided by

its particular discursive patterns, objective truth can never be fully attained. *My Place* presents unreliability of narrative and of memory which feeds it. It highlights the subjectivity of stories because they depend on politics of remembering, on the one hand—what is recollected and what is obscured: “somethings I might tell you, I don’t want in the book,” Arthur tells Sally. On the other hand, there is the “distortion of memory”: “I have no memory of being taken from my mother and placed in Parkerville Children Home,” Gladys claims (260). “My brain’s no good, it’s gone rotten,” nan also states (367).

Another aspect is the fact that, in some of those stories, like her mother’s, grandmother’s and Uncle Arthur’s, Sally used a tape recorder first and then transcribed the stories. She claims that the stories were “virtually” transcribed word to word, especially in her mother’s case who was very articulate. Sally’s job was only to put the parts of the story together and in a chronological order:

when we did the tapes we had no system, so I had bits all over the place. I never asked Mum any questions, she just talked as she remembered. So cutting and pasting, I had bits here and there, and then it was retyped as it made sense. And for me, I started off at several different points in time and wrote what I could remember, and then researched at different times, and later it all started to come together. (Morgan, “A Fundamental Question” (108)

She goes on to confess how difficult her mission got as a result of the ramifying nature of stories, as “there were stories that kind of went off on tangents. It was

very easy to go off on another funny story.” Consequently, she “chucked a few of those [stories] out.” (108)

What is more, Sally adds that sometimes in Nan’s case and the other older Aboriginal people, she received some non-verbal answers communicated through facial gestures or body language. Since those answers could be felt and seen only by Sally, verbalizing them would be seen as subjectifying the content. This made it harder for Sally to make a decision whether to include them or not:

[T]hey’ll you look at you, and you know what that means, that was really hard for me, because I knew what she was telling me, and she wanted me to know, but it hadn’t been spoken. So I had to decide, do I include this or do I leave it out [...] (108)

Finally, realizing that those non-verbal answers—like the verbal ones— were actually “information [Nan] had given [her],” Sally decides to write those answers in, but “very simply.” She admits that she—like any other writer—had to face the temptation to actually put her words into the speaker’s mouth. That is why she decides to put the words that represented those non-verbal answers exactly the way she perceived them and let the reader decides:

I think there was a danger there to get up on my high horse, but I think what I learned when I was writing it was that you don’t have to be explicit to say something. It’s better to just put something simply and let it tell its own story. I think it has more impact. And also if you’re going to bash people

over the head they don't always listen. You've got to get to people's hearts, make them feel about something... if people could *just* see Aboriginal people as a people with the same human emotions, the same feelings; as just ordinary people. (109)

Paul John Eakin states in *Fictions in Autobiography*, that “the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure”(2), and that “fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived and of any art devoted to the presentation of that life”(3). Thus, “it is as reasonable to assume that all autobiography has some fiction in it as it is to recognize that all fiction is in some sense necessarily autobiographical.”(4) As a result, studies on autobiography have extended to include works under the subgenres of fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction, genres of which their various obvious ambiguities had previously kept them separate (or at least appeared to be kept separate) from studies on autobiography and fiction proper.

Along with memories, Ondaatje intersperses his narrative with nonfactual stories (the author admits this in his “Acknowledgments”) which still provide insight into the past despite being fictional. Factual errors and dubious claims seem to consist an essential aspect in Ondaatje's narrative technique. He frets over the accuracy of some of the stories. For example, when Ondaatje hears another different story of his father drunkenly diving headfirst off a train: “there is a story about my father I cannot come to terms with. It is one of the versions of his train

escapade [...] there were *probably*⁴⁷ stray dogs [...] he had *perhaps*⁴⁸ picked them up..”(86). In addition, he also suspects the truth about Lalla’s birth story: “She[Lalla] *claimed*⁴⁹ to have been born outdoors, abruptly, during a picnic, though there is little evidence for this”(52). Another example is when Ondaatje and his sister Gillian go to visit Sir John Kotelawala at his massive house seeking more information about their father. Ondaatje mentions Sir John’s deviation from the story for three times and admits helping him to remember some other details that he heard “from three or four other points of view”(72). What is more, Ondaatje uses many expressions to indicate the flaws of memory: “either that, or, and of that we were not sure” (78), “or so my side of the feud tells it” (69). He seems to doubt this story’s truth. This use of nonfactual story gives the reader a greater understanding of the truth suggesting that even a fictionalized story can be used to illuminate the truth of the past.

When we ask ourselves the essential question of truth in stories, Salman Rushdie answers the question in one of his interviews making clear that “stories do not have to be true”(“Salman Rushdie on Magical Realism” 00:00:05- 00:00:08). Which is also emphasized in his book *Midnight’s Children*: “what is true and what is real are not necessarily the same” (37). Their aspects of unreliability actually

⁴⁷ Italics mine

⁴⁸ Italics mine

⁴⁹ Italics mine

support the vision of multi-versioned reality and that elements of fantasy and make believe were actually meant to support his vision of multi-versioned reality.

Both works continually cross and re-cross the boundaries between real and fictional/imaginative identification. To recreate fictionally the land and the home one had left decades ago is inevitably coupled with the failure to arrive at any objective truth because the distances of time and space distort facts and memories contain only incomplete truths, the only material the between– world writer can record. Although Sally's life narrative is mostly based more on real incidents the characters faced, it leaves some space to the imaginative aspects created by including some of the Aboriginal traditions in the text such as the Aboriginal spirits of the ancestors and their manifestation through music, dreams and land. However, in his book, Ondaatje shows a great focus not on history's truth but on the idea that history is reproduced or recreated in telling ("[recreating] the era of [his] parents"(97). He employs fiction in his work implying the unreachable objectivity of narrating one's own life and reality. He ironically uses imaginative aspects to create a space for the reader's imagination without imposing anything, without saying what is and what is not.

When Ondaatje writes that "in Sri Lanka a well told lie is worth a thousand facts," he describes not only the Sri Lankan tendency for invention but his own task as a story-teller. This acknowledgement that the record of his family thrives

on “ well-told lie[s]” rather than factual truth can be read as a challenge to normative representation and its claims for authenticity. He is not going to reproduce reality as it appears to the objective eye; instead, he prefers images, rumours, unverifiable stories, or lies over facts in his account of his family, himself and a historical period. He builds an "imaginary country" and tries to impose it on the one that exists because he realized that “one’s portrayal of one’s land of origin cannot be objective.” That is why we see Ondaatje focusing on personal truths rather than historical truths.

One of the examples where Ondaatje’s memoir is fictionalized is when he uses magical realism to give the reader a sense of the way Maureen and her daughter feel Mervyn’s presence in their lives, even after his death. The cobra’s protective role suggests that the family’s memories of Mervyn are pleasant enough that they are some comfort even after he is gone—although he is flawed, his legacy to his second family is still ultimately positive. Moreover, when recounting the method of recalling the past “In the heart of this 250-year-old fort”, Ondaatje explains:

we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship. No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organized.

(4)

In “Lunch Conversations”, Ondaatje relays a dialogue among himself, Gillian, and several others. The statements are recorded without attributing who said what, and the conversation overlaps, contradicts, and repeats. There is no clear plot to the individual story they were telling. They are all talking together about two men who loved Lalla, though in one instance of the story she is nine years old and in another she is 65, and the conversation jumps through the elapsed time between those periods as well. The listeners (presumably Ondaatje and Gillian) are confused and struggle to track the different threads of story.

Moreover, it is highly important to highlight the politics of remembering that frame memories and place them in specific discourses. Mariana Achugar explains in her book, *What We Remember: The construction of memory in military discourse*, that:

What we remember and how we remember it is framed by the socio-cultural context we participate in. This means that the process of remembering is determined by the time and place from which we remember. We remember as members of a group (family, nation, political party, institution, etc.), from our particular social role in a specific moment (as children or parents, generals or officers, etc.).(10)

That is why in both works we see different memories of a single event and some of them even contradict mainly because memories change according to the context and goals of the moment of production. Ondaatje’s and Morgan’s works

demonstrate how history is preserved through collective memories, even though those memories are unreliable and often contradict themselves. On the one hand, the contradicted stories and memories about the truth about Sally's Mum's biological father create an ambiguity that leave the text open-ended, with a possible incest. On the other hand, Ondaatje points out that his own memoir is an unreliable record of the past—which is another mark of postmodern literature. Despite being unreliable, the many memories provide different perspectives on the same story, which creates a richer understanding of the past, even if some details may not be accurate: “there seems to be three different stories that you’re telling” (48). This leaves Ondaatje and the reader with several unanswered questions.

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie remarks about memory saying, "memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies"(108). And as “True stories don’t tell the whole truth”(Rushdie, “Salman Rushdie on Magical Realism”), the “whole truth” was never meant to be told, perhaps because it is not the truth those writers want to present. There are alternative “truths” they want to come to term with so that they can complete the quest they started. They want their own versions of truth.

Conclusion

My Place and *Running in the Family* narrate the post-colonial experiences of Sally Morgan and Michael Ondaatje, which are characterized by a sense of alienation, loss of identity and diaspora in the post-colonial metropolis. Diaspora experience, thus, is essential in negotiating home, identity and belonging of the postcolonial subjects, as Said emphatically states, “one has the feeling in the Arab world and elsewhere that this mass society has destroyed identity in so powerful a way, that the sense of particularity is something worth keeping”(“Edward said Interviewed” 00:50:42- 00:50:55). However, this in-between space of the diasporic self, with its accompanied states of instability and fluidity, is a complicated space where various discourses are created and negotiated.

Both works reflect the postcolonial discourse and the hybridizing effects of the assimilation policies of the colonizers on both authors and their families, and on their community on a larger scale. They also present a decolonized subjectivity in which the subject “I” breaks down midway through the cycle of self-discovery. Furthermore, they challenge the politics of representation that positioned them as “the unspoken and invisible ‘other’” (“New ethnicities” 441) by the Western discourses of the Other—of Imperialism, the colonized, Orientalism.

My Place and *Running in the Family* succeed to show an urge to challenge the problematics of language Western modes of representation in articulating their alternative meanings of “self”. Both works present examples of the colonized subject’s writing back to the empire and articulating its hybridity through deterritorializing the language of the center by including oral tradition and native-language terms, and destabilizing the form and chronological order of their texts. They employ a complex linguistic structure of the “I” which holds a multiplicity of “I”s as an attempt to destabilize the hegemonic and autonomous self as Western metaphysics. The different Derridean “I”s that are implemented either implicitly or explicitly inside and outside the text stand out as a perfect split space to accommodate the split selves of diaspora. This is clear through the multiplicity of the autobiographical “I”s in both works. When we read both texts we cannot stop asking ourselves these questions: Who claims ownership of the text, the self/selves who write(s), the self/selves who narrate(s), the self/selves who is/are narrated, or the self/selves who read(s)? In my opinion, each one of these selves does its own production of the text, which cannot separate in any way from the other productions. The genre of autobiography is best to contain the fusion, splitting and contradictions of all the selves in one text

The quests of self-rediscovery of both authors involve an attempt to reattach with their homes, histories, oral traditions and myths. They both build their life-

narratives on the stories and memories of and about their relatives and families, emphasizing on identity as a collective construct rather than an autonomous one. Both texts present many truths and versions of stories, and they admit the flaws of memory and the unreliability of history. By doing so, they deconstruct those traditional Euro-centric concepts that can no longer swallow the postcolonial, diasporic selves with their multiplicities and postponement of meaning of self.

Life-narratives like *My Place* and *Running in the Family* try to surpass and defy the limits of Western conventions and centres by appropriating it with textual fluidity to articulate their hybrid, multiple and conflicting selves. The journey both Sally and Michael make going back home to reterritorialize, rediscover their lost identities through reclaiming and reconnecting with their roots, multiplies itself to different levels: the geographical journey, the cultural one and the textual one through writing. That discards simple geographical, biological or cultural binaries. Consequently, both texts end up with an open conclusion: can a true, full recovery of identity be really achieved through tracing and investigating the lost homeland?

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ملخص

تعرف السيرة الذاتية بشكل عام بأنها نمط من أنماط كتابة الذات التي يدّعي الغرب تبنيها. أصبح نمط السيرة الذاتية مشهوراً في فترات الاستعمار لأنها ساعدت الأشخاص الخاضعين للاحتلال بأن يرووا ذاتهم المشتتة حتى انتهى بهم المطاف في الكثير من الأحيان أن يقوموا برحلة بحث عن جذورهم و تاريخهم. تهدف الأطروحة إلى دراسة تأثير الاستعمار والحادثة في خلق إحساس بالشتات و هجانة الهوية وضياع الذاتية في سيرتين ذاتيتين من أواخر القرن العشرين: "مكاني" (1987) للكاتب سالي مورغان (استرالية الجنسية) و "يسري في العائلة" (1982) للكاتب مايكل أونداتجي (سيريلاكي كندي الجنسية).

"مكاني" تصور حياة سالي التي تبدأ باكتشاف انتمائها للسكان الأصليين في استراليا وتسعى أن يتم الاعتراف بتاريخهم ضمن الخطاب الوطني في استراليا . بينما تمثل "يسري في العائلة" مذكرات خيالية للمهاجر أونداتجي الذي يعود إلى بلده الأم "سيلون ما بعد الاحتلال" في أواخر السبعينات من القرن العشرين. أعتد خلال تحليلي لتجسيد "ذات ما بعد الاحتلال" في السيرة الذاتية على نظرية "ما بعد الاحتلال التفكيكية", موضحة الاعتماد الكبير لنظرية "ما بعد الاحتلال" على "فلسفة التفكيك" للفيلسوف جاك ديريدا خاصة في عملية تفكيك الذات.

ويركز البحث على تصوير خطاب ما بعد الاحتلال و آثار سياسات الدمج والاستيعاب التي اتبعتها الاستعمار والتي أدت إلى تهجين وتجزئة هوية الكاتبين. كما يجسد الكاتبان الذات المحتلة والمجزأة التي تعتمد آليات الرد من خلال الكتابة بلغة المستعمر ولكن بعد إخضاعها لتغييرات تجعلها هجينة هي بدورها. ويناقش البحث نتائج الرحلتين التي يقوم بهما الكاتبان في إعادة اكتشاف نفسيهما على الصعيدين البيولوجي والثقافي

وتجادل إمكانية الوصول المطلق لأي منهما, إذ يواجه الكاتبين نفس السؤال ونفس النهاية المفتوحة لهوية تحتوي على المزيد من التناقضات.

كما يناقش البحث عودة الكاتبين إلى التاريخ وتقاليد مجتمعيهما الجمعية واعتمادهما على الذاكرة بحثاً عن أي دلائل تصلهما بالماضي وربما تمنحهما بعض الأجوبة عن هويتهما الحقيقية. لكننا نجدهما في بحثهما عن ذاتهما يتخبطان بين الماضي والحاضر و بين الفردية والجمعية. لذلك تهدف الأطروحة إلى تفكيك مفهوم مصداقية التاريخ والذاكرة و مفهوم الحقيقة المطلقة الواحدة.

تمثيل الذاتية المشتتة في سيرتين ذاتيتين من أواخر القرن العشرين: "مكاني" للكاتبة سالي مورغان و"يسري في العائلة" للكاتب مايكل أونداتجي



جامعة البعث

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دراسة أعدت لنيل درجة الماجستير في اللغة الإنكليزية

قسم الدراسات الأدبية

2020

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