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The Portrait of Aboriginal Women in Sally Morgan's *My Place*

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Abstract: *The aim of this research is to explore the lives of Aboriginal women as it is reflected in an Australian novel entitled My Place. This novel is an autobiographical novel written by an Australian author, Sally Morgan. How the Aboriginal women struggled to search for their identity, how they were treated by colonialists, and how they were driven off from their homeland, are described in the analysis. This is a descriptive qualitative study done through library research. The approach used is a feminist approach which is underpinned by postcolonial theory stated by Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. The result shows that this research vividly uncover a clear picture of the life of Aboriginal women from three generations who experienced double colonization as the impact of European settlement in Australia.*

Keywords: Aboriginal women, three generations, self-identity, double colonization

1. Introduction

It is about 40.000 years ago before the European occupation in the late 18th century Australia was inhabited by Aboriginal people. Even these people had existed and inhabited the continent when precisely European immigrants from the Netherlands came to the continent a century before the arrival of Europeans who were convicted by being dumped in the region.

At that time, the Aboriginal people lived along the Port of Foreshores, northern Sydney. Fishing in the waters, hunting in the countryside, and harvesting plants that can be used as food around them is the way they survive. They did not need to travel far from their area to get food because of the abundance of natural resources they have there. They only need to work 4-5 hours a day for their livelihood. With so much free time, they were finally able to develop various rituals, languages, customs, and belief (Romdlon, 2015).

History even recorded that in the 17th century Aboriginal people had established good relationship with the Bugis-Makassar people who came to the region to look for sea cucumbers. This contact led to the establishment of kinship between the Bugis-Makassar and the Aboriginal people. It is therefore not surprising that there are similarities in a number of Aboriginal vocabulary languages with the Bugis Makassar language (Macknight, 1976).

However, their lives were disturbed when a group of Europeans arrived in Australia. This marked the start of a new chapter of unhappy and painful life experienced by the Aboriginal people. These Europeans claimed that Australian land was theirs (Hudec, 2011). Especially after the discovery of gold in Australia which caused more and more immigrants to come to this country, the suffering of Aboriginal people also increased. In this situation Darwin's theory of 'survival the fittest' applies. Who is strong is the one who lives. In addition to being slaughtered, given drinking poison, some of them were also made as experimental animals.

Flood says that on January 26, 1788 (now Australia's National Day) the British flag fluttered in Sydney Cove and the land became the king's power. Anyone born in the region was under British rule. Therefore, Aboriginal people along with the land they inhabit also belonged to the United Kingdom (2006: 33).

A number of attempts have been made by Aboriginal people to become independent from British rule. But that was not easy. The various obstacles they face made what they wanted and aspired still are a dream. Now Australia has become a British commonwealth and a prosperous continent. But behind the prosperity it has gained, there is a heartbreaking long story about the sadness of the Aboriginal people, the original owner of the continent of Australia, who has inhabited this continent of kangaroos since approximately 60,000 years ago. It seems sadness is still with them. To be sure, the more impactful days of the arrival of 200,000 British prisoners in the past year have caused Aboriginal people to be discriminated and marginalized.

Although in 2008 Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, had officially apologized to Aboriginal people for the 'stolen generation' which he admitted as a past blunder, it seems that the apology cannot cure the wound yet felt by these natives. The apology to the 'stolen generations' was conveyed by Rudd in his speech for almost half an hour in front of members of the Australian Parliament and Aboriginal citizens who packed the balcony seats in the parliamentary room in Canberra. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly taken away by Australian government agencies and the mission of the church from their families left deep wounds against Aboriginal natives (Kompas, 2008).

One authentic proof that can show how painful the suffering of Aboriginal people as a result of colonization is through literature, in this case, an autobiography entitled *My Place* which was written by Sally Morgan. This memoir tells the story of the suffering life of Aboriginal women of three generations due to the 'colonization' of white settlers. This is what underlies the importance of this research in order to

reveal the impact of colonization on colonized generations.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the researches that have been done concerning Aboriginal people and continues with the explanation of the underlying theories.

2.1. Previous Studies

A number of studies on Aboriginal people have been carried out. Among those carried out by the Australian government. However, these studies focus more on health problems, criminal problems, and their welfare problems.

There is a study conducted by P. Campbell entitled *The Problem of Aboriginal Marginalization*. There is also what was done by C. Reading entitled *Aboriginal Experiences with Racism and Its Impacts*. Both of these studies were conducted by Australian researchers. And the focus of their research is on Aboriginal people in general in recent situations and conditions.

There is a literary study ⁵ Aboriginal people done by R. Marlina et. al. entitled *Patriarchal System in Aboriginal Women in James Tucker's The Adventures of Ralph Rasleigh*, which is almost the same with this study. However, the previous study uses sociology of literature approach to see the patriarchal system faced by Aboriginal women, while this study uses a feminist approach supported by postcolonial theory. In addition, the previous study analyzes a novel written by male author while this study analyzes an autobiographical novel written by a female author.

2.2. Theoretical Background

⁸ The approach used in this study is a feminist approach. That is the approach ⁶ that focuses on the life and experience of women. Fry states that "feminism can be understood theory-systems of concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women's situation and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them (Code, 2000). There are three theories underlying the feminist approach used, namely 'postcolonial', 'double colonization', and 'can the subaltern speak?'.

The first is a postcolonial theory stated by Edward Said. This theory is related to the elements of historical and social context. The word 'postcolonial' is indeed related to the time after 'colonialism'. In short, it is not only limited to the time after the colonialism ends. Therefore postcolonial here also includes anything had happened in a group or a nation until at the present as the impact of their relation to colonialism. So this theory illustrates the impact of postcolonialism in a group or a nation dominated by other group or other nation. Description of postcolonial practice can be seen through literature works, for example novels. In other words, this theory studies literary works that try to dismantle the practice of colonialism and the consequences it has caused through the intrinsic elements in the work. If the work is in the form of a novel, it can be seen through characters, as what has been done in this study. In this case, literature is

seen as a place for the formation of a group's power over another group or a nation's power over another nation. This idea is reinforced by Said's opinion in *Orientalism* which reveals that a number of Western literary works also strengthened Western hegemony towards the East (Orient). Said emphasizes that it was natural for the West to civilize the East (1994). In addition, Nejat and Jamili say that the term postcolonial refers to the condition of a society or a nation after colonial rule. It includes its influence on national and local culture. People in colonized countries will usually react in various ways to find out anything that makes them being colonized. A number of attempts were made by the colonized to see how this domination occurred especially those experienced by women (2014). Nejat and Jamili add that marginalization was the main form of double colonialism experienced by women. In this case, the voice of male colonists is considered superior while the voice of colonized women is considered inferior (2014).

The second is the theory of double colonialism also expressed by Edward Said, which means the double colonialism experienced by minority group done by majority group. In line to postcolonial theory, this theory refers to anything happens as the additional impacts after being colonized. In other words, this means that after one nation is colonized, the people of the nation are also colonized. So, the colonists colonize not only the nation but also the people. To this point, Nejat and Jamili say that women are usually the main victims of what is termed double colonialism.

The third is the idea of 'can the subaltern speak?' proposed by Gayatri Spivak. This theory describes how finally the colonized group that might be represented individually can speak against or resist to unfair treatment the colonized group experienced done by colonists. Due to this as Said has stated about Western power over the East, Spivak also views the same idea that the West is considered having dominant power than the East. Therefore, Spivak adds that Western colonialists (Europe) still exist although their colonized nations have got their independent. This is because the political, economic, and cultural structure of the colonialists still remain dominating the independent nation (1988).

3. The Portrait of Aboriginal Women

⁵ In this discussion, the portrait ⁴ of Aboriginal women reflected in the novel *My Place* by Sally Morgan will be divided into three parts.

3.1. First Generation

⁴ The character of the novel who represents the ⁴st generation of Aboriginal women is Daisy Corrunna. She plays the role ⁴ is a grandmother of Sally Morgan, the author of the novel. It is depicted that Daisy has a black skin. Sally, a granddaughter, just realizes and understands that, when she comes home from school one day and finds her grandmother is sitting in the kitchen crying. When Sally asks why the grandmother is crying, surprisingly the grandmother answers that Sally and her siblings are fucking children because they are not happy with their grandmother's black color.

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'You bloody kids don't want me, you want a blood white grandmother. I'm black. Do you hear, black, black, black!' . (MP, 97)

With her grandmother's statement like that, Sally indeed just believes that her grandmother's skin is different from the color of their skin which is not black. Then if the grandmother is black, their skin should not be white.

Based on the situation above, it can be concluded that there is something annoying the grandmother having white skin grandchildren. The grandmother realizes that this brings her memory to the painful past story of her grandchildren's father who is a white European settler. The problem is that Sally's father or her son-in-law treats her badly because he has a temperament character that always makes his wife Gladys, his mother-in-law Daisy, and his children suffer mentally and physically. This is true because Sally's father, William Joseph, is described as an army who fought in the war. As a result of the war, Sally's father endures a mental illness and brings him to drink alcohol as an escape. By the time he gets drunk, it will affect negatively to all members of the family, including to the grandmother Daisy who is always very scared. In other words, Daisy's impression to her son-in-law who has a white skin represents the hegemonic power over black skin. In addition, Daisy's fear of the white does not only go her son-in-law but also to the government which represents the whites.

This kind of scene is in line with what Said means on double colonialism. It is vividly portrayed here that the family's suffering of post colonialism done by European settlers gives additional suffering life especially to particular group of Aboriginal women. It is not only their homeland taken and controlled but also the people.

3.2. Second Generation

The second generation in *My Place* is represented by Gladys Corrunna, Sally's mother. Gladys is described as a faithful woman and always submissive to her husband even though most of her life she just spends to serve and to argue with her temperamental and drunk husband.

One day Sally and her younger siblings are invited to a picnic by their father. Because the way their father drives the car carelessly and unsafely, so their mother reminds the father to be careful. However, unexpectedly the father gets angry and turns to scold their mother. As a result, the children are scared.

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'Bill, please.'

'Listen, Glad, you bloody stupid woman, I know what I'm doing!'

'Bill, stop! You can kill yourself if you want to, but you're not going to bloody kill the rest of us!' . (MP, 37)

It is obvious in the conversation above that Sally's father's temperament behavior shows the way he does not respect and is very rude to his wife. Of course, Said's double colonialism again is reflected through what is happening in this scene. In other words, being a wife of a white husband, Gladys as an aborigine is regarded as 'other'. Hence, Said's

Western hegemonic power is represented by a figure of a white husband.

3.3. Third Generation

The character who represents the third generation in this novel is Sally, the narrator, the daughter of Gladys and William Joseph. Sally in this case is actually a representation of the author of the novel, Sally Morgan. In real life she has Morgan as her family name because she gets married with Paul Morgan. She is an Australian Aboriginal Australian author. Like many other Australian Aborigines, Sally feels she has lost everything; the trace of her ancestors, culture, customs and habits, and the homeland where she stands as a citizen. The personal story she presents in *My Place* is actually the ill-fated story of the Aboriginal people who are driven off from their own homeland. This is a story of the colonized group of people done by white colonists.

What Sally Morgan has done by searching the trace of her ancestor is in line with what Nejat and Jamali has stated about the critic of post-colonialism. In more specific, Nejat and Jamali emphasize that to some extent the colonized group will find out the reasons why the colonists colonize them especially the women. In addition, what Sally Morgan has done by writing and publish her biographical novel *My Place* is an obvious proof of what Spivak says about 'can the subaltern speaks?'. Sally Morgan has proven that 'yes' the subaltern can speak, that 'yes' the subaltern is not 'silent'.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, following the trace of three generations of Aboriginal women, the ancestors of the author of the novel *My Place*, uncovers a clear picture of the lives of Aboriginal women who experience double colonialism although the colonialism is over.

This paper still needs to be extended critically. Therefore, constructive suggestions are very much appreciated.

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