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**Securing the Future of Past in Postcolonial Writing: A
Postcolonial Con-text to the Historical Pretext of Terra Nullius in
Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005)**

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of Magister in Commonwealth Studies*

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DEDICATION

The thesis is dedicated to my parents who never ceased to encourage and support me all the way since the beginning of my studies. It is also dedicated to Dr.Soumai for her words encouragement and to my brother Mustapha for being a source of motivation and inspiration. This thesis is also dedicated to all those who look for power in learning and in enlightening themselves. Lastly, I also would like to express my wholehearted thanks to my supervisor for their generous support and help throughout the journey of writing the thesis.

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ABSTRACT:

This present work attempts to secure the future of past by analyzing a counter discourse of a postcolonial novelist to the historical pretext of *terra nullius*. The chosen corpus of this study is Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005). It is read from a postcolonial perspective. The reality of taking up the land from Aboriginal people is not recognized. Despite the fact that Aborigines had lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years, Australia is considered to be uninhabited land as a result of the historical pretext of *terra nullius*. The need of rewriting the past in the postcolonial context of Australia becomes an effective source for the Aborigines to restore their rights. Grenville's novel re-interprets the pretext of *terra nullius*. Kate Grenville campaigns for Indigenous land rights in postcolonial Australia by telling the truth from her point of view. The excruciating and gloomy story of colonizing Australia still exists today and shakes the very foundation that Australia rests on. Aboriginal people were written out of history records and since they had no access to historical record, and they were historically silenced. In this study, Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*(2005) states how the legal fiction of *terra nullius* erased the history of prior settlement by Indigenous Australians and facilitated their violent dispossession. It attempts to restore of what had conventionally been forgotten or relegated to an absolute silence from the story of founding Australia. It is the first step in deconstructing the official version of Australian history and paving the way for reconciliation. Therefore, the study attempts to go beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. It illegitimizes white Australian belonging to the land, and dispels the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Australia has been depicted a vacant space since its colonization. The confiscation of the continent as British territory was made possible by the legal fiction of *terra nullius* i.e. a land belonging to nobody. The idea of a vacant continent was the legal theory behind British land acquisition in Australia. It was the common belief that this was a land hitherto belonging to no one (Pettit, 2015: 40-41). The legal doctrine of *terra nullius* efficiently erased the history of prior settlement by Aboriginal people and facilitated their violent dispossession. Aboriginal existence in Australia has threatened the foundations of the Australian nation. It entitles the legitimacy of British settlement in Australia with suspicion.

The story of the founding fathers of Australia is the story of the strong-willed men of the British Empire, who strive to restrain the Australian land. It is matched with the portrayal of the Australian landscape as unfruitful, remote and hostile, a site of physical and psychological ordeal for the white settlers, and to the legal fiction of *terra nullius* and the representation of the Australian landscape as a place of blankness. Hence, “the prevailing British perspective of Australia was of a *terra nullius*, or “empty continent”, for incorporating it into the imperial British system of formal property ownership” (Pettit 2015: 53) As a result, this fiction effectively wiped out the existence of prior settlement by Aboriginal people.

The arrival of white man to Australian lands might be considered one of the turning points not only in the history of Australia itself but also in the history of original inhabitants of Australia. Aboriginal people have been the original landowners of

the Australian landscape for over 50,000 years. They “ have been successful custodians of the Australian landscape for over 50,000 years (2,000 generations)” (Ross ,2006:4). However, the white settlers took possession of the eastern half of Australia without any regard for the original inhabitants and as a result they acquired the unquestionable legal position of being the first occupants. The deplorable situation of the Aborigines is in the name of *terra nullius* and under the umbrella of *terra nullius*, Australia belonged to no one. The pretext of *terra nullius* paved the way for the dispossession of Aboriginal land and a denial of fundamental Aboriginal rights.

The British took the land of Australia from the Aborigines. There was no consultation, there were no treaties, and yet the continent became British and recognised by other countries as a British territory. However, there were the original owners of Australia who had occupied the continent for centuries. When the British claimed sovereignty, they did more than claim the right to govern over Australia. They also insisted that the British Crown had also become the owner of all the land. That is to say, “Australia was *terra nullius*” (Reynolds,2012:1). They did not argue that it was inhabited, but the people in the continent had no right to property. All the land of Australia became the property of the British Crown. The land had ceased to be the land belonging to the people who lived there and settled it. It had become the property of the British Crown.

In the Australian continent, there was no need to negotiate, no need to purchase, no need to tire themselves, and recognize the existence of Aboriginal people (Reynolds,2012:2). The settlers were self-assured that they were moving out into an empty land that belonged to nobody. They were also convinced that the Aboriginal

people they were not the owners of the land. In different parts of British Empire, the indigenous peoples of the land were at all times acknowledged, whether it was by peaceful treaties or harsh periods of conflict. Britain was never able to ignore the indigenous people of the lands they colonized. Nonetheless, the existence of the original inhabitants of Australia did not recognize. They surrendered the land of Australia for *terra nullius*. The British renowned this land as a land belonging to nobody, which gave them the absolute ownership over it and the right to use it as their own with no regard to Aboriginal people.

In the postcolonial context, the colonial history of Australia is written by the colonizers to suppress the story of the colonized. Kate Grenville as a postcolonial novelist intends to re-interpret the history of the continent in the form of fictional narrative for the sake of re-writing the official version of the Australian history and sympathizing with Aboriginal people.

In this study, we attempt to elucidate how the writing of *The Secret River* (2005) offers an interpretation for the imperial and the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. The study interprets the colonial discourse of *terra nullius* from the privileged position of using postcolonial lens. It is the investigation of the means by which the colonizers imposed and maintained its codes of colonial domination. It is oriented for interrogation of the historical narratives which are written by the colonizers to sympathize with the original owners of the Australian continent.

The motivation for undertaking this study is fuelled by an attempt to analyze the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. It is claimed that Australia is the youngest continent in the world of two centuries old. In reality, it is one of the oldest continent in the history of humanity. This continent has a human history estimated at least between 40,000 to 50,000 years old. Aboriginal people are representatives of the longest surviving civilization in the world.

There are few works which dealt with this novel prior to my work. A case in point is the article written by Martin Staniforth which is entitled *Depicting the Colonial Home: Representations of the Domestic in Kate Grenville's The Secret River and Sarah Thornhill*. In this article, Staniforth argues that while Grenville's texts are intended to contribute to the process of reconciliation in Australia by justifying white actions in the colonial past. His study solely highlights the need of finding the way of reconciliation. However, our work sets the pillars of starting the movement of reconciliation. Furthermore, Sue Kossew (2013) and Susannah Radstone (2013) argue that that Grenville's work of historical fiction provokes an awareness that the violence that was part of Australia's settler-colonialist history cannot be simply consigned to the past but lives on and requires recognition. They claim that the novel is for urging Australians to face up their dark past of White Australia. But, from his article, the reader gets to see only one side of the coin, and would not fully comprehend the story of founding Australia. That is why in the dissertation, we will try to encompass the different facets of the story beyond founding the Australian nation.

The crucial questions which the work attempts to enclose are the whole gamut of perspectives regarding the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Firstly, what is essential to the study is to examine the way through which the story of founding Australia is re-interpreted in order to have a clear vision of re-writing Australian history. Another focal question of the dissertation is for founding the veracity behind the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. As the white settlers were not the first to inhabit the continent, and the existence of convicts is represented by a one half of one percent of the time of human occupation of Australia. A further quest of the paper is for finding and paving the way for negotiating with the historical reality of dispossessing the Aborigines. And how the Australian nation can or should address or work through the burden of the Aboriginal past in the present.

There are various hypotheses which can be suggested for the sake of offering possible explanation and illumination as regards to the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. The first hypothesis is that the existence of the convicts might be safely legitimated and justified without the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. And consequently, the white settlers are the legitimate owners of the land, and therefore the land of Australia is not previously owned. The second hypothesis suggests that in the journey of the quest for *terra nullius*, it may be founded that the founding fathers of Australia are not the white settlers. The legal doctrine of *terra nullius* might be just a pretext to take the land from the hands of Aboriginal people. The crucial part of undertaking an investigation of *terra nullius* may be the medium with which the Australian author expects to lessen the burden of the past in the present by starting a movement of

reconciliation. Therefore, the presence of the Aborigines may be legitimized before the impending of the white settlers to the Australia continent.

In addition to the general introduction and general conclusion, the dissertation comprised of three chapters: The first chapter: “The Scope of Re-writing Australia History ” presents a theoretical background for our study. It forwards the framework within which the study is launched. It presents the ideological and artistic background of the study.. In this chapter, an enlightenment would also be presented on Australian history as an example of positioning history in a monopoly within which the colonizers write whatever serves their interests. We will examine, too, the ideological and aesthetic peculiarities of the scope of re-writing Australia history.

In the second chapter: “ The Secret of Terra Nullius”, we will try to examine the nature of the legal fiction of *terra nullius* for the sake of making a challenge for the legitimacy and feasibility of prior representation and perception of Australia. We will attempt to search for authenticating the legal fiction of *terra nullius* for the sake of appropriating the bias and prejudiced representation of Australia. In this chapter, we will quash the Eurocentric myth of Australia as a *terra nullius*, and historicize it in the novel.

In the last chapter “The Shadow of Terra Nullius and the Making of White Australia”, we will attempt to explain how the acknowledgement of the rights of Aboriginal people in the land and the confession of their dispossession are the blueprints for reconciliation between the Aborigines and the white settlers. We will examine the desire of Grenville to make amends for the past atrocities and to recognize

the status of Aboriginal people for helping all Australians to live peacefully in the present and collectively in the future.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Scope of Re-writing Australia History

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1- 1- Introduction

The conventional historical version of the Australian history is re-analyzed for the purpose of re-writing it, and revealing what happened in Australia by refuting the conventional models of history. Hence, Western writers of history from a privileged vantage point have written the history of the Australian continent unfaithfully. They assigned no historical importance for the history of the land before the invasion of white man. The historical meta-fictional elements in a novel are the means of mobilizing a challenge to the orthodox version of the past by debunking the representation of Empire from the claim of representing reality realistically. Since the history of Australia depends on written sources which are imperfectly remembered by its writers; subjectively constructed by policymakers, it is prioritized to write it by metafictional technical devices for the sake of representing an-other version of history. In this chapter, we will try to examine how fiction is used for the purpose of writing history, and the way in which it is a counter historical discourse to the official version of Australia history.

Dealing with Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, we will, thus, try to present a framework within which Australian literature is used to question the validity of Australian history. We will, in the process, seek to contextualize the extraposing of history in Australian literature, and the extraposing of Australian history in a monopoly which is broken by Grenville's novel. It is monopolized by the colonizers for the sake of writing the history which glorifies them and belittles the colonized.

1-2- Colonial History and the Narratives of Dominance

The need of rewriting the past in the postcolonial context of Australia becomes an effective source for the Aborigines to restore their rights. The testimonial literature like *The Secret River*¹ is a counter discourse to the pretext of the colonizers that Australia is *terra nullius*². That is to say, it is an unowned land, and this means that those who discovered Australia did not recognize any ownership by indigenous groups over the regions they inhabited. The legal fiction of *terra nullius* is considered as the foundational tenet of British colonial land policy in Australia. It was a contention the British relied upon to support settler claims for land (Banner,2007:17-18).The lack of concern or respect for the Aborigines gave the explorers a sense of entitlement to the lands they explored. They felt that they were the first to travel and inhabit these areas and thus, they were the owners of the land.

¹ The novel tells the story of William Thornhill, a lighterman on the London Thames who is transported to New South Wales after having committed a minor crime—stealing timber. He is transported together with his wife Sal and his first son Will. After a few years in the new settlement at Sydney Cove he obtains his pardon and settles with his family on the wild Hawkesbury River. The land is already inhabited by indigenous people whose presence is constantly felt even when they are not seen. The differences in language and culture create a barrier between them that will lead to an escalation of violence ending with the massacre of the tribe in retaliation for the death of one of the settlers and as an attempt to secure absolute ownership of the land.

² The pretext of *terra nullius* was for justifying the dispossession of Aboriginal population. It is a Latin term meaning a land belonging to no one. The literal meaning of the term *terra nullius* is a land belonging to no one which according to Bain Attwood, could be understood in two ways: that the land of concern is not inhabited at all or that the inhabitants of the territory do not exercise sovereignty over the land and therefore; they are not held to have property rights. In the nineteenth century, the idea that Australia was *terra nullius* or a land that, prior to the arrival of the first fleet in 1788, belonged to nobody became the legal doctrine that helped dispossess the Aborigines of the entire continent.

The past is always in an engagement with the minds of writers, philosophers, scientists, and of course, people. The Australian history is an important source of inspiration for writing. Novelists and historians search like never before for narrating history of colonizing Australia from the perspective of the colonized. They attempt “to give expression to colonized experience, and sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization - the myths of power, the race classifications and the imagery of subordination” (Boehemer, 1995: 3). They are also attempt to satisfy their deep curiosity for knowing the dark story of white Australia.

1-2-1- Re-writing Colonial History in Postcolonial Literature

The diversity in the narrative accounts of the past is due to the position of power of the colonizers. The aim of diversity is to highlight the value of alternative accounts that are presented by the colonized. These accounts are relayed by the colonized that have been silenced and indoctrinated with the belief that their voice could never overpower their colonizers. As “the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased” (Loomba, 2005: 7). The colonized people aim to show that they have all become agents of their own history and that it is impossible to turn a blind eye to the misrepresentation of colonizers. Their stories are for affirming, questioning, problematizing, or deny specific episodes in the national history of Australia.

The history of the colonized was previously ignored and forcibly censored by their colonizers. In the times of colonialism, the ignorance of colonized was essentially for providing the colonizers with a threshold of power that allows them to exploit

others. The sculpt of colonial relations is specified by “colonial power and discourse which is possessed entirely by the coloniser and therefore there is no room for negotiation or change” (Bhabha,1983:200). Therefore, the history of nations is written by the colonizers, and there is only one version of the past which is disseminated. That is why, the objectivity in the process of writing history is absent, and the colonialists incorporate ideologies which legitimate dispossession and exploitation. As a result, the colonized are silenced, and the colonizers speak for them, easily taking their property and freely writing their history.

Writing back to the historical canon brings the history of colonized to the limelight placing it alongside the colonial discourse for making a comparison. ‘Writing back’, ‘counter-discourse’, ‘oppositional literature’, ‘con-texts’: these terms used to identify a body of postcolonial works, supposedly as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon (Theime,2001:1). It is firstly for challenging the colonial discourse, and secondly for changing it. In Helen Tiffin’s words, such texts are not “simply “writing back” to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds” (1987:23). For that reason, the version of history which is written by the colonizers and the other one which is written by colonized impose a re-reading of history, and expose events which are dispersed from the pages of history books.

The past was threatened and forcefully subjected to change in the Australian continent. It was entirely obliterated. The indigenous people were swabed off from the face of earth. Therefore, pre-colonial life is an irrefutable concern which is indefatigably tackled in post-colonial writings. As there is no present without the past,

postcolonial writers frequently revisit their past to question their present. As colonization has caused a fissure in their history by “the construction of opposites and others” (Said, 1994:332). Thus, the yearning of going to the pedigree for convalescent intentions is one of the missions of postcoloniality although at all times there is a realization that the pre-colonial past will not be recuperated unaffected by the experience of colonization.

In Australia, the traditional life of the Aborigines was disrupted. Their traditional values which were mainly based on cultural heritage were demonized and denounced barbaric and wild. “Their traditions, rituals, and ceremonies were considered acts of savagery. Their languages were misconstrued and were considered as brutal sounds close to that of the animals” (Rees, 2005:11). The Aboriginal society is never the same as their lives radically transformed by the influence of the colonizers.

As the past continues to preoccupy the present, postcolonial writings interrogate the European versions of Aboriginal history. The politics of representation come to the front as the writers inspect various colonial discourses which were used as a powerful tool in the process of colonization. Hence, “the achievement of superiority has been accomplished not only by the sword and cross” (Willinsky, 1998:134). The writers take it upon themselves as a responsibility to counter these falsifying images of their past and expose the colonial designs that skulk underneath such constructions.

1-2-2- Colonial History in Postcolonial Literature

The course of history for the Aborigines was changed after colonialism. The desire of colonizers to know and to report details of their discoveries of land and people is “often an exercise in imaginative discourse which was grounded on their

fears, prejudices and selfish motives” (Rees, 2005:1). Hence, the colonizers had an assignment of justifying their acts of violence which were unleashed on the natives. Any signal of opposition on the part of the indigenous people was met with brute force of bullets. By the same token, it was destructive the belittling discourses of textual violence that denied the acknowledgment of the colonized as human beings and thereby enhanced the process of colonization.

Postcolonial literature in postcolonial context gives the floor for the suppressed people, breaks the shackles of stifling forces, and expresses the felt experiences as an act of self-assertion. As McLeod notes, postcolonialism involves the challenge to colonial ways of knowing by “writing back” in opposition to colonial ways of knowing is still present (McLeod, 2000: 32). Therefore, the contestation of postcolonial writing is the contestation of the politics of representation while exposing the power of colonizers in the construction of colonial discourses. For the reason that the postcolonial writer writes from an alternate viewpoint, he addresses the colonial discourses and the discriminating binary constructions. The writer stands in direct conflict with colonial writings and stereotypical representations of the West.

Postcolonial writers interpret the racial representation of the colonized. They are in a postcolonial re-examination of the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized from the latter’s standpoint. It is “the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and 88 modes of discourses that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France and other European imperial powers” (Abrams, 1999:236). Since the voice of colonized has always been voiceless in most European works, the postcolonial text, as seen by Elzette Steenkamp, is “characterized by a desire to challenge normative European notions of power by giving voice to the

marginalized, misrepresented and silenced other” (2008:10). the process of writing back aims to challenge, defy, and refute the colonial misrepresentation of the colonized in their colonial pre-texts and pretexts. The adoption of a counter-discourse by the colonized aims at dismantling the European codes of representation. It is the beginning of forwarding an-other version of the colonial (hi)story and challenging the Eurocentric worldviews. The history of the colonized nation would be narrated from the perspective of colonized under the umbrella of postcolonialism.

The term ‘postcolonial’, obviously, refers to the period that comes after the end of colonialism. That is to say, the term post-colonial implies the decline of great empires such as France and Great Britain, and the emergence of a new era in which new powers come to the front. An effortless inspection of the term reveals a topographical difference. There are those who write Post-colonial³ with a hyphen, and those who use the non hyphenated form, that is to say postcolonial. The term Post-colonial refers to the historical moment when “a country, state, or people cease to be governed by a colonial power such as Britain or France and take the administrative power into their own hands”(Innes, 2007:1). Therefore, if the word “post” means "after", then the starting point of postcolonial literature was after the end of the colonial period. The term post-colonial is firstly used to denote the period which began after the Second World War with the end of colonial existence in colonized

³ In appearance, the term ‘post-colonial’ appears to refer the period following the end of colonial rule and the acquisition of independence in former colonies, but in reality, it means “the persistence of neo-colonialist or imperialist practices in the contemporary world is a very obvious, perhaps the most serious, obstacle to any unproblematic use of the term post-colonial” (Williams et al, 1997:3). Moreover, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin assert that post-colonial theory “addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact” (1995:2). That is why, the concurrent continuation of colonialism and postcolonial resistance weakens any definition of a post-colonial condition grounded on a chronological relation to colonization.

countries, and secondly to specify the literature which is written by the members of the formerly colonized countries after the removal of colonial rule.

However, the term “postcolonialism” is very far away from just describing the literature which is written in previously colonized countries. It starts to acquire more implications upon the ramifications of colonialism. After encompassing its semantic and historical implications, postcolonialism is essentially related to the ideology of resistance and opposition of colonialism, and it is adopted by postcolonial writers in an endeavor to restore their devalued past and racially distorted history. Postcolonial literature covers all literary works which adopt an anti-colonial discourse. Despite the fact that they were written during the colonial period or by non-colonized people. In her book which is entitled *Colonial and Postcolonial literature*, Boehmer states: “Rather than simply being the writing which ‘came after’ Empire, postcolonial literature is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives” (1995:3). In other words, postcolonial literature reconsiders the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Postcolonialism has emerged as a counter-discourse for the sake of representing of the misrepresentations which colonialism carried out against the culture and the people of colonized countries. The literary work which is written in postcolonial context is characterized by a desire to defy the colonizers notions of power by giving voice to the marginalized, misrepresented and silenced colonized. Postcolonial writers express their anti-colonial resistance. They write history from the point of view of the silenced and marginalized by reconsidering the early versions of

history which are written by the colonizers. It is the act of “re-placing the text” (Ashcroft et al, 1989:77), and seeing with fresh eyes a pre-text from a new critical perspective to construct a con-text. It is the idea of granting those marginalized people a place in the centre and the chance to tell their own story themselves. By doing so, they put them on an equivalent status with their colonizers.

The con-text of postcolonial rewriting is based on a postcolonial reading and interpretation of pre-texts and pretexts. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said speaks of a reading strategy which is the consequence of the complicated imbalance between the margin and the centre. It is a kind of an oppositional reading “with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented ”(1994:66). It is built on a postcolonial re-reading of colonial texts. It is an examination for colonial texts. A postcolonial interpretation of the colonizers literary works changes our views of their pure literary work and opens our eyes to the direct and indirect racial representation of non-European races. Helen Tiffin writes of the role of the postcolonial writer who “re-enters the texts of European traditions with a view of interrogating and destabilizing the assumptions on which they rested [...] and a re-placing of texts in sites where a politics of oppositionality is thus invoked”(1989:67). The responsibility of the postcolonial writer is to question the assumptions of the colonial discourse which requires the re-reading and re-writing of the colonizer’s historical and fictional writings. Rewriting in the postcolonial literary project is more than being an act of mimicry. It is an act of liberation. The postcolonial writer makes a mindful and a purposeful relationship with the original text in order to call the attention to what is not said, or intentionally

ignored, or left blank. He seeks to undermine, dismantle, and subvert the authority of the canonical text. The writer analyses the canonical text with the intention of adapting, appropriating, and revising what is seen offensive in the eyes of the previously colonized.

The colonial experience of the Aborigines is different from that of the African people. The white colonizers came not just for exploitative reasons but to stay as permanent settlers and monopolize the rights of the land. Even though they were criminals, they assumed a racial and a moral superiority to that of the natives.

By the means of power, the white settlers gained control over the indigenous land. From the first time of their landing in Australia, the native Aborigines were subjected to cruelty and oppression, and became slaves in their own land. The land which was sacred for the Aborigines was confiscated for the construction of the white mission of settlement.

The white settlers utterly disregarded the reality that the land owned by Aboriginal people before their coming. They had a tradition of life which was as old as the existence of humanity. The Aboriginal people of Australia are very cognizant of their history, and they trace it on their various cultural artifacts which are handled on from one generation to the next. Jack Davis points out:

We, the Aboriginal people, have been recording our history for thousands of years. Our medium has been stone, hair, wood, the walls of caves; and the flat surface of rock has been the canvas of our ancestors. Hair string

manipulated by fingers can tell a rhymed of stories and the land was our drawing board (1985:11)

The colonizers were ignorant of Aboriginal life and culture and they called the land *terra nullius*, and forgetting the Aboriginal presence. Aboriginal people were not even considered to have had a history of their own due to the absence of written records. They are absent in the history of humanity until the arrival of white man to the Australian continent.

Even though the date of the first human existence in Australia remains in inquiry. There are new studies that suggest that the Aborigines were the first people to have left the cradle of the humankind in Africa in a quest of new place about 50,000 years ago. It is proved that the Aborigines had lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years, but Australia was considered to be uninhabited land due to the British legal doctrine known as *terra nullius* which basically allowed the British to claim the Australian land as a land without owners.

Once Australia was colonized, the British Government used *terra nullius* to rationalize the dispossession of Indigenous people. The British saw no proof of agricultural, social or religious structure like their own, and therefore improperly concluded that Indigenous people did not own the land, but they simply roamed it. By inventing the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, the British Government claimed sovereignty over Australia, ignoring the rights of Indigenous people who had lived there for at least 50,000 years. Indigenous people were in the way of the colonists from the first day they set foot on the continent. The first motive why Indigenous people were seen as a nuisance was that they lived on the land the colonists wanted for themselves. This

problem was solved by adducing the term *terra nullius* which suggested that Australia was an empty land during the white invasion and therefore they were simply settling a new continent.

Furthermore, the Aborigines did not engage in crop rising or agriculture and according to the whites, left the land totally unexploited. Based on this evidence, the colonists judged that it was equitable and justified to take the land away from such people who did not bother themselves to make use of it. The British people found a land in a state of waste, and they took possession of it.

The good sentiments of protecting the land from waste do not sound persuasive for many people in the modern times. In reality, the Aboriginal people were dispossessed because the British had the power to do so. The concept of *terra nullius* might have given the colonizers the theoretical right for the land. However, it did not make the Aboriginal groups evaporate in the air.

Kate Grenville's postcolonial historical novel *The Secret River* searches for the lost past of Australia and challenges the forgetfulness of official histories of settlement in Australia by groping in the historical knowledge of founding Australia. Like a number of her contemporaries, Kate Grenville in her novel seeks justice for a dispossessed people and positions her novel as a witness to "the secret river of blood" (Kossew, 2007:8-9). that runs through Australia. The question of what is identified and what is not identified in the Australian history is a matter of questioning *terra nullius*. In recent years, a number of Australian novels have attempted to rewrite history from a postcolonial perspective. Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* focuses on reading Australian history through the lens of postcolonialism and, points out that non-

Indigenous Australians can re-interpret the way by which the colonizing forces have constructed the nation of Australia.

1-2-3-The Exilic State of the Colonizer

The convicts cry out their hostility and animosity; whatever experience they went through, they express a need to speak of themselves. Essentially, the theme of exile provides an insight into the exiled state of mind. It is a curse and damnation, a punishment, a psychological burden which is the exile's essential source of pain. It "is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you" (Said,2003:184). The exile is oriented to a distant place and feels that he does not belong where he lives. Usually he longs to return to the homeland and anticipates the joy of return. It is a story of disorientation, of a crisis of belonging. It implies damnation, castigation, diffidence, anguish and also salvation and a everlasting hope for return.

They long for their home lands. It is due to the close and vital relationship between men and their lands. It is a bond that denotes a strong feeling of belonging. Man's connection to the land is as old as the history of humanity. Hence, man's attachment to his land is irrevocable, it elucidates time the sense of thrashing and suffering which is felt after being deported from home.

The life of the men and women who have been condemned to leave their motherland is entitled with misery. In spite of all the arguments which are presented to legitimize their departure, they feel the same pain, the same seclusion, the same severance and the same sorrow once they cross its boundaries. Regardless of how despondent and excruciating the environment they decided to depart from was, the

convicts found it very difficult to cope with the new environment they were transferred to. They feel the senses of uprootedness and homelessness.

In the same vein, the Saidian view of exile emphasizes exilic displacement and emplacement over the constancy of movement in travel, and it is grounded in the postcolonial experience of loss of home. Therefore, the exiled people long for the stability of belonging. They arrive in Australia as displaced people from England. Despite the misery of being exiled, they try to accommodate themselves with the new situation. As a result, they need to overcome the sense of being exiled by achieving a new sense of belonging through the possession of land.

The impossibility of finding the means of coping with the unfamiliar surroundings is the source of the pain of exile. In spite of their assumed superiority, British settlers in the colonies might suddenly experience the feeling of being very alienated; they find themselves facing a problem of identifying themselves with the Australian continent. It is the feeling which characterizes the colonizer's encounter with the wilderness of the "uncivilized" world (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 23-24). As a result the representation of colonized are constructed in very specific ways to uphold the superiority of the colonizers.

Accordingly, the colonizer sets out to degrade the colonized at every opportunity to further the gap between them. Hence, at the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay an undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism and racial superiority for the continuation of the gap.

The process of colonization is realized by the hierarchy of the colonized / colonizer. However, what is predominantly practical is the association of violence with

colonization. In *The Wretched of Earth* (1963), Fanon analyzes the link between violence and colonialism with the intention of explaining how violence was required to colonize people. Although colonialism is a mission of taking up the land, Fanon expressively exposes the violence intrinsic in the process of colonization. Therefore, the colonizers are not innocent. According to Fanon, white colonists became implicated in committing acts of violence and genocide. They are not as innocent as we would be led to believe (1963:14). The use of violence is not only for the aim of keeping the colonizers at arm's length; it seeks to dispossess and dehumanize them. Everything is permissible to take up the land, and therefore the end of taking it up is the justification of using violence.

However, the use of violence is not without a consequence. It causes the trauma of Aboriginal people. The overwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic event of taking up the land occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of delusions in the present and the bygone times. The fact that the event was overwhelming for the other means that he is not prepared for a shattering experience. The victim was not ready to feel pain and anxiety. Traumatized people experience a feeling of depression, a feeling of helplessness, and another one of closing off of the spirit and the mind for the sake of insulating themselves from further harm.

The term "trauma" authorizes several meanings at once: it is a psychological illness, a historical event and a powerful shock that may have long-lasting effects. That is why; the writing of Grenville's novel has remedial chattels for the colonizer and the colonized alike. It is a healing act, and a manner to come to convey pain and suffering of the ancestors to the next generations.

Narratives of trauma invariably bespeak the inherent tension in trauma between an untellable event in the past and the exigency to narrate and testify to the experience in the present in an effort to work through it. It concerns itself with the understanding of the traumatic history of Australia. The presence of traumatic memory attests to the difficulties of recovering the reservations of history. The writers of fiction struggle to understand the past and collect fragmented memories that verbalize a traumatic experience.

Trauma studies engage in a convalescent process to achieve a perception of the story of colonizing Australia for the sake of figuring out the convolution of the historical reality of colonialism. The study of trauma makes an idiosyncratic input to the understanding of suffering of Aboriginal people. It is clear that in the constant reenactment and revisioning of the past, the study of trauma have common characteristics with postcolonial literature. In postcolonial context, the theory of trauma become attempts to uncover suppressed personal and collective histories to convert the story of the colonized and the colonizer. It also addresses the mistreatment of the Aborigines in the form of racial violence in the Australian continent.

1-3-A Mutation in the Format of Writing History

History is, for all intents and purposes, a narrative mode of knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past. It has undergone a linguistic turn which is inspired by structuralist and poststructuralist thought, leading to the emergence of so-called postmodernist history. Since the 1980s this has had a considerable impact on how literary scholars and novelists have thought about the past, provoking a historical turn which is evident in new historicism by the emergence of historiographic metafiction. In her outstanding work *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon aims to formulate a poetics of postmodern literature. The focal point of Hutcheon is to define the postmodern novel by the concept of historiographic metafiction. In short, this particular type of novel is best described by the problematic encounter between historiography and metafiction. It is a type of fiction that is concerned with the representation of past.

1-3-1- The Dichotomy of Fact and Fiction

Postmodernism is a quest rendering problematic concepts, domains, and institutions that have conventionally served as the pillars for our perceptions of who we are and what construct the world around us. History, with the aim of recapturing and explaining the past, has traditionally been considered veracious. However, within the last three decades, the field of history has become subject to a postmodern examination. In the context postmodernism, the representation of past or the writing of history is considered an enormously problematic task and it is exactly this crisis of representation that Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' embodies and investigates.

Nevertheless, an understanding of history and historiography under the influence of poststructuralist thoughts constructs the theoretical background for the analysis of historical novels written in the postmodern era. Gertrude Himmelfarb states in her article which is entitled *Postmodernist History* (1999) that history writing follows in the postmodern age. She observes that postmodernism has become influential in many disciplines, including history. When applied to the field of history, postmodernism, which refutes both the fixity of language and text and the assumed connection between language and reality, turns into “a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past” (Himmelfarb, 1999: 72). It refuses and refutes the conviction of representing historical events truthfully.

In the nineteenth century, the writing of history was fundamentally the writing of reality as it happened. By definition, history was “as an empirical search for external truths corresponding to what was considered to be absolute reality of the past events” (Onega, 1995: 12). Therefore, it is a scientific search for historical knowledge. However, the vision of seeking not haphazardly the historical knowledge is conformed by later historians namely by Hayden White.

The historical facts cannot be represented objectively because they do not exist independently and separately. Historical events are merely reached through documents and other texts, and historiography turns historical events into historical facts. Such an argument stresses the role of the historian as a determining factor in giving significance to certain historical events in the historical accounts while ignoring others.

The postmodern thought of history bases its arguments on poststructuralist theories which assert the textuality of reality. Therefore, the past is not at all within the reach in an unpolluted form as historical events. It can only be reached through chronicles and archival documents. The influence of poststructuralist paves the way to a historicist study of literary texts, analyzing literature in the context of social, political and cultural history, and regarding literary history as a part of a larger cultural history.

The abortion of concocting history as plainly a reflection of events which were from the ancient times, even though it may seem to represent an outdoor reality, history as a text is a construction. For that reason, it is claimed that “the cultural and ideological representations in texts serve mainly to reproduce, confirm, and propagate the power-structures of domination and subordination which characterize a given society” (Abrams,1999:184). As a consequence, history is the outcome of language and a discourse of power. The postmodernist examination of history throws out the idea of history as a straightforwardly open and single, and substitutes for it the outset of histories an enduring series of human deconstructing and re-constructing.

Hayden White elaborates on this new concept of history, mainly in his Metahistory. He determines that the aim of metahistory is the search of answers to questions concerning the epistemological status of historical explanations and the

possible forms of historical representation. For White, the narrative form is the only possible form of representation in the writing of history. He proposes in *Metahistory* a theory of narrative that draws parallelisms between history and literature. It is argued that traditional historiography uses the narrative form in which historians convey the knowledge of the past and he analyzes the “deep structure of the historical imagination” (White, 1973: 9). History contains a deep verbal structure and that a formal theory is needed to analyze the deep structure. White highlights the idea that history writing consists of the process of emplotment. It is a necessary operation since “histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles” (White, 1973: 223). In brief, it is the transformation of history into a story; it is the turn of archives into accounts.

It is generally believed that historical fact make no sense at all when they stand alone, the historical record is constantly “fragmentary and always incomplete” (White, 1973: 223); that is why the historian is obliged to make a plausible story out of facts through “the encodation of facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures” (ibid). It is the compulsion to make “stories out of chronicles” which is the reason for the presence of some story elements in history writing. White explains how these elements bring history writing to the level of literary composition by indicating that the events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like. In short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. The concept of emplotment entails the abovementioned role of the historian in shaping the stories made out of chronicles

according to his choice of the most appropriate structure for ordering events into a meaningful and complete story. The historical fact is emplotted in a number of dissimilar ways, so as to offer different interpretations of these events and to award them with different meanings. Thus, it provides the sustainment for an intentional way of writing history. White also calls attention to the fact that the historian traces the past events in historicized records, documents or archives, but he does not reach the contexts of past events accurately. The historian, therefore, has to invent contexts in order to make past events noteworthy and evocative. He indicates that the milieu in which those documents take place is not accessible, hence not given but invented.

The narration of past is briefly described by the process of transforming past events into historical facts. E.H. Carr describes briefly how the process of transforming past events into historical facts is actually the interpretation of the historian himself. He contends that: "It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context" (1990:11-12). Although Hayden White draws attention to the general reluctance to consider historical representations as verbal artifacts, the above arguments of both White's own and E. H. Carr bridge the gap between history and literature, but the gap was widened by the attempts of those historians who tried to equate historical accounts with sciences. A new kind of "fictional" history emerges when the difference between history and fiction gets indistinguishable. It is safe to say that history has become rather "metafictional" than fictional only for the goal of postmodernist history is to lay bare the devices whereby past reality is constructed through the writing of history. It is the easy way out for fully understanding the history of ancient times.

However, the traditional way of writing history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is an attempt to reflect historical events in an objective way. The scientific objectivity of traditional history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is realized by accurate quotations, citations, documentation in footnotes and bibliography.

Furthermore, postmodernist history draws attention to these attempts of conventional history to “conceal its ideological structure behind a scholarly façade of footnotes and facts” (Himmelfarb,1999:75). The methods and devices that are exploited to make history seem objective should also be questioned and challenge. In the attempt of the demystification of historical knowledge, postmodernism has to expose not only the validity historical knowledge, the hegemonic, privileged, patriarchal interests served by history; but also its methodology, the scholarly apparatus that gives it a specious trustworthiness. The postmodern theory of history stresses the role of the historian in interpreting past events entails the fact that historical events are described by subjectivity since the interpretation of history is from the perspectives of historians. A historical piece of information is no longer innocent and above suspicion, because “historical narratives do not reveal meanings that are always there, rather they construct meaning much as fictional narratives do” (Baş,1999:16).The authorized version history is the dominant one. It suppresses the history of minority people; Elisabeth Weaseling argues that: “the absence of ethnic minorities from [...] history does not result from some sort of natural, automatic process, but from deliberate exclusion” (Weaseling,1991:166). That is why, the postmodern historical fiction attempts to voice up the voiceless portions in the history of humanity.

Therefore, postmodernism is a way of releasing history from the control of dominant ideologies and powers. It celebrates a multiplicity of histories. The postmodern history neither ignores the suppressed parts in history, nor accepts fully the available parts of history. The concentration of postmodernist history is the marginalized, disempowered, or victimized people in history.

1-3-2- Setting the Stage and Clearing the Way for Historiographic Metafiction

Historical fiction develops into a new form by the means postmodern innovations in both history and fiction. The conventional version of history is no longer valid, and multiple histories are possible. The inclusion of historical characters or events into the fictionality of texts differs in postmodernist novels from classical historical novels of the nineteenth century. The traditional historical novel can only be introduced on condition that the historical reality which is the background of the novel is not in opposition to the official historical record. Consequently, it is not possible to know the dark events in the history of humanity, there are surely blank pages in the official records of history.

The discrepancy between classical historical fiction and postmodern fiction is that the former avoids anachronism and the contradiction of official history through producing fictional only in accordance with the official version history whereas “postmodern fiction, by contrast, seeks to foreground this seam [...] by visibly contradicting the public record of ‘official’ history; by flaunting anachronism; and by integrating history and the fantastic” (McHale, 1994: 90). McHale’s label for historical

novels written in the postmodern era is “the postmodernist revisionist historical novel”. It revises the content of the historical record, and debunks the conventional version of past.

In her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1989), Linda Hutcheon names postmodern historical novels as “historiographic metafiction” as she schematizes the theory of contemporary historiography and problematizes the distinction between history and fiction. She explains her reason for such a label by asserting that “historiographic metafiction puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past. This is why I have been calling this historiographic metafiction” (1989:192). Linda Hutcheon’s definition puts a constant worry especially on postmodernist historical novels, “an intense self-consciousness about the way in which all this is done” (1989:113). Her definition is governed by the paradox created by the intermingling of metafictional self-reflexivity and historical reality in novels. The postmodernist theory of history paves the way for inventing stories about past events, and foregrounds certain events while suppressing some others for ideological reasons.

The analysis of postmodern historical novels, the metafictional elements, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, non-linear narrative and parodic intention foreground this process of enlightening. Historiographic metafiction attempts to use historical material within the parodic self-reflexivity of metafiction which aims at undermining realism. Historiographic metafiction is not only concerned with the question of the truth-value of objective historical representation but with the issue of who reins the process of writing history. Thus, in historiographic metafiction, the idea of historical fact is emphasized for grounding the process of writing historical knowledge.

Hutcheon states that: “All past events are potential historical ‘facts’, but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated. [...] This distinction between brute event and meaning-granted fact is one with which postmodern fiction seems obsessed” (1989:75). Therefore, the focus of historiographic metafiction is on past events and historical personages which history chooses to exclude. The excluded events are foregrounded, and their stories are retold. As a result, a multiplicity of histories is achieved since historiographic metafiction writes alternative version which are different from the previously accepted one. Historical novels in the postmodern age present the prospective of presenting manifold historical possibilities in contrast to a single possibility sustained by suppressing alternatives and silencing the other version of (hi)story.

The official history is presented by a discourse of power and aims at representing the viewpoints of the prevailing ideology. Historiography, while turning real past events into facts, signals certain real events and omits some others. To Hayden White, historical writing consists of “the arrangement of selected events [...] into a story” (1973:7). Such an arrangement is carried out according to the dominant discourse since historical knowledge has come to be seen as an ideological construction for sustaining hegemony.

Nevertheless, postmodern historical novel rewrites history from the perspectives of groups of people that have been excluded from the making and writing of history. It is not only for instructing people about the silence of official historiography, but it gives them more power than they truly possess. It gives them the power and acknowledges for them the right of writing history. The postmodern historical novel is for inscribing the suppressed in history. It is also for empowering

the position of suppressed groups in the present. Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, also, voices the silenced histories of marginalized people by subverting the previously accepted historical version in order to re-pose it out of the center and to reveal the decentralized histories of the ex-centric colonizers.

Historical novels in the postmodern era have been discussed under different labels by various critics. Even if Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction is regarded as an all-encompassing term. Brian McHale establishes his own theory of historical novels in the postmodern age and labeling them as "postmodernist revisionalist historical novels", he noticed the connection between postmodernist revisionalist historical novels and Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction.

1-3-3- The Narrative of the Small Narratives

The skeptic stance of postmodernism is referred to the French theoretician Jean François Lyotard. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Lyotard points out the status of knowledge in the modern times. Therefore, he embarks upon the subject of meta-narrative. Lyotard explains how those modern societies seek through meta-narrative stability which is the result of order, then, he equates that the stability with the idea of totality. Stability, order and totality are established in modern societies through the means of "grand narratives". Grand narratives attempt to masquerade the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. He is a proponent of postmodernism because it rejects those totalizing grandnarratives. Hence, postmodernism is a fracture with held beliefs and calls for "mini narratives" or "little narratives" which are at all the times conditional, reliant and provisional for the sake of writing history.

Lyotard refuses to consider the history of grand narratives as the official version of history. That is why, postmodernist writer has experimented the writing process of the small narratives in which he has challenged traditional version of the grand narratives. Therefore, the meta-fictional technique of the small narratives is used to re-place the meta-fictional one of the grand narratives.

In other words, Lyotard investigates the condition of “grand narratives” by which history is officially written. He defines postmodernism by its “incredulity towards metanarrative” (1979:xxiv-xxv). Lyotard states that postmodern artistic creations emphasize peripheral voices, a different view of reality and the implausibility of the official version of history. It is a crack in the prevailing dominant aesthetic way of the grand narratives.

The grand narratives are neither satisfactory nor sufficient to define the contradictions accumulated within historical knowledge. The writer thus searches for a virtual and broken story for challenging and eliminating any rhetoric of truth. The small narratives are essentially related to the story of the marginalized. According to Lyotard, postmodernism as a textual strategy is marked by transgression and resistance to the modernist way of writing history.

Postmodernism is all the time referred to the forms of representation and the ways in which we depict reality. J.F. Lyotard states that all ways of writing depend upon narrative in order to corroborate themselves, and it could be said that all knowledge is principally narrative as, no matter of their intermediate, all the ways of writing necessitate the meta-narrative technique to clarify, authenticate or rationalize them (1984: 7). In the postmodern condition, “the grand narrative has lost its

credibility” (Lyotard, 1984: 37). The grand narratives is replaced by the propagation of small narratives that are used to make interim judgments about limited, specific situations, and cannot be universalized into a amalgamated format. The doubt for the legitimacy of these metanarratives leads to argue that postmodern knowledge is mainly produced by running counter discourse to the preconceived and already accepted historical reality.

1-4-Voicing the Secret of *The Secret River* (2005)

In *The Secret River*, Kate Grenville attempts to re-narrate the history of colonizing Australia and taking the land from the hands of Aboriginal people. She subverts the conventional version in the colonial history of Australia by employing the postmodern genre of historiographic metafiction. The employment of this postmodern genre is for investigating the colonial history and writing an alternative story. Historiographic metafiction falsifies the notion of one accepted historical version. That is why, *The Secret River* reveals the historical reality in Australian history and opens the door of interpreting and constructing an other version of history. Kate Grenville's novel is an attempt to uncover, re-examine, and narrate the distorted discourses in history. It revisits nineteenth century scenes of violence in order to portray the dark side of Australia's national history as perpetrated by white colonists.

1-4-1- A Beginning for Ending the Pretext of Terra Nullius

It is a disputed fact that Australian history only began with Europeans because of the ignorance of Aboriginal past and the erasing of Aboriginal prior presence. British colonization was legitimated by denying any relationship between the land of Australia and the Aboriginal population.

The Australian history was written from a colonial perspective. Therefore, historians did not offer considerable attention to the tragedy of dispossessing the Aborigines. The Aboriginal people were vanished from the pages of Australian history

as they were disappeared from the inland plains of Australia. In *An Introductory History of Australia* which was written to elucidate what people mean when they speak about the history of Australia, Walter Murdoch states that:

They mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia. There is good reason why we should not stretch the term to make it include the story of the dark skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe [...] The historian is concerned with Australia only as the dwelling place of white men and women, settlers from overseas. It is his business to tell us how these white folk found the land, how they settled in it, how they explored it and how they gradually made it, the Australia we know today (1917:9).

In the twentieth century, the process of recording history gave no attention to the Aboriginal occupation of the continent. The main focus of the white man in the continent of Australia was that the land was uninhabited before his coming.

The Australian pre-history has been tainted in the last decades. In 1961, it was estimated that the Aborigines had been lived in the continent for 10,000 years. From that time on, the view of ancient Australia has utterly reshaped. It is stated in the journal *World Archaeology* that:

In 1961 the oldest date was some 9000 years, by 1968 four sites older than 20,000 years were known and by the early 1970 at least two sites older than 50,000 years were accepted. For the last five years, 50,000 years has been generally agreed on as a likely limit, though a few believe that considerably greater antiquity will be rewarded (Murray and White, 1981: 257).

The reality of populating the land of Australia for more than fifty thousand years trudges the Australian history with profundity and complexity. The epoch of the existence of convicts in Australia represents nothingness in comparison to the existence of Aboriginal people. That is why, the pretext of *terra nullius* is questioned and nullified.

The colonizers came to Australia in the eighteenth century to settle: “despite Aboriginal resistance, the white invaders gradually spread across the country” (Webby, 1989:96). The more settlers arrived, the more land they needed. Therefore, the period of stability in the lives of Aborigines ends partly because the Europeans misunderstood the Aborigines and partly because they did not even consider them as human beings equal to themselves.

The excuse of the Europeans for colonization was that the Aborigines were savages, and Australia was a no man’s land. Its “wilderness as a nature and as a euphemism for Aboriginal failure to develop a civilization” (Jensen, 2005: 13-14). This notion clearly indicates the inequality of Aborigines, who were also strategically excluded from the history of Australia. As “Australian settlement histories have relegated Aboriginal histories to the margins along with non-British migrant histories and women’s histories” (Jensen, 2005:67). It is an act of eliminating the existence of the Aborigines. Therefore, they were written out of the Australian history intentionally.

Australian Aboriginals have been the original landowners of the Australian landscape for over 50,000 years. In 1788, Britain took possession of the eastern half of

Australia without any consideration for the original inhabitants. In the eighteenth century, the British occupation of Australia was justified by the belief that the land had been empty and they had appropriated the land as property. Elizabeth Webby points out that:

In 1770 James Cook arrived to claim the eastern part of the continent for the British Crown and name it New South Wales. He apparently did so under the impression that there were few Indigenous inhabitants and that, since these few did not use the land in the European sense of cultivating it, they did not own it (1989:7).

It was believed that “the cultivation of the soil that was the necessary badge of civilization” (McGregor,1997:2). This generated the national myth of legitimating white settlement. It further provides the colonists with the premise of a new beginning in a blank space and enables their settlement to thrive without any compensation to the original owners. In this respect, it is the whitewashing of Aboriginal history. They position Aboriginals at the peripheries of history, and thereby denying them a rightful status as the sovereign inhabitants of Australia.

The British justification for conquering Australia was the idea that these lands were uninhabited. Behind this justification was the application of the Roman legal concept of *terra nullius*. Western Europeans and their Euro-Americans cousins after 1500 A.D. They adopted the idea of *terra nullius* to legitimize and popularize conquest and settlement of land in the Americas, Africa, and Australia. Empty land was often land previously unknown to Europeans (Zukas,2005:49). Europeans mapped *terra incognita* and cited *terra nullius* as rationale for conquest, even in the cases where lands were obviously occupied. Within a larger public discourse on imperial

projects from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, maps played a major ideological role in popularizing the deceptive notion of empty space as part of larger imperial projects.

In postcolonial context, there have been a necessity for postcolonial authors to write back to colonial writers of history that have portrayed colonized people as the other of the colonizers. Accordingly, it is indispensable for postcolonial writers to oppose and correct the myths produced by colonial writers. What is necessary in writing back to the canon is the emphasis on displacing the center to the margin in order to dismantle power.

1-4-2- Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* as a Voice for the Aborigines

Grenville's novel presents an act of revolution and a movement of resistance in Australian literature and history. In this sense, *The Secret River* resists the official historical narrative that is fixed in its portrayal of a single truth of the past, in order to faithfully portray the colonial violence in the Australian continent. Grenville presents differently the Australia history by the fictionalization of history. She imagines the past and offers a narrative of settlement that is marked by authenticity. It writes back to the suppression of memory and the misrepresentation of the past.

The other version of Australian history is a history of violence and dispossession of the Aborigines in the Hawkesbury River. It is the version of an untold story. The novel re-writes the colonial history of Australia by adapting of historiographic metafiction. The novel is a fictional work with many historical references that gives readers a possible access to an imaginative past that disrupts the

narratives of an accepted history. It suggests a different narrative of settlement, and exposes a (hi)story that discloses the violent act of taking the land from Aboriginal people by admitting the terrors of the past.

The dispossession of the Aboriginal people of Australia from their land is achieved by the planned massacre of the Aborigines by the settlers. It is focalized through William Thornhill's white perspective. It is for the sake of disclosing the connivance of contemporary Australians about colonial dispossession of the Indigenous people. Thornhill's perspective contributes to the unconventional story of settlement which is suppressed from the memory of Australian people.

The Secret River narrates the story of colonization and uncovers some of the truth about Australia's history. It presents an alternative form of historical documentation which is not candidly bound to a faithful depiction of the past. Grenville's novel as work of fiction creates an liberating site for ignored history by supplanting the official (hi)story of the nation.

The novel emphasizes Thornhill's hunger for possessing land. In colonial Australia, Thornhill associates the possession of land with freedom. Land is for settlers as long as no other white man had already laid claim to it: "All a person need do was find a place no one had already taken. Plant a crop, build a hut, call the place Smith's or Flanagan's, and out-stare anyone who said otherwise" (Grenville, 2005: 66). It is stated in the onset of the novel that Thornhill's dreams of property and prosperity in England are impossible to realize. In the colony of New South Wales, the dreams of property and prosperity are possible.

The thought of Aboriginal existence in Australia is absent in the mind of settlers. Thornhill's mind is obviously driven by the desire to possess and quench his thirst for land. Therefore, Aboriginal people were excluded from the human race by the colonial discourse of the British Empire. By the same token, the biased ideologies of the late eighteenth century furthered imperial domination through the power of colonial discourse that supported Eurocentric visions of blank space and empty land.

The land of Aboriginal people are dismissed in favor of the colonizers role as the dominant owner of new territory. The white settlers ignore the existence of the Aborigines. Thornhill's perspective recognizes no visible marks of previous occupancy or cultivation. He sets up borders and boundaries to proclaim his right to the land: "There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said this is mine. No house that said, this is our home. There were no, fields or flocks that said, we have put the labour of our hands into this place"(Grenville,2005:52). That is to say, the land of Australia is a land available for the taking.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal people cultivate crops. They farm the land, but the settlers do not recognize the farmed plots as agriculture. Additionally, when Thornhill admits reluctantly to himself that the patch of soil has been farmed, and that it is prime territory for the crops he wants to plant, he wants to take the plot for himself and uproots what the Aborigines have planted there. The novel not only foregrounds the colonial discourse by putting forward the reasons of taking up the land. If the Indigenous inhabitants of the land did not farm the land, they could not be using it, and it was much easier for the settlers to develop the doctrine of *terra nullius* and assert the ownership of the land.

The dispossession of the Aborigines is realized by the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. It is not in vain because it reduces the resistance of Aboriginal people who are dispossessed and dispersed. On the Hawkesbury River, Thornhill encounters land as “a place of promise [...] the blank page upon which a man might write a new life” (Grenville, 2005:70). He establishes his presence upon the absence of the Aborigines. The colonization of Australia is legitimized by the absence of Aboriginal people.

The novel is a re-examination of the past from the present. It presents the colonial history of Australia which has been omitted and erased from Australia’s memory. As a postmodern historical revisionist novel, it counters the forgetting of past and contributes to complete historical understanding of the modern times in Australia.

Kate Grenville’s novel re-writes the colonial Australian history which was marked by conflict and dispossession, the taking of Aboriginal land, the devastation of their habits and traditions. Despite the presence of Aboriginal people, the British colonial authorities declared Australia as *terra nullius* which removed any legal recognition of pre-existing Indigenous tribes. From the outset, the Indigenous peoples were officially left without land. Dispossession, dispersal and marginalization of the Indigenous population were the major consequences of colonial conquest. They were not considered to own the land, and therefore Australia was considered uninhabited and settled rather. Thus, the colonization of Australia occurred under the pretext of *terra nullius*.

1-5-Conclusion

Historiographic metafiction serves as a liberating genre for writers. It is for voicing the other version of Australian history. That is why; it is the postmodernisation of postcolonial discourse. It is an attempt to create alternative histories of the colonized in opposition to the official history of the colonizers. The official history of colonizers is used by the colonial powers as an instrument to construct reality on behalf of the colonizers; and therefore the history of colonizers relentlessly leaves out the history of the colonized.

The white Europeans took the burden of writing the history of Australia. They set Australia as *terra nullius*. When the domination of the colonizers ended, the representation of Australia as a land without people has remained. Therefore, the novel re-writes the European historical and fictional record of the Australian history by offering a new version which is written from the perspective of the colonized rather than that of the hegemonic power.

Kate Greenville's *The Secret River* as an oppositional discourse includes references to the colonizer's version of history which distorts, disfigures and destroys the past of the oppressed people. It dismantles the hegemonic accounts of the past by means of introducing the suppressed voices of Aborigines whose histories are silenced by the pretext of *terra nullius*. It depicts in great detail the dark story of Australia's history as perpetrated by white colonists. It is by uncovering the excruciating scars of the past and by doing so, voicing "the Great Australian Silence".

CHAPTER TWO:

THE SECRET OF TERRA NULLIUS

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2-1- Introduction

The quest for *terra nullius* is a quest for the foundational myth of founding Australia. It rewrites the foundational narrative of white Australia. *The Secret River* questions the legitimacy of *terra nullius* and dismantles the official version of settling and establishing the nation of Australia. Grenville exposes the discourse of superiority, deconstructs the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, and refuses the right of whites to own the land. In Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, the role of the legend in the foundational narrative is firstly the assurance of white ownership of the land, and secondly the concealment of the violent dispossession of indigenous people. The settlers are aware of the indigenous presence, but they decide to ignore it and refuse to accept it as inhabited land even though there are visible signs of owning the land. The white settlers dismiss this evidence and refuse to admit previous ownership of the original inhabitants of Australia.

The Aboriginal people had an intricate relationship with the land. They did not farm or herd animals, but they lived by hunting and gathering whatever was available for food. Since the Aboriginal people did not use the land in the way that Westerners did by farming it, mining it, and building on it. That is why; the British colonists believed that they had no ties to the land. They declared Australia as *terra nullius*. It was the procedures upon which the acquisition of the colony of New South Wales were based. In this chapter, the legal fiction of *terra nullius* is questioned for the sake of overturning it. Thus, the official version of the Australian history is examined, the suppressed memory is revived, and the rationale for the legal fiction of *terra nullius* is exposed.

2-2- Lifting the Curtain of Terra Nullius: The Story of the Shackled Pioneers of Australia

The transportation of criminals was the most effective and the easiest form of punishment. It was very far lenient form of punishment in comparison to the Bloody Code.⁴ After the loss of the American colonies, Australia was colonized in the name of *terra nullius* for the sake of lodging criminals and getting rid of them. It was a natural prison. Since the construction of prisons were expensive: exiling criminals seemed the most practical solution. The punishment of criminals had turned out to be unsympathetic, predominantly for crimes against property, even if it was only a matter of stealing a loaf of bread. Therefore, theft was a serious crime, no matter how small it was. In *The Secret River*, Grenville describes how and why William Thornhill ekes a living as a boatman and small time thievery. William is caught for theft and transported with his wife to Sydney for the term of his natural life. Grenville explores the evolution of an impecunious criminal who is shipped off to Australia as a convict.

2-2-1- A Living between the Hammer of Poverty and the Anvil of Transportation

⁴ The penal code of those times became known as the 'Bloody Code' and until now evidence of its harsh toll on the criminal classes of the 19th century. During that period 222 crimes were punishable by death. The criminals simply heard the judge order to take them to a place of execution and *be hanged by the neck until dead*. The Bloody Code was the name given to the English legal system from the late 17th century to the early 19th century. There were many reasons why the English legal system was so harsh at this time. Firstly, the attitudes of the wealthy men who made the law were unsympathetic. They felt that people who committed crimes were sinful, lazy or greedy and deserved little mercy. Secondly and most importantly, the rich made the laws they made laws that protected their interests. Any act which was a threat to their wealth, property or order was criminalized and made punishable by death. (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1203828/The-222-Victorian-crimes-man-hanged).

The trouble of poverty became a serious social and economic burden on English society in the end of 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Therefore; it is fairly accepted and pretty expected that Kate Grenville devoted a part of her novel to expose the problem of poverty. It is praiseworthy for pointing out and mirroring life in England of those times. *The Secret River* is a mirror for the English society in a time which is full of contradictions where poverty is next to prosperity, and where the life of the poor people is often outdone by the material desperate social state. Grenville tries to depict convincingly the hard times of living in the English society with a particular focus on the most deprived. The novel provides a thoughtful examination of the great socio-economic problem of poverty and, what is more, what makes people fall lower and lower in the social ladder from being a poor man to a thief.

In Dickensian society⁵, poverty was the root cause of crime in the British society because the poor wants to live the life of rich. As Poverty begets theft, People are slotted in crimes so as to run away from poverty. Poverty had a huge psychosomatic influence on people; they became depressed, desperate, and then they decided to commit a crime, as they have not found anything that can legally get them out of such situation. The desperate economic situation of people in Britain and the lack of jobs especially for young people generated the thoughts and actions of crime.

⁵ It refers to the period covered by Charles Dickens books and also, the fact that Charles Dickens wrote extensively and vividly in his novels about poverty. So, when people talk about for instance people living in 'Dickensian conditions they mean that people are living in extreme poverty.

The Industrial Revolution⁶ was a time of dramatic change, from hand tools and handmade items to machine made products. which were produced by machines. It was the replacement of manual labour in manufacturing, and therefore many labourers were flocking to the expanding cities to earn a living in the new factories. They could not all find work, and in any case wages were miserably low. There was no help for the poor. They relied on themselves, and on their families and friends, who were often poor.

Theft was a comprehensible way to avoid starvation. Minor theft and even major theft were accepted among large sections of the working class as a reasonable way to help themselves and their families, in a society where no one else much wanted to assist. Instead, they were subjugated to exploitation and treatment similar to that of animals for their powerlessness and poverty.

Kate Grenville's novel is set in London at the end of the eighteenth century, and in New South Wales at the beginning of the nineteenth century during the hard times of the industrialized society. Therefore, the life of Thornhill is stamped by poverty that, "He was always hungry" (Grenville2005:11). He struggles to survive in an overcrowded city where life prospects are short and social support does not exist. When Grenville describes the young William's childhood friends as "thieves, any time they got the chance" (2005:13). She refers not specifically to his friends, but generally to his society. The whole members of the family engage in a trivial thievery to put a loaf of bread on the table. William, along with his brothers Rob and James, belong to a

⁶ The term Industrial Revolution was first popularized by the English economic historian Arnold Toynbee to describe England's economic development from 1760 to 1840. (www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution).

local gang of boys who spend their days on the street looking for any opportunity to steal something to eat or sell. The members of society stole whatever available. Robbery was often a way of life, it was out of necessity rather than voracity as the young William believes that: “there could be no sin in thieving if it meant a full belly” (2005:13). Theft is far better for Grenville than starvation, and theft on behalf of your family can seem entirely justifiable since “It was on the shoulders of William that the survival of the others seemed to depend” (2005:15). The Thormhills suffer from constant hunger and freeze in the winter as the wind whips through the broken glass in the windows. Therefore, the first contributing element to the crime of theft is poverty. The poor people, like the Thormhills, are desperate to do something about their situation so they turn to the crime of thieving as a means of living.

Grenville returns to William’s life in London before his deportation to New South Wales to introduce the reader the dire poverty of Southwark⁷; and therefore, sympathizing with William who steals in the day light and shivers in the night. The act of stealing is not presented as a moral wrong rather of a physical necessity. If the people of Southwark did not steal, they would soon starve to death. Grenville paints a very human and sympathetic portrait of the inhabitants of Southwark to counteract the stereotype of the deported convicts as rough and violent individuals. Grenville also

⁷ It refers to a district of Central London and forms one of the oldest parts of London and fronts the River Thames to the north. It historically formed an ancient borough in the county of Surrey, made up of a number of parishes, which increasingly came under the influence and jurisdiction of the City of London. As an inner district of London, Southwark experienced rapid depopulation during the late 19th and early-20th centuries. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southwark).

wants the reader to see beyond the stereotype of “Australia [...] as a nation of shoplifters” (Ferguson,2002:78), and understand the forces that brought the convicts to Australia and the challenges they faced in the new land.

Poverty is the root cause of crime, in view of the fact that crime is recurrently committed by the poor. Crime has been reputable in poor areas because people who are experiencing poverty want to live a better life just like anyone else. Poor people undergo many frustrations and they end up solving their problem with another problem. The problem of thievery is added to the one of poverty. Life is extremely hard for the poor people and their desire to improve their lives leads them to greater problems. People search for a better life by committing crime. There are no specific reasons why people engage in crimes but poverty has been seen as the starting motif and the driving force of crime. Poverty is not a condition of preference, it is “the inability to satisfy minimum needs” (Hazlitt,1973:33). It is easy to hide wealth but poverty cannot be hidden. Therefore, poverty is essentially the root cause of crime. It brings an extreme anxiety and thus, pushing people into crime. Since it is easier to engage in crime when someone resembling William is poor; living in poverty and being in need push people to do the impossible.

The British society has to deal with its increasing members who commit crimes for the sake of defending the properties and the members of society. Historically speaking, there are different measures for dealing with the crime and the criminal:

There have been six ways of both punishing them and deterring others, which have usually been authority's aims, rather than rehabilitation. Governments can execute criminals; punish them physically by, for example,

whipping them; shame them by putting them in the stocks; fine them; imprison them; or exile them—all preferably while paying as little as possible (Alison,2010:16).

Exiling criminals has a long history. Though tough on prisoners, it is more humanitarian than execution. It is cheap, just sending criminals overseas. And the British society is enduringly free of them since they are far away, while authorities hope that the rest of the population sees exile as so dreadful. They are deterred from crime. Therefore, exiling criminals in Australia is an attractive and a practical option.

2-2-2- A Land as a Natural Prison

Colonizing a remote land as Australia was a venture for the British. It was a calculated and an attractive risk for them “for diametrically different reasons. Because it was barren. Because it was impossibly remote. Because it was a natural prison” (Ferguson,2002:77). The impetus was the unexpected need to find an alternative place to house convicts. Ferguson argues that: “The settlement of Australia was designed to solve a problem at home – primarily that of crimes against property” (2002:77).The British society was based on the inviolability of private property, but theft was ubiquitous and the prisons were consequently overflowing. Until 1776, convicts were transported to colonies in North America, where they were indentured to plantation owners as labourers. The successful revolt of these colonies and their subsequent independence as the United States of America fundamentally put an end to this practice. With the expansion of the British Empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the transportation of criminals became a major industry. With the

loss of the American colonies and the contraction of the criminal code, British prison infrastructure failed to accommodate the inflated number of convicts (Barnard,1986:207). At this time, no plans were put forward for the settlement of British people in Australia, or for any other use of the land. It became just another part of the Empire. However, the idea of the newly found land in the far distance began to attract the colonizers for the possibility of using it as a convenient solution of a social problem. It was the best place for exporting the growing number of convicts who were crowded in hulks⁸ along the Thames.

In the late eighteenth century, Australia became a penal colony⁹ for the British authorities, and it was positioned as a place of punishment and exile. The penal colony of Australia was depicted as a place of darkness, viciousness, and despair (Keneally,2005:278). It was a nightmare in the night of convict and a torture on earth for him. So there was a deep, ironic resonance in the way the British brought the Pacific into the realm of European consciousness. They explored, mapped, and demonized Australia once more by chaining criminals on its innocent dry coast. Australia was appropriated to accompany the transportation of British criminals to the

⁸ It refers to a vessel salvaged as a prison for holding convicts , awaiting transportation to a penal colony.

⁹ Penal colony is a settlement used to exile prisoners and separate them from the general populace by placing them in a remote location, often an island or distant colonial territory. Although a score of nations in Europe and Latin America transported their criminals to widely scattered penal colonies, such colonies were developed mostly by the English, French, and Russians. England shipped criminals to America until the American Revolution and to Australia into the middle of the 19th century. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_colony).

Australian shore: the bizarre continent was fit to host the despicable segment of the British society. The British government exported crowds of convicts to Australia to serve their term as labourers. The cause of the deportation incorporated an attempt to decrease poverty and crime in England while concurrently developing a British colony in Australia.

The first colonial descriptions and interpretations were provided from an exterior perspective by the British to describe Australia in relation to Britain. The distance and isolation from home and the aberrant hostile land enhanced the power of negative images left to the British criminals and the general public in fear of Australia; it was “a weapon in the control of working-class crime in Britain” (White, 1992: 20). The image of Australia was generally summed up by the strictest and harshest places on earth for punishing criminals. The representations of the penal colony of Australia maintained it as an aura of terror and an endless damnation before the transportation period. From the very beginning, the transportation has cast a shadow on the colony. The founding fathers of Australia on its deck were the people whom Britain expelled from its society; the outcasts were to inhabit and populate the new continent.

The early unfavourable perceptions of colonial Australia were also connected to the fact that Australia was recognized as *terra nullius*, or as a land without owners. Australia had no equitable occupants and no legalized history. For the Europeans, a land without any history or an acknowledged civilization was desolate. The thoughts of despondency from the emptiness, isolation, and the distance of the continent were common among the convicts. The lifelessness and timelessness of their retribution are frequently expressed in the colonial accounts. In such hopeless

positions, the perimeter between life and death is distorted. Kate Grenville depicts the early nineteenth-century Australian frontier. In her novel, Thornhill is transported to New South Wales for theft, hears rumours about “the place to the south where felons were sent who committed offences in the colony [...] It was called Van Diemen¹⁰’s Land, and the tales of what went on there made the blood run cold” (Grenville,2005: 54).

The Secret River begins in darkness on William Thornhill’s first night in Sydney. It was a heart of misery for him the same as, “There were things worse than dying: life had taught him that. Being here in New South Wales might be one of them” (Grenville,2005:7). Thornhill’s worries deepen as soon as he sees the appearance of the first Aborigine from darkness. Thornhill is surprised by “the way the darkness moved in front of him. It took a moment to understand that the stirring was a human, as black as the air itself” (2005:7).The Aborigine dresses “his nakedness like a cloak” (2005:8), and making the fully clothed Thornhill feel as “skinless as a maggot”(ibid).

The insecurity of life for the Thornhills becomes apparent when Middleton dies: “His business had been good, his life cautiously prosperous. But as soon as he was gone it fell into pieces with amazing speed”(Grenville2005:27). It takes the Thornhills down as well. Losing their home, furnishings, and steady income, they lose what “Thornhill could hardly believe that life had given him this corner to turn”

¹⁰ The colony of New South Wales, was founded in 1788. The colony of Van Diemen’s Land was officially recognized in 1825, even though the island had been settled since 1803. Western Australia was founded in 1829, South Australia in 1836, Victoria in 1851 and Queensland in 1859. (www.australia.gov.au/australian-story/european-discovery-and-colonization).

(2005:24). They shortly experience the “mix of fear and need”(2005:32). Thornhill steals few pieces of expensive wood and he is tried in a court and sentenced to death. When Captain Watson, at Sal’s request, writes on his behalf, Thornhill is pardoned for his crime, “On condition of his being transported to the Eastern Part of New South Wales for the term of his sentence, viz., for and during the term of his Natural Life”(2005:41).

After the nine-month voyage to New South Wales, the Thornhills arrive. However, William is clasped to his former life, and reside with his familiar bends in the Thames; “He got up and stepped out through the doorway there was no cry, no guard: only the living night. The air moved around him, full of rich dank smells [...] A breeze hivered through the leaves, then died, and left only the vast fact of the forest ” (Grenville,2005:7). As he listens to the foreign sounds of the forest, William recognizes that the life he left behind in London is everlasting ended. The waiting in jail in London with the death sentence of hanging was a matter of trying to break away from the noose. But now, he is trapped on the edge of a ruthless continent by ten thousand miles of water, he wonders if death was better than this prison without walls. He feels severely detached from everything he knew. William longs for the sights and smell of the Thames as he lays on his bunk in the overcrowded ship. The misery that he feels when he sits in front of the mud hut and the frightening he also feels by the foreign smells and sounds. It represents the sense of displacement and exile.

The novel opens with the section of Strangers which establishes the setting of the novel. In 1806, Thornhill had just arrived at Port Jackson, and they were transported for the term of his natural life to “ His Majesty’s penal colony of New South Wales. There was hardly a door, barely a wall: only a flap of bark. [...] There

was no need of lock, of door, of wall: this was a prison whose bars were ten thousand miles of water” (Grenville,2005: 7). Furthermore, the sense of eviction was enhanced by the isolation of the continent from Europe: “An unexplored continent would become a jail. The space around it, the very air and sea, the whole transparent labyrinth of the South Pacific, would become a wall 14.000 miles thick” (Hughes,1988:1), as if the colony was nothing more than a huge hulk where the British criminals were locked up in the out of harm’s way distance. In the same way to Hughes, Blainey describes the colony as a natural prison: “The prison had no walls and those who wished to escape had a whole continent in which to vanish [...] The ocean was the wall of the prison, imprisoning not only the convicts but also the governor and officials and marines” (1966:38). Blainey stresses the reality that the guards and the convicts were confined in the natural prison of the Australian continent.

The first section instantaneously establishes the context of the alienness of the land. Before the novel moves on to tell the story of Thornhill and his family in the penal colony, there is a flashback where we are told the story of the poverty-stricken man and his wife in London and the vicissitudes of life that brought him to be sentenced to death for having stolen timber, and later the sentence commuted to transportation. The author conveys the suffering which is caused by existing in a place that is completely different from the mother country due to its climate, vegetation and fauna. Thornhill’s wife notices the strength of the rain, different creatures and especially the trees: “ Their colour is not green the way a tree should be, but a washed-out silvery grey so they always looked half dead” (Grenville2005: 49), but they are grey; their shape does not correspond to that of a proper tree and the strange characteristic is that they do not drop their leaves, but their bark. The landscape

does not have a pattern : “It was exhausting to look at: different everywhere and yet everywhere the same” (Grenville,2005:50). In these lines the author expresses the alienness felt by the first settlers who look for something familiar and cannot find anything, not even the undemanding things. Thornhill pain of loss is rendered through his perception of the alien stars that: “This was a place, like death, from which men did not return. It was a sharp stab like a splinter under a nail: the pain of loss. He would die here under these alien stars” (Grenville,2005:7). The stars are valued to him in his work as a lighterman as they are the means of finding his way on the Thames, but they are meaningless in this unfamiliar place. He has lost his reference points, and by doing so he emphasized his feeling of not belonging to this unfamiliar place of Australia.

2-2-3- The Transformation of a Place of Punishment into a Place of Opportunity

Australia, as a convict colony, is primarily a ruthless land; but it is also a significant opportunity for the convict. William is able to start a new life in Australia and protect his family. He starts to feel tempted by owning a piece of land. It is so easy for him to annex a hundred acres of the land and assert that it is his own. Even though it is a kind of theft as the land is inhabited for more than fifty thousand years by Darug people.

When Thornhill is transported to Australia, it becomes a new home for the whole family. Grenville captivantly presents the reader with two different views on their Australian home. Sal, Thornhill’s wife, is obsessed with the idea of return to London and no possible advantages Australia offers to emancipists could convince her to change her mind: “Her dreams have stayed small and cautious, being of nothing grander than the London they had left” (Grenville,2005: 61). To Thornhill, Australia is

packed of opportunities, and it is better than Britain where Thornhill envies Sal's home:

It was easy to wish to belong in this house, number 31, Swan Lane. Even the name of the street was sweet. It was not just the generous slab of bread, spread with good tasty dripping: it was the feeling of having a place. Swan Lane and the rooms within it were part of Sal's very being, he could see, in a way no place had ever been part of his.(Grenville, 2005:18).

The sense of having a home is a hallucination for Thornhill. Hitherto, when he arrives to Australia, he realizes that his dreams might come true there. William realizes that it is the place where he wants to belong to and decides to establish a new and real home with no yearning to return to England. As an emancipist, Thornhill is allowed to possess land, and the urge to own it is strongly rooted in him. He fights for his piece of land, his Paradise, and manages to gain profit from it. So, in a few years, he becomes something of a King in the settlement, even though the status of an emancipist will always remind him of the lowly position he occupies in the colonial society.

Grenville's novel exhibits the opportunities that are offered by Australia to the convict. Australia has gradually changed from a place of expulsion into a place of opportunity for the Thornhills and other settlers. Grenville introduces an important constituent that stands behind this transformation; it is the ownership of land.

However, the above mentioned transformation of Thornhill from a criminal to a King effectively rewrites the mythology of the convict in Australia. The stories about the possible reversal of destinies were established as early as the First Fleet

shipped off from England: “At Botany Bay in the southern hemisphere, where the south, not north, pointed to the polar region, reversal of destinies was possible” (Keneally, 2005: 67). In the first years of the colony, a number of success stories reach Britain, and many hopes were built on settling in Australia.

According to White, “there was enough truth in the rumors of the rags-to-riches convict to give some consolation to those about to be transported” (1992:30). The tales of prosperity which were written about the southern Arcadia where convicts were transported that they could be saved from paucity and where a better life awaited the newcomers (Hughes, 1986:76). Such rumours from the new world were not welcomed by the British authorities who wished to maintain Australia as an aura of terror.

However, the stories of success introduce a new version and new potential to Australia. In the novel, an upturned image has presented that set aside the old imagery and challenged the early colonial interpretations which are in opposition to the original representation of Australia as a continent of darkness. The supremacy of Britain and the mother-child dependency were further challenged with the emergence of the Australian nationalism among the first Australian-born settler generation. The sentiments of exile and expulsion were unknown to them. Grenville describes Thornhill’s children like the representatives of prevalence:

In the corner he could hear Dick making smothered gasps and noises. He saw that Sal was right: these children of his had no notion of any place that was not Thornhill’s Point. They knew nothing of streets and cobblestones, of houses jammed in cheek-by-jowl, the bricks sweating in the fogs from the river. They knew nothing of feet numb with cold, dead hands gripping an oar as cold as a piece of iron,

knew nothing of drizzling rain that seeped out of the sky day after damp day, the dread of the bone-chilling cold. In their mouths the very names of that other place had a peculiar sound. This, for better or worse, was the only world they knew (Grenville, 2005:114).

By the dawn of the first day of the first generation in Australia, the image of Britain has become different, strange and outlandish. It has characterized the colonial Australia as a geographical and cultural environs of the British Empire. They appropriate the British colonial stories and rewrite them to position Australia at the centre of Australian life.

The representations of the convict Australia have undergone many changes since the early developments of the colony. First, it was defined as a penal colony of the British Empire and accordingly, inauspicious connotations were ascribed to it. It was generally represented as a continent of peccadillo and punishment. Nevertheless, the petition of the Australian continent and the determination of the new generation to resist the meanings imposed on Australia by the British required new representations of the continent. They inhabited it and turned it into their home. The early images of colonial Australia were rendered by the British to portray the continent in an unfavourable light. It was for the sake of maintaining Australia as an aura of horror and penalty. However, there were also other images that depicted Australia as a place of self-amendment and self-creation.

2-3- The Legitimacy of Terra Nullius

In the history of nations, the Australian history has often been seen as something of an exception. Arguably, this exceptionalism has been reinforced by exposing the truth behind *terra nullius*. The possession and colonization of Australia were justified by the rigorous application of the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Exposing the underlying principle of *terra nullius* is a conspicuous souvenir in the Australian history that lies beneath the modern Australian state and of the ways in which that history has sometimes been deliberately suppressed to give the impression of more dignified and honoured foundation of Australia. *The Secret River* is more concerned with readdressing the moment of settlement and exposing the reality behind *terra nullius* in order to deconstruct the mythic aspect of doctrine than focusing on issues which are related to the exact accuracy of events.

2-3-1- A Cult of Forgetfulness

The (hi)story of founding Australia is effusively overflowed by secrets and the first meeting between Aboriginal people and European settlers is one of them. The national secret is commonly associated with shame and that is why; Australians do not seem to be proud of this secret in their history. The significance of the novel is in rewriting the history of settlement, and accordingly exposing the violent part in the story of the founding fathers. The construction of Australian history as a discourse from which events may be silenced to justify land dispossession is clearly addressed by Kate Grenville. The secret of the first encounter between the Aborigines and the convict is suppressed to give a praiseworthy souvenir for the founding fathers. It is intentionally concealed for gliding the picture of the early settlers of Australia.

The title of the novel is originally taken from the W. E. H. Stanner's Boyer Lectures¹¹ of 1968: "There is a secret river of blood in Australian history". Historically speaking, the secret river of blood is referred to the times of the first encounters between Aboriginal people and white settlers. It is covered up in Australian history, and the secret is suppressed in the name of *terra nullius*.

The secret is interrelated with the silences within the narrative about Wiseman that she had inherited from her family. Grenville interconnects with both archival and familial silence to "The Great Australian Silence" that the anthropologist W.H. Stanner identified in 1968. It was specifically the omission of Aboriginal people from the narratives of the nation that set buried. Kate Mitchell points out that *The Secret River* "dramatizes the way in which Australian Aboriginal history has been passed down as a series of silences and omissions" (2010:260). The history of Aboriginal people was a missing segment in the history of Australia which was scantily written during the colonial era and that it was only with the establishment of the nation-state at the end of the nineteenth century that they were written out of Australia's history (Macintyre and Clark, 2003:43).

Grenville takes apart the lie of *terra nullius*, but the settler's description as owner is not questioned. The question is about his essential contribution in violence. The materialization of the violent story of founding Australia in the novel presents the dark story of white Australia. However, the Australian history is presented with

¹¹ For more information on these lectures which are known as the Boyer Lectures, see Stanner, W.E.H. *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians - An Anthropologist's View*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1969.

ignominy. It “is not [...] ultimately threatened as the writing of such a text with its genuine goodwill and willingness to relive the nation’s past atrocities, could be read as a signifier of even more virtue” (Kelada, 2010: 12). *The Secret River* is read as an admission of guilt and a request of forgiveness for the Australian’s past mayhem.

Grenville concedes the existence of a different story by constructing ‘a hollow in the book’ but, as Gall suggests that the “recognition is a judicial position, apparently above the action of the frontier that it evaluates and describes and the creation of a space of recognition; for indigenous dispossession does not undermine the settler’s possessive logic” (2008:101-2). The hollow is also strained by a different view. The choice of Kate Grenville to reinsert indigenous people in the narrative in the form of a hollow makes a privilege of the narrative which is still conversant by the knowledge produced about the other (Kelada, 2010:4). Kelada advocates that in the final pages of the novel, the legal fiction of *terra nullius* appears to be reasserted with the reference to emptiness and any suggestion of continuing of indigenous sovereignty is effectively whitewashed and reduced to a recurring hollow (2010:13).

The voice of the other is not tolerated, and therefore; there is a deficiency in founding and finding an appropriate indigenous point of view as an alternative narrative. Grenville intentionally positions herself as a white Australian writer who is conscious of her significant position and that is why, she does not appropriate the indigenous point of view. Accordingly, the indigenous characters are voiceless in the novel.

In *Searching for The Secret River* (2006)¹², Grenville points out that: “This was because [...] all that was for someone else to tell, someone who had the right to enter that world and the knowledge to do it properly” (2006:198-9). Therefore, Grenville’s choice of not inserting indigenous voices is a conscious acknowledgment of her a privileged position of whiteness.

Nevertheless, Grenville places herself and her novel in an honoured position of whiteness; she does not have the right to speak on behalf of the other because she does not have the tools and the legitimacy to speak for the other. The novel is an acknowledgement by Grenville of her power position as a white writer in Australia. Though, she re-affirms her power to give identification and recognition for Aboriginal people. As a result, the voice and the story of the other do not exist for the reason that the white settler and writer do not recognize that existence. Thus, the white man has the right to give the recognition for the other and who at the same time does not need the permission of the other for doing so.

Grenville’s intents are most likely indisputable; she continues to be ensnared in the white settler’s borders of reference. The novel inhabits the space between the two. If Grenville courts the reader’s empathy, it is not only by representing the traumatic events, but also by presenting the process by which the events are constantly forgotten. The novel does two things at the same time; it is the representation of what

¹² *Searching for the Secret River*(2006), is a memoir about the writing of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*(2005) where Grenville accounts for her inspiration and novel-writing process, she meditates on her own sense of collective guilt, resulting from her realization that her convict ancestor, Solomon Wiseman, had not harmlessly taken up land on the Hawkesbury river, but had rather forcibly taken the land from its Indigenous owners. This discovery prompted her to set about a research process that finally led to the writing of *The Secret River*., a novel partly based on her ancestor’s life.

happened and how it is not passed down. It records a version of frontier conflict as well as imagining the way in which that conflict was written out of the Australian history.

2-3-2- The Scolding of Aboriginal People's Existence

The convicts are presented as powerless and defenseless people against the belligerent Aborigines. The Thornhills face “a hundred black men with spears, a thousand, a whole continent full of men with spears and that grim line to their mouths” (Grenville2005:8). The heroism of the early colonizers who settled the wild Hawkesbury River in defiance of the unsympathetic conditions and of the terrorization posed by the indigenous people is undoubtedly lauded by the construction and the representation of the other. It is a mission for civilizing the Aborigines who are not civilized, and often in a state of backwardness. The Aboriginal people are treated exactly in the same way as the wild beasts or birds that the settlers may find there. Their lives and their property, the nets, canoes, and weapons which represent as much labour to them as the stock and buildings of the white settler, are held by the Europeans as being at their absolute disposal (Hatt,1999:36). The early settlers of Australia were set at the top, the fittest to survive, while the Aborigines were seen to be at the bottom (Foster, 1985:53).

In *The Secret River*, the author imagines and constructs the setting for disclosing her story. Grenville outlines the legal fiction of *terra nullius* by employing all the discourses implied by the legal fiction for the sake of subverting them. The discourse of the civilizing mission and the superiority of the white race are evidently addressed as a means of justifying land dispossession and white settlement:

King George owned this whole place of New South Wales, the extent of which nobody yet knew, but what was the point of King George owning it, if it was still wild, trodden only by black men? The more civilised folk set themselves up on their pieces of land, the more those other ones could be squeezed out. In exchange for the risk such men were willing to take, and the labour they were prepared to expend, a hundred acres of land seemed a fair thing. (Grenville2005:66).

The simplicity and the facility of taking the land from the Aborigines are accomplished and justified by applying *terra nullius*. The whole scheme for justifying *terra nullius* is firstly owning the place and naming it, and secondly showing both the settlers and the Aborigines the signs of dwelling and of farming the place. The land of Australia is not used by the Aborigines and consequently, it is not inhabited by them due to the lack of signs of agriculture: “ This was a place out of a dream, a fierce landscape of chasms and glowering cliffs and a vast unpredictable sky [...] It seemed the emptiest place in the world, too wild for any man to have made it his home” (Grenville,2005:56). However, Thornhill is conscious of the existence of the Aborigines in Australia. He is aware that Aboriginal people inhabit the land ,and “It came to him that this might look an empty place [...] This place was no more empty than a parlour in London, from which the master of the house had just stepped into the bedroom. He might not be seen, but he was there” (2005:82). And accordingly, the indigenous people are not the owners of land.

The founding fathers of Australia do not acknowledge the land as a humanized landscape. Thornhill perceives it as a vacant space and a promised land: “It was a place of promise to him now, the blank page on which a man might write a new life” (Grenville,2005:70). The importance of owning the land is remarked upon the

continuous recurrence of used language: “His own. His own, by virtue of his foot standing on it” (Grenville, 2005:71). Furthermore, Grenville states: “His own air! That tree[...] his! That tussock of grass, each coarse strand haloed by the sunlight: his own! Even the mosquitoes, humming around his ears, belonged to him” (Grenville, 2005:72). The use of possessive pronouns is legitimized by making a comparison between Adam on earth and Thornhill in Australia: “He could have been the only man on earth: William Thornhill, Adam in Paradise, breathing deep of the air of his own new-coined world” (2005:72). He is the only agent of humanity in Australia.

The struggle of the early settlers against the wilds of Australia is acclaimed through the sweat Thornhill puts into clearing and cultivating the land. The reverence of the struggle is palpable in the building of the hut: “Chopping, clearing, building, he was discovering a new William Thornhill, though: a man who could labour against wilderness until it yielded up a dwelling [...] The place was full of the sound of themselves” (Grenville, 2005:85). The construction of the hut is a sign that the place is not vacant. The civilizing mission in Australia is designated by the hut: “Once there was a hut to go into, a person became again a thing separate from the place, moving through an air of their own making” (2005:85). The hut is not a part of the place, and the hut and Thornhill are respectively the sign and the ambassador of civilization. The obligation of civilization is accentuated through a change in the perception of the landscape itself. It is no more the same landscape before the coming of the Thornhills: “The forest took on a different aspect [...] Outside the eye was confused by so many details, every leaf and grass-stalk different but each one the same. [...] the forest

became something that could be looked at part by part and named” (2005:85). Australia before the coming of the Thornhills is not the same after the coming of them.

Kate Grenville evaluates the first years of settlement by rewriting the interactions between settlers and Aboriginal people. Grenville uses the legal fiction of *terra nullius* to position the panorama of settling Australia. However, she persistently undermines it by exposing the discourse of civilization and racial superiority which is employed to justify the hegemony of the white settlers over the land and the people. A sense of Australianness and belonging to Australia is mounting from this discourse. The construction of the legal fiction and the foundational myth of *terra nullius* is assured by the endurance of “*la mission civilisatrice*”¹³. Grenville dismantles the discursive construction of Australia as *terra nullius* when the land is perceptibly populated.

Grenville deposits the first encounter of William with an Aborigine as a momentous meeting. It is about asserting the ownership of the land from different perspectives. The land is considered for the Aborigines as their bequest and birthright on the one hand, and it is a natural prison for the convicts on the other hand. Therefore, the first meeting goes from the bad to the worse due to the absence of communication in establishing a gulf between the two cultures. As Grenville points out:

Be off! [...]

The mouth of the black man began to move itself around sounds. As he spoke he gestured with the spear so it came

¹³ It is a rationale for colonization. It proposes to contribute to the spread of civilization by the westernization of indigenous people.

and went in the darkness [...] In the fluid rush of speech. Thornhill suddenly heard words. *Be off*, the man was shouting. *Be off!* It was his own tone exactly. This was a kind of madness, as if a dog were to bark in English
Be off, be off! (Grenville, 2005:8).

The repudiation of the demand to leave the land is vindicated by the fact that “he had been stripped of everything already: he had only the dirt under his bare feet, his small grip on this unknown place. He had nothing but that, and those helpless sleeping humans” (Grenville, 2005:8).

Thornhill has his family and the chance to create a future for them, and he does not intend “to surrender them to any naked black man” (Grenville 2005:8). Both the Aborigine and William command one another to be off. The preservation of the Aborigines way of life is achieved by the departure of convicts, and the construction of their lives is realized by taming the Aborigines and cultivating the land.

The communication between the early settlers and the Aboriginal people ends by a failure from the first encounter. They do not understand one another. Thornhill heard the sound of words and the meaning of them “evaporated into the air like steam out of a kettle. It was as if a word that had no meaning could not be heard. [...] It was as if a word that had no meaning could not be heard” (Grenville, 2005:112). Grenville highlights the importance of having a common language in achieving understanding between different people. There is a comprehensible illustration of misunderstanding which is stated in the conversation between the old Aborigine and Thornhill. The old Black man makes an effort to explain the importance of the daisy yams, as he points out the tubers as edible, but Thornhill does not understand the orientation of the Black men to food. The Aborigine converses with Thornhill in vain since there is “a

conversation had taken place. There had been an inquiry and an answer. But what inquiry, which answer? They stared at each other, their words between them like a wall” (Grenville,2005:104).The language as a means of communication mislays its power to facilitate communication, to transmit knowledge, if the words are not understood by both sides. The endeavour of undertaking communication between the Aborigine and the convict is a difficult exercise.

The founding fathers of Australia categorized themselves as the “civilized” and Indigenous peoples as the “savages”. From this institutionalized bias, a complex set of images and terminology has set Aboriginal people as an inferior people. The white settlers regard them as savages because they lead completely different lives from that of the convicts. Grenville presents the nomadic aspects of their life as hunters and gatherers:

They wandered about, naked as worms, sheltering under an overhang of rock or a sheet of bark. Their dwellings were no more substantial than those of a butterfly resting on a leaf. They caught their feeds of fish, gathered a few oysters, killed a possum or two, and then moved on (Grenville2005: 51).

They do not live in houses and they do not wear clothes. They roam and kill some animals to afford food for their family and the rest of time is spent with their families. They lived a life of savagery as they “made no fields, and built no houses worth the name, roaming around with no thought for the morrow [...] In all these ways they were nothing but savages” (Grenville,2005:120). They are free from care ,and therefore they “have plenty of time left for sitting by their fires talking and laughing and stroking the chubby limbs of their babies” (2005:120). They devote a lot of time

to their families and rituals. Nevertheless, the white settlers do work hard to be able to secure their families from starving. Thornhill gets up early in the morning and starts “hacking at the weeds around the corn, lugging water, chopping away at the forest that hemmed them in” (Grenville,2005:120). Thus, they neither spare energy nor time for their families.

Furthermore, the spiritual scars on the bodies of Aboriginal people are different from the ones on the convicts. The scars are signs of pain and marks of humiliation on the bodies of convicts while the ones on the Aborigine are different. Grenville points out:

The scars on Scabby Bill’s chest were different. It seemed that the point was not so much the pain as the scars themselves. Unlike the net of crisscross weals on Daniel Ellison’s back, they were carefully drawn. Each scar lined up neat next to its neighbour, a language of skin. It was like the letters Sal had shown him, bold on the white face of the paper (Grenville2005:50-1).

The scars on the body of the indigenous man are elevated to the level of a language through the direct comparison to letters. Although the intricate signs on his body, the humanity of Bill is denied by the white settlers. He is compared to “the ants or the flies, a hazard of the place that had to be dealt with” (Grenville,2005: 51). It is the discourse of racial superiority which constructs the other as inferior and the self as superior: “Men came from all the streets around, cheered to watch this black insect of a man capering before them, a person lower in the order of things even than they were” (2005:51). They are also associated with savagery for example: “The spears of the blacks [...] were like the snakes or the spiders, not something that could be guarded

against” (Grenville,2005:52). The Aborigines are therefore amalgamated into the hostility of the land in order to deny their ownership and their existence.

2-4- The Land Question

In *The Secret River*, the ownership of land in Australia was on behalf of the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. It denies the right of Aboriginal people to claim ownership of the land. The Aborigines do not farm or fence the land like the convicts. Once the white settlers arrived, they decided that Australian land was not used and therefore, it did not belong to the Indigenous people. They started to scuffle for the land of Australia. The Indigenous people did not possess the land like the convict did; the land possessed them. They had a very close bond with the land; it is their home for thousands of centuries.

2-4-1- The Justification of Terra Nullius

Grenville rationalizes *terra nullius* by narrating the beginning of the white nation from Thornhill’s perspective. The story of the founding fathers of Australia starts in London and is exemplified by Thornhill’s life in London and his perpetual struggle against penuriousness. The struggle of Thornhill in London authenticates his psychosomatic energy to possess a place of his own in Australia. The piece of land is the source from which he seeks sustenance and aegis. Grenville accentuates the resoluteness and grit of the early colonists who build an incipient life out of nothing. Grenville sets the longing for home in London and communicates the feeling of having a place like Sal’s Swan Lane. She is cautious to the issues of class and the dispossession of the poor in the early nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Grenville pursues a research for his fight to keep his wife and family in an inequitable British class system that leaves Thornhill with no cull but to commit a crime. Thornhill is portrayed as a victim in a cruel urban society. London is portrayed as a dismal and inequitable place representing nineteenth century Britain. The circumstances of poverty victimize him as a convict to Australia.

The dark side of Thornhill's life in London is the driving force behind his subsequent transportation as a convict to New South Wales and the taking up of land for himself and his family. Therefore, it leads to the ineluctably foreordained dispossession of the Darug people. This is the bleak and punitive gregarious background from which Thornhill endeavours to elude when he takes part in the extirpation of natives who stand in the way of colonization and thus, rationalizing the legal fiction of *terra nullius*.

Grenville includes different layers of trauma in the narrative. Thornhill is portrayed as a victim of the English class system who struggles to make ends meet. Grenville's protagonist is represented as a traumatized victim of circumstances. The sufferings and hardships serves as an account for the trauma of misery and transportation.

The author equivocates by mentioning the hopes of the Thornhills for "owning a stretch of ground. Not simply owning it: naming it after himself!" (Grenville,2005:58), and establishing himself with his family in a cruel and unforgiving surroundings in the penal colony of Australia. Therefore, Grenville supports the account of the innocent convict. It is a declaration and an evidence for the

incorruptibility and the innocence of convicts. Consequently, the image of the ex-convict in modern Australia is an honourable and a praiseworthy one.

The surprise of confronting the Darug people along the Hawkesbury River menaces Thornhill's emerging sense of independence and potential prosperity. The existence of prior landowners and the encounter of the Aborigines puncture the desire for possessing a place of his own. The stumbling upon what is supposed to be an empty land on the one hand, and the Darug people on the other one, signals the Thornhill's dispute with the original inhabitants of the land. Hence, the novel employs imaginatively the distressing story of the founding fathers with the land and the Aborigines which remains entrenched within the Australian history.

Moreover, The legal fiction of *terra nullius* is also rationalized by the lust of Thornhill for land. Thornhill arrives in New South Wales as a convict. In the settler colony, he comes to correlate land ownership with emancipating his life from poverty. In the colony, land is at the settlers disposal so long as no other white man had already laid claim to it.

The first encounter between Thornhill and a piece of land upon the Hawkesbury River urges him to have the possession of it. Thornhill's evolving erotic relationship to the land betokens the obsession he feels at the visual sensitivity of untouched and uninhabited space:

A chaos opened up inside him, a confusion of wanting. No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground. No one had ever spoken of how there could be this teasing sparkle and dance of light among the trees, this calm clean space that invited feet to

enter it. He let himself imagine it: standing on the crest of that slope, looking down over his own place. Thornhill's Point. It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say *mine*, in a way he had never been able to say *mine* of anything at all. He had not known until this minute that it was something he wanted so much (Grenville2005:58-9).

The commotion unfastens inside him a mystification of wanting. The perforating hunger is the stimulus for the desire of owning the land. Thornhill's mind is limpidly driven by the desire to possess. He quenches his thirst for land, and also uplifts himself from the state of poverty. *The Secret River* revolves on a Thornhill's relationship with the land and his desire to take it away from Aboriginal people.

In the same vein, political ideologies of the late eighteenth century furthered imperial ascendance through the puissance of imagination that fortified Eurocentric visions of blank space and empty land. That is to say, it is *terra nullius*. As the result of the spatialization of property and the colonizer's cultivation of land, Thornhill closes his eyes to any indication for the equity of Aboriginal land ownership. Land is exposed before Thornhill's eyes and hands. It is an opportunity for him to possess and prosper; it is also a chance to inscribe himself, his dignity, and his ethnicity.

William and Sal retort in different ways to the environment of New South Wales. William finds it liberating to be thousands of miles away from the rigid class and power structures of England. He visually perceives men just like himself, born into impecuniosities with no edification. Therefore, William wants to embrace the opportunity to discard his past with its sour taste of poverty and inferiority and take his place among the elite in Australia.

However, Sal does not apportion William's exuberance for their incipient land. While she apperceives the opportunities for economic progression, she does not have the same desideratum for gregarious advancement as William. Sal would relish to make enough fortune to return back home and live in relative comfort. She does not aspire to anything more than the life she had as a child. She does not feel the sting of poverty, and therefore she does not possess William's drive to radically transform herself or her life.

William's dream of building a prosperous holding on Thornhill's Point stimulates the first crevice in their relationship. As the result of the preoccupation and the remembrance of living in a constant hunger, Thornhill wants to secure himself and his family by possessing his own land. He wants the puissance from owning the land. In nineteenth century England, land ownership was the reserve of prosperity and potency. The poor in England would ever dream of owning the land. However, the conformist convention suspended in New South Wales regarding the Aborigines, Thornhill is persistent to seize the chance to become a land owner.

The English settlers outwardly saw no reason not to take the land. They took the appearance of interminable and empty spaces, and they indicate that the Aborigines had not put their labour in using and cultivating the land. In the convention of the Protestant hard working attitude, an owner of a piece of land that did not work on the area or build up its assets was not considered to an owner of that land. It is the justification for taking away the land from the hands of Aboriginal people.

On the Hawkesbury River, William witnesses the undeniably truculent clash between the pioneers and the natives. On the way of approaching the river, William experiences two clashing perspectives how to approach the Aborigines in the types of Thomas Blackwood and Smasher Sullivan. Blackwood is an empathetic man, who has figured out how to venerate the Aborigines. He is by all accounts free and innocent from the racial bias of his comrades. Along all these lines, he does not hold the perspective and the privilege of having the white skin which gives them the privilege to take what he wants.

However, Smasher Sullivan represents the colonizers with his abhorrence for the existence of Aboriginal people. He believes that the settlers have the right to claim all of the land, and considers the presence of the Aborigines to be a nuisance that should be dealt with. He takes matters into his own hands by killing the Aborigines who venture on to his homestead. Smasher's approach represents the growing consensus among the colonists and leads to the bloody dispersal and extermination of the Aborigines in the story of founding Australia.

2-4-2- Seeing the Land from Different perspectives

Aboriginal people are connected to the land. The meaning of land is very specific for them. They respect the nature which gives them everything they need. They are owned by the land from the Dreaming time¹⁴. They are completely depended on the land. Nonetheless, the strong connection is damaged by the European settlement. The European colonization tries to separate the Aborigines and the land by taking it away from them. The isolation of the original inhabitants is intruded, and it is perceived from the part of Aboriginal people as an attempt to alienate them from the land.

The Aboriginal rights, their notions of land, and their Spiritual connections to it are repudiated. The lands of the Darug people are taken away from them. Thornhill's perspective recognizes no visible marks of antecedent tenure or cultivation for the part of the Aborigines. He establishes borders and sets boundaries to proclaim his sole right to the land. As Grenville points out that: "There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said this is mine. No house that said, this is our home" (Grenville,2005:52). Therefore, the possession of land requires exclusive signs to achieve it.

¹⁴ According to Aboriginal belief, all life as it is today is part of one vast unchanging network of relationships which can be traced to the great spirit of ancestors in the Dream time. The Dreaming time continues as the "Dreaming" in the spiritual lives of aboriginal people today. The events of the ancient era of creation are enacted in ceremonies and dances. It is the Aboriginal understanding of the world. The Dreamtime is the beginning of knowledge, from which came the laws of existence. (www.aboriginalart.com.au/culture/dreamtime2).

William's ownership of the land is not accomplished by simply settling on it. When William and his two sons go to plant the seeds of corn in the land to claim ownership of it, they discover that the soil they had culled had already been dug up. It is a proof that the land is owned according to western standards. Accordingly, he loses what "the thought of that point of land became a private thing, a bead of warmth in his heart" (Grenville,2005:61). He realizes that the land is owned by the Aborigines, and consequently he loses the peace of his mind.

The heartbreaking reality that the land is owned by Aboriginal people pushes Thornhill to act. The actions which are undertaken by Thornhill are specifically naming, clearing, building a hut, and farming the land. It is an obligation by western convention to claim the land for himself. As Suzanne Falkiner stresses that: "naming is fundamental to the process of humanizing the landscape: possession is signified by naming: for Europeans something that cannot be named cannot be owned" (1992:135). The process of naming generates a sense of belonging, and by doing so; the colonizers familiarize the landscape.

The settling of the land is perceived by the white man as a constructive process like civilizing, cultivating, farming and taming which is achieved by a destructive one. They have no choice but to make something out of the Australian landscape. Thornhill had cut down trees, dispensed bushes, chopped out the tussocks.

The excitement of the clearing of the land and the obligation of imposing order on it through the physical demarcation of the fence is subverted straight away. It is the result of a destructive process: "There was this about it, though: no matter how much a man did in this place, the everlasting forest could not be got rid of, only pushed

back” (Grenville,1992:250). The existence of Aboriginal people lessens the excitement of the taming of the land because the land is not a wasteland, it is already inhabited. They have already tamed the land. Thus, both the success of the Thornhills and the foundational myth of *terra nullius* are reversed. In other words, *terra nullius* is a lie and the story of the successful founding fathers of Australia is in reality a story of robbery with violence. Grenville rewrites and represents the glided picture of the founding fathers of Australia.

The meeting with the indigenous people reveals the intentions of the early settlers to possess the land. They claim a piece of land, and presume that it was theirs. Therefore, they set the borders for it. They realize that the Aborigines exist, but they are primed to deny their existence: “Neither of them ever mentioned the blacks. They had not been seen since the first day. He felt sometimes that they might not exist if no one said the words: the blacks. But they all felt watched” (Grenville,1992: 81). It is a process of constructing the emptiness of Australia and eliminating the existence of the Aborigines. Thus, the founding fathers are free to tolerate their imagination to roam across the landscape of the continent, and to impose on them the cartographical, geographical and categorization upon which Australia is formed and claimed as *terra nullius*. They dehumanize and stereotype the people and the land of Australia.

Thornhill alleges that he belongs and owns the land as the consequence of carving it out of the state of waste. The accentuation is on the conception that ownership is linked to hard work and firm perseverance. The belonging of Thornhill is strengthened by reference to the first night in Australia as Grenville points out:

He remembered how it had been that first night,the
fearsome strangeness of the place. Those cold stars had

become old friends: the Cross, nearly as good as the Pole to steer a course by, the Pointers, and the Frying-pan, which was nothing more than Orion, only upside down. He could tell over the bends of the Hawkesbury the way he had once been able to tell over the bends of the Thames (Grenville2005:151).

However, the possession of land is achieved by the denial of indigenous ownership. Regardless of the evidence of their existence, Thornhill reiterates the discourse of *terra nullius*: “They ain’t never done a hand’s turn, he said. He could feel himself swelling into his own indignation. They got no rights to any of this place. No more than a sparrow” (Grenville,2005:151). In order to secure his sense of ownership, Thornhill refuses to acknowledge the Aborigine’s ownership. Grenville’s description of the land simultaneously articulates both the colonialist discourse and the placing of Aborigines outside the landscape of Australia.

Nevertheless, Thornhill does not belong to New South Wales. He is overpowered by the presence of the Aborigines in the land. Though he possesses the land, he does not belong to it because he knows it was taken by force from its legitimate owners. It is a state of losing oneself.

In *The Secret River*, the Aborigines are owned by the Australian land. They live in concordance with it. The tranquility of Aboriginal people is bulldozed by the white settlers who are engrossed by the ownership of land. The Aborigines are denied of their property and are compelled to live in the reserves. Jack, the Aborigine man, was sufficiently privileged to survive the grisly slaughter. However, he suffers in the limited territory of the reserve. As the result of exterminating the Aborigines and destructing their way of life, Jack goes to Thornhill’s new house to ask for feeding.

Thornhill tries to pacify his penitent personality by giving him sustenance, garments and even the parcel to Jack, but it is not sufficient to pacify himself.

William stands before the consequences of what he has done and how the land owns the Aborigines. He is by all accounts jealous of the way that Jack is the legitimate occupant of the Australian continent. In spite of the fact that Jack lost his companions, relatives and land he is still owned by the land.

2-5- Conclusion

The history of Australia was written to serve the interests of the colonial nations during the pre-colonial, colonial and the post colonial periods. It is the outcome of writing the Australia history from a colonial position of power. In the post colonial period, the hope of changing the “official” historical image of Australia is the cause of overturning the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* is a counter discourse to the conventional model of Australian history for the sake of constructing a new historiography for the Australian continent. The opposition of Grenville is to the conventional history of Australia as a land available for taking. Thus, the novel is an aesthetics attempt for overturning *terra nullius*. It is a bystander for narrating differently the black history of white Australia.

The quest for the legal fiction of *terra nullius* challenges the validity and viability of prior representation and perception of Australia. Seeking the historicity of *terra nullius* is an attempt towards appropriating the bias and prejudiced representation of Australia. The land of Australia was firstly conquered by writings, in the form of anthropological reports and maps. That is why, the legal fiction of *terra nullius* is historicized in the novel. The ostentatious historical narratives of the western anthropological imagination have been historicized in Grenville’s historical narratives. *The Secret River* unveils the dark story of white Australia, and nullifies the Eurocentric myth of Australia as a *terra nullius*. Hence, it is useless to talk about the history of colonizing Australia without referring to the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. The author seeks the historicity of founding the Australian nation by launching a quest for *terra nullius*.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE SHADOW OF TERRA NULLIUS AND THE MAKING OF WHITE AUSTRALIA

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3-1- Introduction

Australian history is not written to identify the Aborigines as the original inhabitants of the continent. Therefore, Kate Grenville makes an attempt for rewriting the foundation of Australian history, and consequently altering the foundation of it. Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* deconstructs the official version of Australian history. The deconstruction of Australian history is initiated and achieved by deconstructing the edifice of Australia as *terra nullius*. The novel is not a simple story which follows the life of Thornhill from a thief in London to a prosperous proprietor in New South Wales after taking up the land on the Hawkesbury River. Instead, it is a story which deconstructs the foundational myth of founding Australia as *terra nullius*.

The founding fathers of Australia recognized the land of Australia as a land belonging to nobody. Therefore, they have an absolute right of ownership over it, and they also have the right to treat the land as their own with no regard to the Aborigines. Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* states that the Australian continent was not a vacant land. Nevertheless, it was inhabited by Aboriginal people. They lived in Australia before the coming of the Thornhills from England. Accordingly, the representation of the founding fathers of Australia as the pioneers of the continent who peacefully colonized the land is falsified. Aboriginal people were overthrown from their land, abused, enslaved, and murdered. Therefore, the construction of Australia as a land without owners exemplifies an official and unjustified distortion of historical reality. The Aborigines were brought to the precipice of extermination by the appropriation of their land, the violent dispossession and massacres against them, and also by the official and the intentional silence of the plight of the original owners of the land.

3-2-Rewriting the Reality of Founding Australia

The Secret River rewrites the reality of founding Australia. It depicts faithfully the colonial story of the land. Grenville handles aesthetically the intricate issues of *terra nullius* by starting from the first contact between the Aborigines and the convicts, and revealing the hidden accounts of taking the land from the original inhabitants. The novel as a work of fiction gives a complete and an acceptable account for founding the Australian nation. Grenville replaces by writing her novel the official version of founding Australia, and sets a beginning for rewriting what is suppressed or ignored in the Australian history.

3-2-1- Beyond the Heroic Story of the Founding Fathers of Australia

Kate Grenville's novel is an artistic addition to the historical record, and an effort for outlining and stressing the blanks of both personal and collective histories. The novel is founded on the life of Grenville's ancestor, Solomon Wiseman. The family story accedes to Grenville from her mother. She integrates a number of permanent Australian epitome which concerns the honorable picture of the founding fathers of Australia. They are the convicts who turn out to be the brave pioneers of Australia:

My mother had told me stories about the first of our family to come to Australia my great-great-great grandfather was a lighterman on the Thames, pinched a load of timber and was transported there for the term of his natural life. Within six years of arriving here, he'd become a free man and 'taken up land' on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. He went on to make buckets of money, built a fine stone house, and called himself "the King of the River" (Grenville,2006:149).

The conventional story of founding Australia is a glorification for the founding fathers. Grenville's protagonist is like her great-great-great grandfather, Wiseman, who was transported from London to New South Wales. It is evidently the shipping from bad to worse. Both Wiseman and Thornhill cope with the Australian landscape and find for themselves jobs as lightermen on the Hawkesbury River. When the dream of returning back home is not possible, they turn out to a state of synchronization with the promising existence in the new colony. It is the land of fulfilling dreams where men are transformed from poor and underprivileged convicts to privileged and rich landowners.

Nonetheless, there is a story within a story. It is the censored story of Aboriginal dispossession and devastation. It is the story upon which the settlement of Australia is legitimized, and the picture of the founding fathers is glided. The suppression of this story from the Australian history supports the account of the peaceful settlement of Australia and the consequent heroic life of the pioneers. It is an attempt to challenge and change the official version of history by exposing and opposing colonial pretext of *terra nullius*.

It is asserted that neither the story of the founding fathers nor the act of the civilizing mission is grounded or legitimized. It is not a surprise because there are achieved upon the violent dispossession and destruction of Aboriginal people. In the process of searching for the secret river of blood in the Australian history, Grenville finds no corroboration in her research neither for extermination nor for devastation of the Aborigines, as she states: "In the hundreds of pages of documents by and about Wiseman, there was absolute silence on the matter of the original inhabitants"

(Grenville, 2006: 95). Accordingly, Grenville recognizes that there is a story beyond the simple story of the founding fathers in Australia. It is suppressed, ignored and replaced for the sake of glorifying the image of convicts.

Consequently, the writing of fictional account of *The Secret River* is a way for revising firstly the authentic version of her family history, and secondly and most importantly for revising the national official version of the Australian nation. Grenville undertakes the action of exposing a skeleton in cupboard i.e. the atrocities which are committed against the Aborigines. In an interview with Ramona Koval, Grenville states that:

Australian history does have a series of secrets in it. There are cupboards in Australian history that we have just drawn a curtain over; we sort of know they're there but we sort of don't want to look at them [...] There are other cupboards that make us uncomfortable, and for 200 years we've just chosen not to look at them too closely. So this is a book, in some way, about those cupboards, it opens a couple of those cupboards and looks into them in a judgement neutral way, but I hope a clear-eyed way, because my feeling is that until we are prepared to look at all those slightly hidden, slightly secret places in our history, we can't actually make much progress into the future. (Koval, 2005)

The Secret River is in opposition to the white washing of the scenes of violence and dispossession. Grenville challenges “the cult of forgetfulness” (Stanner 1969:24). By doing so, she gives another meaning of “what it means to be a white Australian” (Kossew, 2007: 9). It is achieved by voicing the Great Australian Silence. Grenville positions an aesthetic opposition for the dark story of white settlement in Australia and challenges the national memory of founding the nation. The novel is a convenient and inspirational example for the exposure of secrets by an aesthetic talent.

The novel acknowledges the suffering and misery of Aboriginal people. By the presence of William Thornhill in Australia, Grenville launches an investigation for exploring the colonists involvement in acts of violence and dispossession in the course of the first years of settling in Australia. In *Searching for The Secret River*, Grenville points out that: “first person wasn’t going to work. That stately voice didn’t belong to an illiterate Thames lighterman. If the book was to be in the first person, the voice would have to become much rougher, less literary, to be convincing” (Grenville, 2006:164-65). Consequently, the choice of an omnipresent perspective is not in vain; it is for the sake of revealing the ins and outs of the real story of white Australia. Since Grenville points out that “what she had to try to do was to let the reader know what was happening, even though Thornhill sometimes did not” (Koval, 2005). By employing the mode of omnipresent narrator, Grenville is able to re-examine the legal fiction of *terra nullius* and the foundation of settling in Australia. Grenville enlightens and tells an account of dispossession and genocide.

The novel is written from a white perspective for shedding the light on the connivance of colonizers in the dispossession and ruin of Aboriginal people. It is an intimation for the involvement of white settlers in the destruction of Aborigines. It is also a way for raising an awareness concerning the Australian nation, and implying a probable complicity of contemporary Australian citizens in the dispossession of the Aborigines.

In The Secret River, there is an alternative version of history which is in need of explanation and exposure. As a result, Grenville brazen out the claim that Australian founding fathers hold no charge of colonial violence. Thornhill’s story

raises questions about the legitimacy of colonizing and dispossessing the Aborigines.

In the same token, Grenville persists on a cohesive historical version that is permanent in its representation of the reality of founding Australia in order to acknowledge the dark story of founding Australia. She writes a historical knowledge in a different way by empathizing an imaginative understanding of the Australian history. By re-imagining the past, Grenville offers a narrative of settlement that she “was trying to be faithful to the shape of the historical record, and the meaning of all those events that historians had written about. What I was writing wasn’t real, but it was as true as I could make it” (Grenville, 2006:191). She offers a story that subverts the official version of Australian history. It is an imaginative insight for the story of mortification and dispossession of the Aborigines.

Thus, *The Secret River* is a work of fiction which grants an access to an imaginative past that interrupts the account of one accepted and expected history of founding Australia. In doing so, Grenville offers an alternative story of Australia whose account challenges the national account of founding the nation. In this sense, Collins states: “Perhaps the story of Australia is not [...] of hard work forging a nation. Perhaps it is not a story of colonial escape from the British class system to a fairer, more innocent world. Perhaps, instead, it is a tragic, ironic story of limitation” (2006:47). Grenville presents a different narrative of settlement that does not aggrandize the heroic struggle of white pioneers and settlers, but rather, it offers a story that discloses the violence of the Australian frontier by admitting and confessing the horrors of the past.

3-2-2- Authenticating the Story of Founding Australia

Historians reject the practice of fictionalizing history. They refuse the privileged position that Grenville gives for herself to write the Australian history. Clendinnen claims that historians and novelists “used to jog along their adjacent paths reasonably companionably, before Australian novelists forgot their place and attempted to ‘colonize’ history, doing their best to bump historians off the track.” (Clendinnen, 2006:16). Accordingly, Clendinnen and Grenville exemplify two different ways for writing history in which Grenville affirms the power of imaginative understanding, and Clendinnen affirms that it is the right of historian to write history. Historians assert that fiction is recognized as “a hindrance to the understanding of reality rather than as a way of apprehending it” (White, 1978:123). Grenville inquires for the secret of colonial violence and reveals it for the public, and thereby unveiling colonial violence, and voicing the revulsion committed against the Aboriginal people. Therefore, it is impossible for Grenville to place herself in the position of the founding fathers two hundred years ago, and then presents her results as a historical knowledge.

The historical accuracy of history is jeopardized by a work of fiction. As Clendinnen states that, “Thousands of people will read *The Secret River* and get some knowledge of their past. That’s great – as long as it’s kept in the fiction section”(2006:15).

Nevertheless, fiction is entitled to tell the truth about the past when the historical record is insufficient. Therefore, fiction replaces history. It offers an affective account of the past rather than an abstract account of history. The hybrid form of historical fiction exacerbates the challenge in eroding history’s power of writing historical knowledge. It is no longer permissible to present and accept one

version of historical knowledge.

Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* is a story of colonization and dispossession which narrates how the white settlers take the land away from the Aborigines. It is a story about the reaction of the convicts to the fact that Aboriginal people were on the land they wanted for themselves. It is not about the confrontation between Aboriginal people and the convict. Instead, it is about who has the right to own the land. The novel replicates the dispossession and the acquisition of land by challenging the representations of the Australian landscape. Grenville identifies the way of the legal fiction of *terra nullius* which is allowed and legitimated the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

The land is illegally taken away from the Aborigines. It is a crime of stealing because it has already been owned by Aboriginal people. The land is "acquired through an act of stealing" (Behrendt, 2006:65). Grenville states and stresses the concession of the convict which facilitates the act of stealing the land. She argues that this is the case of all the white settlers regardless of whether they were primarily a free settler or not.

However; when Thornhill is in New South Wales, he makes an effort to dispossess the Aborigines, and accordingly to possess a piece of land. He does this intentionally for uplifting himself from the state of poverty. Thornhill accepts the position of the colonizer. Therefore, it is expected that he takes up the land. The deficiency of the signs for cultivating the land that associates it with the depiction of savagery, and release the convict from the acknowledgement of the prior existence of Aboriginal people. Nonetheless, Grenville points out that the excuse for the dispossession of Aboriginal people is not acceptable, and calls attention to the

existence of the original owners who are silenced and excluded from Australian history.

3-3-The Suffering of Aboriginal people

When the convicts inhabit the land, they deprive the Aborigines from their land, their hunting grounds and water resource. In *The Secret River*, the process of dispossessing the Aborigines starts by clash and conflict, and ends by genocide and dispossession. The Convicts start to deprive Aboriginal people of the occupancy of land and property. They entitle themselves with the right to do this as they claim ownership of the land under the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Therefore, it was necessary for them to eliminate the existence of Aboriginal people.

3-3-1- The Seed of Quarrel

The clash and conflict between the Aborigines and the convicts was for land. The British settled on the land, and pushed the Aborigines out of their territory. Although the land was taken away from them, they assumed that it was their land and that they had the right to use it. Clash and conflict were inevitable when it was apparent that the convicts were staying and would prevent Aboriginal people from using their land. The stress set out the way for conflict because neither the Aborigines nor the convicts understood the lifestyle, the languages and traditions of one another.

In the novel, Grenville exposes and explains the root of conflict between the white settlers and Aboriginal people of Australia. The Aborigines intend enthusiastically to share the land with the white settlers if they want. Thomas Blackwood advises William on how to deal with the Aborigines. Blackwood states that: “Ain’t nothing in this world just for the taking, he said [...] A man got to pay a fair price for taking, he said. Matter of give a little, take a little A man got to pay a fair

price for taking. Matter of give a little, take a little” (Grenville,2005:58). Of all the characters in the novel, Blackwood respects and acknowledges the existence of the Aborigines. He respects their claim to the land and lives in harmony with them.

However, the convicts do not intend to co-exist with the Aborigines. They announce and pronounce the declaration of founding Australia on an empty land, and confiscate the rights of Aboriginal people in their land. They start to spoil the environment and take the spoils of the land. The white settlers could effortlessly co-operate and co-exist if they follow the example of Blackwood, but they take the other way around. So, conflict is an anticipated result.

The life of the Aborigines depreciates by the coming of convicts. They were dispossessed of their land and deprived of their traditional culture. Despite the fact that the Aboriginal civilization was the longest continuing one in the history of humanity, the coming of the white settlers had changed their way of life. Before the coming of the white man, the Aborigines lived in every corner of Australia and adjusted with nature. They “choose to live as hunter-gatherers” (Ward, 1992:12). As they “lived a lifestyle based on their Dreamtime beliefs¹⁵” (Hann, 2007: 1), which means that they live harmoniously with the land.

¹⁵ It refers to the beliefs that are largely peculiar to the Australian native people. There are at least four aspects to Dreamtime. The beginning of all things; the life and influence of the ancestors; the way of life and death; and sources of power in life. (www.dreamhawk.com/dream-encyclopedia/australian-aborigine-dream-beliefs).

In *The Secret River*, the white settlers fear from the Aborigines. Therefore, the spark of conflict is the fright from one another. The convicts trepidates from spearing their domestic animals and ignoring their fences. They also frighten that the Aborigines intend to burn the settlers's crops. As they fire the Aborigines randomly and poison them. The settlers take up and fence off the land on which Aboriginal people live for more than fifty thousand uninterrupted years.

In the novel, co-existence is better than conflict for both sides, and conflict has especially catastrophic consequences for the Aborigines. The dispossession of the Aborigines is the seed of conflict. The Australian landscape is poisoned literally and realistically by the settlers and, the trace of conflict is erased in the Australian history. However, the history of Australia is re-written. Grenville exposes the past the atrocities committed against the Aborigines by the convict. In the Australian history, it is known as the 'black armband view of history'¹⁶. Hence, the secret of the white settlers was the genocide of Aboriginal people which took place in the early years of colonization

¹⁶ The term, 'the Black Armband view of history' has come into common usage in recent years. It has been taken up most strongly by those within the Australian community who perceive that the history of Australia is being re-written with undue attention being given to the negative aspects of European settlement, in particular the treatment of Australia's indigenous peoples. Others view these additions as an appropriate and necessary filling in of those parts of Australia's history that have been ignored or minimized in what has been described as 'the Great Australian Silence'. (www.geoview.iag.org.au)

The secret massacres are undeclared in modern Australian times when they are committed by the founding fathers of Australia. They firstly exterminated the Aborigines, and secondly left a prevailing bequest in the Australian history which is about the denial of whether these conflict and massacre ever took place in the first place. It is an attempt for erasing the traces of conflict. In racial conflict, neither the Aborigines nor the convict is the victorious, both sides are merely defeated.

In *The Secret River*, the conflict is also between the white settlers and the land. They redirect the flow of water for their unproductive crops when they irrigate from the banks of the Hawkesbury River. As a result, they destroy the place where the Aborigines once fished. Furthermore, the convicts lose the battle against the climate and the land. Thornhill in the Australian Landscape is like a palm on which he is an ant. He is like a bloodsucker trying to take everything out of value. He is altogether the opposite case of the Aborigines who coexist with the landscape.

When the crops of the white settlers grew, they had to prevent animals like kangaroos and possums from spoiling the crop by eating it. The convicts built up traps, poisoned water and activated hunt for these animals. Nonetheless, the construction of the convict's life was achieved by the destruction of the Aborigines's one. In the novel, the Aborigines lost in the conflict between themselves and the white settlers. Therefore, they were forced to leave the land which was taken up from them. The convicts also seized the Hawkesbury River and the area around it which was the habitual hunting grounds of Aboriginal people.

The transportation of the convicts from London to New South Wales is a stimulus for conflict. The anxiety of change and the complexity of adjustment pave the way for starting the conflict. The colonization of Australia and the transportation of convicts is the driving force behind the coming of Thornhill to Australia. It is also the origin of the encounter between the Aborigines and the convict. Australia “had only one purpose: to be a container for those condemned by His Majesty’s courts” (Grenville, 2005:43). In the novel, Grenville asserts that the initiation of conflict is for changing Australia from being a container of convicts to a container of land owners.

In *The Secret River*, Sal recognizes that the Aborigines are as old as the land itself: “They was¹⁷ here [...] Their grannies and their great grannies. All along’ (Grenville,2005:150) . Nonetheless, it is a reality that the convicts pay no heed to. She wonders: “Why ain’t they here then, he said flatly. If they reckon it’s their place” (ibid). Sal questions the legitimacy of *terra nullius* and the officially recognized existence of the convicts in Australia. However, the convicts assert that the Australian landscape is *terra nullius*, but it is occupied by the Aborigines. The British government empowers the colonizers in their desire of taking up the land by providing them with the legal fiction of *terra nullius*.

The convicts refuse to acknowledge the rights of the Aborigines in land. They pretend ignorance and show arrogance. Even though Thornhill does not ever fully grasp the complexity of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous inhabitants, he does not realize that he cannot ignore the Aborigines presence. “It took him some time to admit to himself that his hundred acres no longer felt quite his own. A small

¹⁷ These are the original words of the novelist. It seems that Grenville regards the natives not as individuals, but as a group.

group of the blacks was always about, even if mostly unseen” (Grenville,2005: 104). At the end of the novel, he finds himself hoping to catch a glimpse of the local Indigenous people to assuage his guilt in their dispersal.

The convicts look for realizing their dreams by owning the land of Australia. What was once a hope of owning of the land had become the despair for doing so in the existence of the Aborigines. Sometimes these dreams become nightmares because of the hardships that are endured through the trials of life. The discrepancy between the hope for owning the land and the reality is the root of conflict. Thornhill dreams for a piece of land, but the land is already owned by Aboriginal people. He expects to find land available for the taking, and therefore he does not accept the existence of the other. He establishes Thornhill’s point, and it was for him “the reward for a man’s labour” (Grenville,2005:24). Thus, land is a reward for his hard work, and Thornhill is paid off for his efforts.

3-3-2- Dispossession and Genocide

The colonization of Australia is a catastrophe for the Aborigines. The original inhabitants of the land were displaced by the force of arms. Grenville acknowledges the Aborigines as the rightful owners of the country which was once took up from them. Kate Grenville’s novel exposes what is meant by the dark story of white Australia from a different perspective in Australian history. She demonstrates the consequence of the encounter between the Aborigines and the convicts. In *The Secret River*, the violent encounter between Aboriginal people and the settlers ends in the massacre of the former. The savage killing of Aboriginals is clearly manifested in the novel. The colonists feared from Aboriginals, and sought to assert their control over

the land they had taken. Thereby, the bloodshed of Aboriginal people became inevitable. The white settlers used violence to clear Aboriginal people out of their traditional lands. One way of doing so was poisoning for clearing out them. The springs of water were laced with poison, and the poisoned food was left so that Aboriginal people would devour it and die.

In *The Secret River*, the act of settling in Australia is intentionally an aggressive act. Grenville points out the schemes to exterminate silently the Aborigines. Captain McCallum “demonstrated on the map how the natives would be penned in against the gully where cliffs rose up sheer. There, His Majesty would dispense justice”(Grenville,2005:137). The land is taken up by the means of arms if necessary. Therefore, Thornhill participates in the massacre for the sake of ensuring and sustaining his existence.

It is by the means of exterminating them¹⁸. The white settlers announce that they have the right to take the land from the Aborigines, “And if they persist in remaining thereon, they are then to be driven away by force of arms by the settlers themselves” (Grenville,2005:140). He stopped and looked around at his audience: “Put plain, you may shoot the buggers any time you get the chance” (ibid). The act of conquest entails the act of exterminating the Aborigines. They act violently in order to

¹⁸ It is distressing to realize what is exceptional about genocide in Australia is not its violence, but its apparent legitimacy and above all its modernity. It was modern technology that made possible the pace and effectiveness of the killing, and modern law that provided the judicial niceties that condoned it. [...] and helped to create the conditions where official silence and legally-sanctioned cover-ups could prevail. (Kociumbas,2004: 98-99)

defend their existence.

In *The Secret River*, Grenville sets the scenes of violence to give a single portion from the history of colonizing Australia. She pictures the violent acts of taking up the land. Thornhill comes across the scene of the murdered and dying Aboriginals who have been poisoned by one of the settlers at Darkey Creek. It is a tragic event in the novel. He discovers several Aboriginals lying dead on the ground. They are palpably poisoned by the flour; Thornhill finds out the existence of a crime. Upon a closer inspection of the crime scene, he realizes that:

It was a boy, still spindly in the arms and thin in the chest, a lad no more than Dick's age, on the ground, his knees drawn up to his belly. From his mouth hung tendrils of the vomit that was all around his head and the lower part of his body was shiny where it had emptied itself. The boy arched his body in a spasm and groaned again. His head jerked, trying to vomit. Flies were crawling on his face and his chest where the vomit was slick.
(Grenville, 2005:144)

The Aboriginal boy dies from Saggity's poison. He considers the dying boy as Dick, his beloved son. Therefore, he does not deny their humanity. William wants to live peacefully and harmoniously with them. However, Thornhill tells the boy that; "Ain't nothing I can do for you, lad. He wanted to turn his back, leave all this [...]" But somehow he could not. He would give the boy some water. He could at least offer that gesture" (2005:144). The feeling of sympathy is not enough because he is not able to tolerate the existence of the Aborigines and correlate them with his longing for claiming the full ownership over the land.

In telling the history of settling Australia, Grenville points out to the dispossession of the land and the bereavement of its original inhabitants. In *The Secret River*, the founding fathers are not the heroic fathers, but they are the source of death for the Aborigines. The appearance of the Thornhills and other settlers brings destruction, poison in the flour, and eliminate the existence of the Aborigines.

The white version of history is used to deny violence and dispossession. The history whose writers write, "There was never any trouble. Never blood spilled, or a gun raised in anger" (Scott,1999: 185). Grenville rewrites the official history of Australia which denies the massacres. Conversely, there is a secret tributary of blood. Grenville dismantles the foundational myth of *terra nullius* and deconstructs the history of settlement. It is not a heroic enterprise rather than a bloody one.

Furthermore, the land keeps a memory of the dark story of white Australia, and preserves her people's memories. Their house "stood up on the rock with the fish carved in it" (Grenville,2005: 163). The engraving of the fish is untroubled and unchanged by the passing of time. It is used by Grenville to imply that the solidified body of silence will not resolve itself. It has become an unyielding part of their lives. In both instances, rocks are portrayed as belonging to the origins of the Indigenous landscape. It stands as historical markers and witnesses. Due to their lasting endurance and impregnability, rocks determine Aboriginal land ownership, and bear witness to the dispossession and genocide of Aboriginal people.

At the point when the family of Aborigines living on Thornhill's Point starts to spoil his harvest of corn, Thornhill is forced to show his first manifestation of coarseness in the novel. William has endeavored to win the power that he could not

even long for having as a young fellow in London. In addition, as a landowner in New South Wales, Thornhill has a firearm with the laws of the British Empire to bolster his entitlement to utilize it. The gunshot that he shoots at Long Jack sends an addictive rush of force.

Sal's emphasis on leaving Thornhill's Point after the Aborigines smolder their corn patch pushes William to a final turning point. At the point when Sal sees the Aborigines camp, she accurately comprehends that the land is their home. While this is not another subject or perception in the novel, the full acknowledgment of that certainty tears away the cover of self-hallucination William had received since he chose to claim Thornhill's Point. William refuses to surrender his fantasy of turning into an individual from the new upper class. In spite of the fact that William is not yet prepared to deliberately remember it, he now realizes that if the Aborigines do not leave voluntarily, he will need to make them leave the land.

The killing of the Aborigines is an unavoidable consequence in the process of settling Australia. The ordinariness and inevitability of racial violence in the process of white settlement is associated with the desire of owning the land. In this way, Grenville accentuates that the massacre of the Aborigines is a certainty. The scene of the massacre incises itself everlastingly in Thornhill's life: "Whichever choice he made, his life would not go on as it had before. The William Thornhill who had woken up that morning would not be the same William Thornhill who went to bed tomorrow night" (Grenville, 2005:157). Grenville stresses the psychological effects of taking part in taking away the land from the Aborigines by killing and poisoning them. The life of Thornhill is not the same after violently taking up the land.

Grenville argues that she had intended “to create a hollow in the book, a space of difference that would be more eloquent than any words I might invent to explain it” (Grenville,2006:199). The hollow represents the dispossession and destruction of the original owners of the land. It is a gesticulation to the horrors of the past and the silence that W.E.H. Stanner described when referring to the forgetting of colonial stories of injustice within Australian’s historical records.

The violence and dispossession of the Aborigines replicates on the actions of the white settlers in asserting their rights of land ownership. However, beyond this time of violence, there is yet another time that is implied for the time of Aboriginal ownership of the land. It is prior the colonial rule. The land which is part and parcel of their life evokes strong emotions and stimulates conflict. Grenville acknowledges the strength of the relationship of the Aborigines to their land and closes avenues for land claims under the doctrine of *terra nullius*. She incites the reader indirectly for re-reading of the heroic story of the founding fathers.

The genocide of the Aborigines is the only way of taking up the land. The white settlers find out an excuse for their crimes against humanity. The dispossession of land is achieved by stating that the Aborigines “were not really people at all” (Kociumbas,2004:96). Grenville justifies the dispossession and extermination of Aboriginal people by denying their humanity. Once and for all, they aim to decimate these worthless and loathsome wretches (Moses,2004: 15). The white settlers used several mechanisms of genocide against Abroginal people.They shoot, poison, rape, destroy the means of existence and change their way of life. The colonization of land is

realized by “the killing of them to the extent that they can barely reproduce themselves and thereby come close to extinction; their classification as vermin by invaders” (Moses, 2004:27).

In *The Secret River*, the massacre of Aborigines stands in front of “the cult of forgetting”. Grenville investigates the homicide of the Aborigines at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely the Waterloo and Myall Creek¹⁹ massacres. She integrates these into the story of “The Secret River of Blood²⁰”, and highlights her trustworthiness to the historical record in order to smudge the lines between historical fact and imagined fiction. By doing so, she authenticates her own representation of the darkest side of Australian history

In *The Secret River*, the land is a testimony for the abomination of Aboriginal people. It is impossible to eradicate all indications of crime against them,

¹⁹ The Waterloo Creek massacre in northern New South Wales took place in 1838. Due to the fact that the perpetrators were brought to trial, Grenville was able to find essential information on the reporting of the killings. Although the historians views differ on the number of Aboriginal fatalities (4-300 fatalities) it was reported that a large group of Aboriginal people had been ambushed by the mounted police as a retaliatory act for the killings of five stockmen. The Myall Creek massacre – close to the Waterloo Creek – has also received some historical coverage. In June during the same year around thirty Aborigines, mostly women and children, were hacked to death and their bodies burned. The settlers responsible for the crime were sentenced to death (Pipic, 2013:181)

²⁰ It is the original title of the novel. It is taken from “the secret river of blood in Australian history,” a phrase used by anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner in his 1968 Boyer Lecture to describe the brutal acts of genocide against Aboriginal people by British colonizers and the successive historical silence about these dishonorable events. Grenville has unequivocally deleted the word “blood” from her title and said that she did not want to give a wrong impression about the book. She wants the focus to be placed on the “secret” and not the “blood”

and the traces of it reside in the land. Notwithstanding, there are traces which cannot be erased, and they contain shocking memory. Thornhill perceives the rough history that is engraved upon the scene. He would look over at where waterway oaks orbited a patch of exposed yellow earth adjacent to the tidal pond, checking where the blaze had smoldered into the night. Something had happened to the earth in that spot so that not even a piece of sod had developed there from that point forward. Nothing was on land. In any case, the clearness itself may recount the story to any individual who had eyes to see. This is in sharp difference to the prior representations of the landscape, where Thornhill is depicted as a conqueror. The space's vacancy holds its own particular memory of the massacre. The past of white settlers with its itchy reality is perused in the land. It is a witness for the distressing experience of seizing the land and taking it up. The killing of Jack remains a memorable indication of the horrible episode in Australian history. His body, which has borne witness to the outrage, conveys the unmistakable characteristics of injury. Grenville utilizes the body as a vehicle to express the existence of colonial violence.

The history of the first meeting between the white settlers and the Aborigines is tainted by extermination and annihilation. *The Secret River* recognizes Aboriginal rights and reviews their grievance. The Aborigines were abused by the white settlers from the beginning of colonizing Australia. At the point when the British started to settle Australia in the nineteenth century, the pioneers continue to remove the Aborigines. The colonization of Australia by the white settlers is escorted by the

killing of the Aborigines. They were firstly diminished, and secondly pushed off from their land. The lust for taking up Aboriginal land increased, and Aboriginal people resisted the stealing of their land.

3-4-The Burden of the Past in the Present

The genocide of the Aborigines was the outcome of policies adopted and implemented by the founding fathers of Australia from the onset of British settlement in 1788. They were suddenly confronted with a hostile and alien force. The Aborigines were forced out of their traditional homes, hunted like wild animals, poisoned or shot, and confined to the harshest and most desolate climes. The effect of British settlement upon these people led to near extermination. Grenville exposes the traumatic experience of founding Australia. It is not for the sake of enlightenment or entertainment, but it is an attempt to reconcile between the Aborigines and the white settlers.

3-4-1- A Nightmare of Violence and a Dream of Tolerance

Grenville explains the meaning of taking up land from the Aborigines in Australia, and associates it with a national shame by exposing the way of taking it away. The land is not legally owned by the Thornhills. It does not belong to them. Therefore, the land is taken up by an act of stealing. Exposing the way of dispossessing the Aborigines is a buckle of the ideal image of the founding fathers. Thus, Grenville traces back the association of hostility and indignity.

Grenville writes about the transgression of the Aborigines rights, and the reprehensible times of yore. She wants to heave over the sense of shame. This sense of being complicit by shame goes hand in hand with empathy for the sake of assuming the liability because complicity cannot go without being acknowledged.

In *The Secret River*, William Thornhill has the choice to serve his sentence in New South Wales instead of undergoing a death sentence in London. Thornhill is as a quarry of poverty in England, and as an executor of the Aborigines in Australia. The two contrasting portrayals of Thornhill serve to offer an admission of guilt for the Aborigines. By presenting the life of Thornhill in London and then in New South Wales, Grenville states that the white settlers have no choice but to commit the crime of exterminating them.

The occurrence of violence in the novel is for the sake of acknowledging Australia's traumatic past. Grenville adds salt to injury by making William realize that Aboriginal people are not that different from him. By doing so, Grenville does not legitimate the existence of white settlers to see Aboriginal people as 'the other' against whom it is unproblematic to decimate them.

The Aboriginal man is described as almost the contrary of the white man, almost as something coming from a man's thoughts. "His skin swallowed the light and made him not quite real, something only imagined" (Grenville, 2005:7). The spear that the black man is carrying with him "was part of him, an extension of the arm" (ibid). The prominence is deposited on the spear when its qualities are described: "It would not go through a man neat as a needle. It would rip its way in. Pulling it out would rip all over again" (2005:8). It is a reminiscent image that announces the irksome occurrence about to take place. The Aboriginal charisma in the novel is surrounded by "Tales came back of men speared, their huts robbed, their fields burned. The Gazette had a handy expression that covered all the things the blacks did, and suggested others: outrages and depredations"(2005:53). Grenville budes violence to the fore when Thornhill ascertains a life for himself on the banks of the Hawkesbury River.

When William meets Smasher Sullivan, another white settler, on his travels along the river, William is directly confronted with the atrocities performed by the white settler. He realizes the price of stealing the land from the Aborigines. Smasher hanged one of the Aborigines and cut off his hands. Grenville points out that: “The burden hanging there was not a scarecrow or a hog, but the body of a black man. Puffy flesh bulged around the rope under his armpits, the head lolled” (2005:57). In his decision not to react against it and not to tell it to his wife, Thornhill transforms himself into a partner in crime by silencing it.

Once Thornhill has taken up the plot of land along the river, the Aboriginal presence is perceptible. Therefore, William recognizes that the land does not belong to him. He legitimates his own act of stealing by stating that “there were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them” (Grenville,2005:52). The Aboriginal attacks broaden, and the spears are set in the space of Thornhill’s hut. They start stealing from his harvest. As he dwells on his scrap of land, he finds out that the land is not without owners, “It took him some time to admit to himself that his hundred acres no longer felt quite his own” (2005:104). He realizes that the Aborigines have lived there long before his existence either in England or in Australia.

Grenville increases the occurrences where atrocities are reported. Firstly, it is a horrifying treatment from the part of Smasher who chains an Aboriginal woman to his hut, “he saw [...] a black woman, cringing against the wall, panting so he could see the teeth gleaming in her pained mouth, and the sores where the chain had chafed, red jewels against her black skin”(Grenville,2005:132). Again William’s retort is an endeavour to avoid involvement by staying flaccid. At this level, Grenville offers an insight for the passivity of Thornhill, “It was bad enough to carry the picture in his

memory. Thinking the thought, saying the words, would make him the same as Smasher [...] He had done nothing to help her. Now the evil of it was part of him” (Grenville,2005:133). Secondly, it is the instance when William discovers that Sagitty is responsible for the poisoning of a complete Indigenous family. It is terrifying when “he saw that the shadows were a man and a woman, and they were dead [...] Beyond the humpy were more bodies: another man, and a woman with a dead child still in the crook of her dead arm” (Grenville,2005:144). In the second instance, Thornhill attempts to divorce his passivity. When he arrives at the turf of crime, there is a boy about to die: “Thornhill knelt beside him. Was surprised at the softness of that black hair. Under it he felt the shape of his skull, the same as his own” (2005:145). Even though Thornhill shows his sympathetic side, he still refuses to talk about the atrocities in an attempt to deny it. As “he knew he would never share with Sal the picture of this boy. That was another thing he was going to lock away in the closed room in his memory, where he could pretend it did not exist” (ibid). William hopes that by denying what he has seen, by locking it away, he will not be involved in the crime.

The white settlers claim to have the right for taking up the land after the official declaration of the government that: “On occasion of any native coming armed [...] to any farm belonging to British subjects [...] And if they persist in remaining thereon, they are then to be driven away by force of arms by the settlers themselves” (Grenville,2005:140). The right is also empowered after the brutal murder of Sagitty by the Aborigines. When Sagitty is found, he is just about to die. In a final attempt to save him, William brings him to Sydney by boat only to witness him die. After the obnoxious incident, the white settlers gather to plan for the reprisal. Therefore, there is

no point of turning back. The white settlers decide that they have to “get them before they get us [...] We can get there tonight [...] Settle the lot of them by breakfast” (Grenville, 2005:155). William tries to make himself invisible, he wishes that he was not there because he knows that at this very moment he will be asked to make a choice: to step away from it all and lose any hope of being able to survive in this rugged country or to participate and fully play the part of the executor. He has no choice because “It was not the voice of any one man but the voice of the group, faceless and powerful” (ibid). As a result, Thornhill gives up his will for the choice of exterminating Aboriginal people. Before he finishes the business of exterminating the Aborigines, it is not possible to escape the feeling of guilt, and he fully acknowledges his involvement in connivance.

Grenville guarantees that the admission of guilt and the traumatic colonial experience of taking up the land are the inauguration for the process of reconciliation²¹. Therefore, Grenville demonstrates the state of Thornhill in the sprain of Aboriginal's life : “And yet their lives, like his, had somehow brought them to this: waiting for the tide to turn, so they could go and do what only the worst of men would do” (2005:156). His life before taking up the land is not his life after doing so. The feeling of guilt for the Aborigine's plight is the title of his life in Australia. In the process of exterminating the Aboriginal community, Thornhill is forced to shoot an

²¹ According to Christine Nicholls, Reconciliation is a policy which intends to bring the nation into contact with the ghosts of its past, restructuring the nation's sense of itself by returning the grim truth of colonization to the story of Australia's being-in-the-world. But it is not surprising that, rather than laying things to rest, these ghosts in fact set a whole range of things into motion: arguments over land, debates over the 'proper' history for Australia, the bother about compensation and saying sorry (2007:75).

Aboriginal man, Whisker Harry. He loses his humanitarian feelings : “Like the old man on his knees he felt he might become something other than a human, something that did not do things in this sticky clearing that could never be undone” (Grenville,2005:160). The life of Thornhill has nurtured in an atmosphere of poverty,he keeps himself and his family alive by stealing. However, his life will change when he has the option to escape the death penalty by sailing to Australia. It is for him the land of opportunities. Therefore, he grosses his pardon and dreams in the possibility of owning a plot of land. When he arrives in Australia, Thornhill is bemused by conforing that the land has already been owned and peopled by the Aborigines. He has no choice but to take it away from its owners. William sails along the Hawkesbury River with Blackwood, he spots a plot of land and falls in love with it, “No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground” (Grenville,2005:58). From this moment on, it is his dream to own this plot of land and he is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure this dream comes true. It is impossible to stop him, “It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say mine, in a way he had never been able to say mine of anything at all [...] It was something he wanted so much” (ibid).

After taking up the land for himself, there is an inveteration for keeping the possession of his plot of land. The potency of his existence in Australia is realized by the protection of his piece of land. Therefore, every action is a calculation for protecting his land. He establishes a thriving business and a magnificent mansion. The Aborigines have not troubled him in the novel, but Grenville does not allocate him to

feel pleased. His dream of taking up the land comes at a cost, and accordingly Thornhill will suffer a lifelong burden of guilt.

The feeling of guilt is dawdled until the end of the story. When Thornhill wants to relax, and he sits on his veranda on a specific bench “the bench he sat on here felt at times like a punishment” (Grenville,2005:173). His desire for the possession of land shades his sense of verdition. The feelings of compunction and remorse come after the dispossession of Aboriginal people. It is not possible to deny what has happened from following his hunger for possessing the land. The encumber of guilt will endure for the rest of his life.

3-4-2- The Way to Reconciliation

The writing of *The Secret River* meets the requirement of the reconciliation movement. It is considered as the first step in reconciliation. Hence, it is “the reclamation and revalidation of rights and obligations enjoyed prior to the discreditable transgression” (Tavuchi,1991:31). The acknowledgement of traumatic past is the beginning of bringing the Aborigines and the white settlers together. Some of the Australian inhabitants might be willing to ignore and deny it. However, the awareness and acceptance of shocking history of founding Australia is a very important step in the reconciliation course, and without which no course of reconciliation is started.

In her memoir *Searching for the Secret River*, Grenville identifies the moment in which the journey of discovering the secret river is instigated. Grenville comes to the conclusion of writing the colonial history of Australia during the Reconciliation Walk, a proletariat event that attract the attention of a quarter of a million participants. Grenville acknowledges that her personal incentive for walking was practically indefinable: “I walked across it to show that I supported the idea of

reconciliation between black and white Australians” (Grenville,2006:10). It was prearranged in insolence to offer an act of contrition to Australia’s Aboriginal peoples. She was walking across Sydney Harbour Bridge along with 200,000 other people to support the scheme of reconciliation between black and white Australians. At the end of the walk, she noticed a group of indigenous people watching, and she exchanged a look with a woman in the group. She realized that her own convict ancestor, Solomon Wiseman, would have had a very different attitude to the Indigenous people. So, she felt compelled to look for her own Wiseman’s part in the process of settlement and to confront the issue. That is why; the research for writing the novel is an attempt from the part of Grenville to orient herself within the notion of reconciliation.

In *Searching for The Secret River*, Grenville points out that the writing process of her novel is initiated by the Reconciliation Walk:

The imagery of our walk across a bridge, suddenly seemed all too easy. We were strolling towards reconciliation—what I had to do was cross the hard way, through the deep water of our history. This is the story of what happened when I took the plunge and went looking for my sliver of that history (2006:13).

The writer explains the necessity of finding out about her ancestor’s relationship with Aboriginal people. She identifies the importance of coming to the conclusion of acknowledging the intricate part of Australian history which has been circumvented and rebuffed.

The future of the Australian nation without revealing the past atrocities against the Aborigines, and after that engaging in reconciliatory affairs of state and people is not subsisted. Therefore, the understanding of the relationship between the past and

the present merits further examination. Thus, Grenville converts the secret river of blood of her family to the secret river of blood in the history of Australia. By doing so, she makes a call firstly for the withdrawn stuffing of her lineage, and secondly for the withdrawn stuffing of Australian history. Grenville highlights the silhouette of the history of violence, oppression, use, and abuse of Aboriginal people, and subsequently the novel is a part of the process of bringing the reticent into the light, and enhancing the process of reconciliation.

Grenville asks the Australians for firstly accepting an apology for reconciliation, and secondly involving in a scheme of nation-building. She claims relevance for her novel beyond the instantaneous fictional content; an implication that emerges both from the insights into the past and the promise to deliver, and from the respective bearing that these insights are not without consequences on the contemporary process of reconciliation.

The journey into Australia's colonial history has often been a grim affair. At the annihilation site, one is lucid and paralyzed by the horror of what occurs to the Aborigines on which the physical and psychosomatic frontiers of settlement that bear a resemblance to grisly warzones of colonial oppression. The moment of acknowledging colonial violence of Australia is a key moment in Australian postcolonial relations. It is the time of expressing intense feelings of ignominy and compunction. As a result, the apology came to be framed as a kind of catharsis.

Grenville initiates an investigation for the secret river of blood by launching a narrative project of re-writing and re-narrating the history of settler invasion and

Aboriginal dispossession. The non-Indigenous fiction functions as a suitable site for the retelling of secrets in its capacity for aesthetic distance and detachment.

Therefore, it is supplement of truth production. Written in the aftermath of Australia's Sorry Movement, the novel makes an effort to embody and employ with the policy reconciliation which "becomes increasingly urgent" (Kossew, 2004:10). The writing of the novel concentrates on voicing the terrifying horrors for the sake of making the first step in the process of reconciliation.

In the cataclysmic and the final scene in the novel, Grenville confesses that Thornhill participates in a planned massacre of the Aboriginals whose land is taken away from them. Progressively, he trespasses his humanity, and ignores the one of the Aborigines when he views them as a threat to his future prosperity and security. The Great Australian Silence hides the dispossession and genocide of Aboriginal people. Stanner highlighted how the Indigenous experience of colonisation and its effects had been increasingly omitted from the Australian historical discourse as developed in the twentieth century. It is "what may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into a habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale" (Stanner, 1969: 189).

Furthermore, Sue Kossew points out that: "It is only by uncovering the painful scars of the past, the text suggests, by voicing the "Great Australian Silence" that a process of reconciliation and shared belonging can begin" (2007:17). It is the construction upon which the Australian nation is built, and the commencement of the

reconciliation is the easy way out for the continuity and the prosperity of the Australian nation.

Grenville points out to the excruciating blemish inflicted from the massacre not only on the psychic of Thornhill and the other settlers, but also on Long Jack and other Aboriginal men who live to tell the tale and the horrors of the massacres. The way of taking the land is memorized. However, it is a secret, and it is circumspectly cosseted by Thornhill. The signs of the episode become effaced not only from the landscape but also from the historical record. Therefore, reconciliation is not possible in the case of keeping the forgotten colonial documents as it is documented.

The traditional way of life and the culture were disrupted, and Aboriginal people become increasingly marginalized. They are about to lose everything, and they were no longer allowed to live as they had done for tens of thousands of years. They are not able to become equal partners with white settlers who had taken their land.

In the aftermath of colonizing Australia, Grenville argues against the harsh treatment of Aboriginal people and calls for recognition of their rights in their land. The necessity to speak up the quandary which is experienced by Aboriginal people has become a mainstream concern for Australians, and many of whom work out to help in the initiation of reconciliation. As the founding fathers of Australia pound the foundation of the nation, Grenville traces back the process of Australian reconciliation in the acts of official remembrance. It is the process by which Grenville struggles to acknowledge the past misdeeds and light the burden of the past in the present. The scuffle of official remembrance and acknowledgement of past injustices is very far

from devoid of value. It is considerably recognized as the first step to reconcile between the Aborigines and the white settlers.

The weight of the decision to recognize the dispossession of Aboriginal people is very essential for the future of the Australian nation. Grenville acknowledges an unfinished business in Australia history. Grenville states that:

My writing of the book was driven by a feeling that there's unfinished business in our history—it's probably why the —history wars go on making headlines [...]. There's no going back and replaying the hand that history dealt us, but we can go back and tease the story out so we can feel what it was like to live through it. Doing that helps to understand the past, and understanding the past is essential to any attempt to disentangle the puzzles of the present (2006:152).

It is an attempt to unstitch the harrowing times in the history of Australia which had been withdrawn. The process of reconciliation is reliant upon the perpetrators confession of their complicity in the plight of Aborigines.

The utterance of sorry²² is the official reimbursement for the Aborigines, and the apology for traumas of the original owners of the land. *The Secret River* is an

²² In the same vein, Eva Mackey points out that; the apology should never be used as a white strategy to re-gain / assure their innocence. The understanding of the apology as a "speech act," she argues, can run the risk of granting apologizers direct forgiveness, while no reparation whatsoever has been offered to the victims. In her own words, How could it be possible that a few words of regret and apology (no matter how earnest, remorseful, or passionate) are expected to erase or begin to address 200 years of colonial violence? How is it that the apologizers emerge, after the ritual, washed clean and innocent, congratulating themselves on their action? How do whites get so much for so little? Is this as good as it gets in a supposedly post-colonial nation? (1999:35).

appeal to all Australians to recognize the history of genocide. The admission of guilt does not identify the profundity of their historical strain. It is meant to corroborate enough of their suffering to enable the progress with less dissent into the future. According to Barta; “the genocide was buried in the national apology and the apology was framed within what has come to be called reconciliation” (2008:210).

The writing of the novel opposes “the black armband view” of writing the Australian history. Grenville points out the problem of the recognizing of historical truth of who did the dispossession and the killing of Aboriginal people. The white settlers took the traditional lands and then smashed the traditional way of life of the owners of the land.

The ignorance about the removal of Aboriginal people is not feigned but factual. Like many Australians, Grenville expresses the feelings of shame and embarrassment by narrating the story of the systematic practice of killing the Aboriginal people. It is a chapter of Australian history that Grenville has taken the trouble to present. Nevertheless, the apology is not enough for compensating the Aborigines. As they are unappreciative to hear the sound of the word “sorry”. It is simply the very first step towards a relationship that bears their appreciation. It is a type of recompense to go along with the admission of guilt. However, the apology is the first step in the right direction that is acknowledged both internationally and nationally. The way to reconciliation in Australia is not the paved way which awaits its passengers. As it is from the beginning of colonizing Australia, the Aborigines are discriminated against. They are stereotyped and dispossessed.

In other words, Grenville's novel is an endeavour to spell out the trauma and anxieties for the sake of national healing, and paving the way for the Australian Reconciliation process. It is essentially after voicing the Great Australian Silence. The anxieties are reinforced the unacknowledged act of Aboriginal dispossession and genocide.

3-5-Conclusion

In *The Secret River*, Grenville exposes the foundation of Australia, and acknowledges the dispossession and genocide of the Aborigines. The recognition of the violent way of taking the land away from the Aborigines is the essence for an understanding of Australian history. Grenville looks for the reality of founding Australia, and points out that the legal fiction of *terra nullius* is used to perpetuate dispossession and hide the massacre of Aboriginal people. Grenville presents the discourse of *terra nullius*, and condemns the sadistic settlement of the land.

The scrutiny for the pretext of *terra nullius* is for the sake of dismantling it. Therefore, it is the refusal of justifying the existence of white settlers on the land. However, Aboriginal people do not need a foundational narrative like *terra nullius* to justify their presence on the land because they belong to the land and it belongs to them. It owns them. The settlement of Australia is presented as a constructive act by the means of *terra nullius*, but Grenville exposes the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* and the colonization of Australia as a destructive one. The legend of *terra nullius* is set up for excluding Aboriginal people from owning and belonging to the land of their forefathers. The acknowledgement of the rights of Aboriginal people and the confession of their dispossession are the outline for reconciliation between the Aborigines and the white settlers. It is the desire of Grenville to make amends for the past atrocities, and to recognize the status of Aboriginal people. The process of reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the white settlers is for finding, undertaking and resolving the aftermath of colonization. Thus, it involves integrity, acknowledgment and honesty, and therefore it helps all Australians to move forward and live together.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The present research work attempts to demonstrate that Australia's Aboriginal people suffered from the mortification and the degradation of their human existence as a result of recognizing Australia as *terra nullius*. Grenville concedes that the oppression of Aboriginal people and the injustices which they suffer from the uncalculated choice of *terra nullius*. The novel acknowledges and admits the responsibility of exterminating and dispossessing the original inhabitants of Australia from the part of the colonizers. It is the beginning of finding a remedy for the injustices of the past. Grenville foresees a future which is founded on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. In other words, the writing of the novel is a precursor for erasing the black spot of *terra nullius*. It directs to reconciliation for the benefit of all Australians.

This dissertation also sought to investigate, acknowledge, and speak of, past barbarities and injustices for the sake of apologizing to those who suffered. The present of Australia is burdened by a story of which it has not previously spoken. Offering an apology to Aboriginal people allows for this history to be acknowledged and spoken of. Therefore, the breaking silence, the accepting responsibility for past injustices and the apologizing are the pillars of reconciliation. The writing of *The Secret River* creates a space for reconciliation, and demands an understanding and a rejection of the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Aboriginal dispossession and extermination is legalized in the name of *terra nullius* and deprived Aboriginal people from being the owners of land. The appliance of *terra nullius* is for ignoring Aboriginal people voices,

perspectives, and experiences. It denies them the right and the ability to challenge the injustices of the past.

The land of Australia was taken by the colonizers on the basis that it was an empty land. The legal fiction of *terra nullius* legitimates and justifies the dispossession of Aboriginal people. As a result, Grenville undertakes the task of writing back to the historical pretext of *terra nullius*. Aboriginal people continue to suffer the impact of *terra nullius*'s mistreatment of them.

Throughout this dissertation, we attempt to voice up, and not silence the dark story of white Australia. It voices it, and attempts to adjust for the story of founding Australia. It is a counter discourse to replace national myth of benign settlement and without hindrance progress. It discomfort the history of colonial invasion and annihilation of Abroginal people by stipulating for land at any cost. The study alters the foundation of taking up the land in Australia by overturning the doctrine of *terra nullius* on which British claims to possess the Australian land. It states that the land belonged to Abroginal people in Australia prior to the establishment of the British Colony of New South Wales in 1788. It outlines a challenge for the western version of history. It also traces the determination of Grenville to present a version of what has happened in the past, and states that the Abrogines were dispossessed of the land. They had resisted the taking up of their land, and died in the defense of their land, and then it was recorded in history books that it is not theirs.

The two hundred years of Australian past history has been dominated and formulated by the colonizers. The official representation of the land of Australia has been written by the colonizers to construct an official version of the Australian history. This official version of history has ensured the subjugation and marginalization of Aboriginal people. Therefore, the real story of founding Australia is achieved by the counter-discourse of Kate Grenville that interrupts the apparent homogeneity of white historiography and foreground previously subjugated and biased version of history. The representation of *terra nullius* has been biased, and stated against Aboriginal existence. As the colonizers claimed sovereignty over this country in 1788 and colonized the land as *terra nullius*, the Aboriginal people were subject to grave injustices and endure the consequences of *terra nullius*. They did not only undergo the loss of their land, but also dilapidation, devastation, and dehumanization.

Aboriginal people in Australia suffered currently from the cruel experience of taking up the land from them. Without overturning the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, the future of Aboriginal people will be miserable. One promising way to lift them up in future times is the move toward reconciliation. Kate Grenville undertakes the task of reconciliation to pursue a desire to acknowledge the past injustices inflicted on indigenous people as a result of *terra nullius*. The value and significance of reconciliation in Australia is clear. It aims to address the past, improve intercultural relations, and redress the extreme disadvantages of Aboriginal people in Australia.

It is a necessity to start to the process of reconciliation because it is a practical contribution for the tenacity of *terra nullius* in Australia. It is for the welfare of all the people of Australia, and of the land itself. The history of the relationships between the colonized and the colonizer in Australia has left shameful stamp in the history of humanity.

The way to overturn *terra nullius* is the way to reconcile with one another, to deal with their violent past of Australia, and also to build new relationships which are ideally based on mutual respect between the inhabitants of the land. It is accepted that reconciliation is based on restoring the right and spotting the duty. Therefore, it is an essential pillar in preventing the future outbreaks of hostility, and also in erasing the ancient times and traces of brutality in Australian history.

For further research, it is a need to put an end for contemporary representations of Aboriginal people. The stereotypes are inherited through time, still living within the present times in Australia. Nonetheless, it is not possible to give the description of authenticity in the way of representing Aboriginal people. The representations of Aboriginal people that can be found in Australian history are very far from being the ambassador of the original people of Australia. Hence, the aim is not to get a confirmable, or a veritable version of Australian history, but to create an other that when it is faced with the white settlers; it aids to legitimize their presence in the land. By framing the Aboriginal people as ridiculous, spiritual, and primordial, the colonizers rejoice themselves and their moral and cultural superiority in Australia.

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APPENDICES

Appendix N ° 1

Kate Grenville's Biography:

Kate Grenville was born in Sydney on 14 October, 1950. Grenville was educated at Cremorne Girls High School and the University of Sydney. After earning a bachelor's degree in literature (1972) from the University of Sydney, she worked at Film Australia for five years before spending time in London and Paris. After meeting several American writers in Paris, Grenville decided to pursue an M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Grenville has stated that the writing program at the University of Colorado encouraged her to adopt a more adventurous writing style. After moving to Colorado, Grenville began teaching, and with *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers* (1990), she began publishing books about her craft. Upon her return to Australia, Grenville published her first literary work in 1984, a collection of short stories which is entitled *The Bearded Ladies*. Her first novel, *Lillian's Story* is garnered by critical attention. *The Idea of Perfection* (1999) won the Orange Prize in 1999. Grenville has published nine novels, several of which, like *The Secret River*, explore Australia's past. In 2006, Grenville captured the Commonwealth Writers Prize and earned a place on the short list of Man Booker Prize nominees with *The Secret River*. Two of her novels, *Lillian's Story* (1985) and *Dreamhouse* (1986), have been made into films. Grenville has also written several books about the creative writing process which are used in creative writing programs at universities in Australia and abroad.

In 2006, she was awarded a Doctorate of Creative Arts by the University of Technology, Sydney. In 2010, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of New South Wales. She is a highly sought after public speaker and gives several lectures a year. Grenville is actively involved in

the Indigenous Literacy Project, which advocates for greater literacy in English within isolated indigenous communities. It aims to increase their exposure to written English. The program is also designed to improve the indigenous people socio-economic status in Australia society.

Appendix N ° 2

A Summary of *The Secret River* (2005):

The Secret River(2005) follows William Thornhill from his childhood in the slums of London in the late 1700s to New South Wales in the early 1800s. In his youth Thornhill works hard as a lighterman and marries his childhood sweetheart Sal. To support his young family he resorts to stealing timber, a crime for which he is convicted and sentenced to transportation. Once in New South Wales, Thornhill, with Sal's help, gains a pardon and claims a hundred acres of land on the Hawkesbury River where he struggles to provide for and protect his family. Initially Thornhill intends to work as a waterman and earn enough money to return home to London. But Thornhill falls in love with the land and wants to stay, although Sal finds colonial life hard and still dreams of England. In learning to cope with the unfamiliar colonial landscape, the Thornhills also become entangled in conflicts between settlers and the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area.

However, the land is already owned. It is been part of the territory of the Darug people for perhaps forty thousand years. They have not left fences or roads or houses, but they live on that land and use it, just as surely as Thornhill plans to do. They are not going to hand over their land without a fight. The spears of Abroginal people may be primitive weapons, but settlers know that they can kill a man as surely as a ball of lead from a musket. As he realizes all this, Thornhill faces an impossible choice. When the Darug object to being driven off, those settlers have no compunction in shooting or poisoning them. Eventually the conflicts reach the point where the settlers band together in an attempt to exterminate the Aboriginal people. This attempt is successful

enough to allow the settlers to continue to inhabit the land without the fear of
Aboriginals, and Thornhill becomes a wealthy landowner. He builds a large house and
furnishes it with comforts from home to console Sal about the fact that their lives are
so connected to New South Wales that they will never return to England.