CONNECTIONS THAT CREATED A SENSE OF BELONGING TO
TRANSCEND TIME: AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE
INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

By:

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Before Australia was colonized by the British in 1770, over 700,000 Indigenous people had been living on the land since time immemorial. Due to their longevity on the land, the Indigenous people formed deep relationships with their land, their tribe’s traditions, and their families. Once the colonists arrived, they forced these Indigenous people off of their land, massacred them, and stole their children from them as a means of conquering the entire continent. The mistreatment of the Indigenous peoples suggests that their connections to their land, traditions, and family may wither, yet the literature over time suggests otherwise. This project explores the relationships of the Indigenous people with their land, tradition, and family within a variety of literature from the mid-1900’s to the early 2000s.
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# Table of Contents

Background Information………………………………………………………………………….5

Literature Review……………………………………………………………………………14

The Endurance of Connection…………………………………………………………………26

   *Rabbit-Proof Fence*………………………………………………………………………29

   *We Are Going*……………………………………………………………………………38

   *Ruby Moonlight*…………………………………………………………………………50

   *My Place*…………………………………………………………………………………55

   *Steam Pigs*…………………………………………………………………………………65

Endless Belonging……………………………………………………………………………76

Works Cited…………………………………………………………………………………79
Background Information

Before exploring the literature by female Indigenous Australian writers following British colonization, it is important to first explain some of the pertinent background information about Australia as a continent, the cultures and practices that existed in Australia before the colonists arrived, and the history of Australia’s colonization.

Australia - the Continent

Australia is an island continent that lies between the Indian and Pacific oceans; its formal name is the Commonwealth of Australia. The continent is divided into six states and two mainland territories. The six states of Australia are New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia. New South Wales is Australia’s oldest state and is also the most heavily populated. The state is situated on the south-eastern side of Australia. The capital city of New South Wales is Sydney, which is the most densely populated city in Australia, with approximately five million residents. Queensland is Australia’s second largest state. Its capital city is Brisbane, and it is situated on the north-eastern side of the continent. South Australia lies on the continent’s southern-most coastline and borders all four of the other mainland states; the state’s capital is Adelaide. Tasmania, an island state, is the smallest of the Australian states and is separated from the continent by the Bass Strait. The capital city of Tasmania is Hobart, and the state is mostly covered with wilderness. Victoria is located on the furthest south-eastern point of mainland Australia and is bordered by New South Wales and South Australia; its capital city is Melbourne, which is the second most populated city in Australia. The final state is Western Australia, which is located on the continent’s western coast and is bordered by the Northern Territory and Southern Australia. It is Australia’s largest state and its capital city is Perth, the fourth most populated city in Australia. Western Australia
also contains many of the different environments found in Australia, from its coastline to deserts (“Cities, States, and Territories”).

Along with Australia’s six states, the continent contains two mainland territories: the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. The Northern Territory is located on Australia’s northernmost coastline and is bordered by Western Australia and Queensland. Its capital is Alice Springs, which is positioned near the continent’s geographical center. The Australian Capital Territory is home to Australia’s national capital, Canberra. The territory is located 290 miles south of Sydney and holds Australia’s Parliament House. Australia also has eight additional territories: the Ashmore and Cartier Islands, the Australian Antarctic Territory, Christmas Island, Cocos Island, Coral Sea Island, the Jervis Bay Territory, Norfolk Island and Territory of Heart Island, and the McDonald Islands (“Cities, States, and Territories”).

In terms of government, Australia is a representative democracy as well as a constitutional monarchy. Australia’s current head of state is Queen Elizabeth II. The Commonwealth of Australia formed on January 1st, 1901, when “six partly self-governing British colonies united to become the states of a nation” (“Cities, States, and Territories”). Australia has a federal system of government, meaning that it divides its power between the central government and the separate states. The Australian Parliament is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as Queen Elizabeth II. The six states under the Australian government still maintain the power to create their own laws related to topics not covered by the Commonwealth government.

In terms of climate and habitat, Australia is nearly twenty percent desert, but is also home to tropical rainforests, cool-temperature forests, and snow-covered mountains. Australia has a landmass of twelve million square kilometers, and nearly ninety-one percent of the continent
contains native vegetation. This includes Australia’s deserts, which are often inhabited by a native plant called saltbush. The human population of Australia is focused mostly around the coasts, due to very limited arable land throughout the country. Australia has a population of around twenty-four million, and is extremely diverse. According to the Australian government’s website: “almost one in four Australian residents were born outside of Australia and many more are first or second generation Australians, the children and grandchildren of recently arrived migrants and refugees” (“How Government Works”).
The Indigenous Peoples of Australia

The first inhabitants of Australia, the Indigenous peoples, arrived on the continent between 50,000 and 60,000 years ago, and it is assumed that the group migrated from somewhere in Asia while Australia was still connected by a land bridge to New Guinea (Hughes 8). After arriving in Australia, the original settlers eventually split into groups forming tribes or populations that “have been continuously present in those same regions ever since” (Cooper). The oldest Indigenous campsites on record were established over 22,000 years ago, and by around 20,000 BC the Indigenous people had set up campsites from South Australia to Sydney Harbor (Hughes 9). At the time of colonization, there were nearly 300,000 Indigenous people in Australia and nearly 500 tribes, each with its own distinct cultural heritage (9). Due to the longevity of different Indigenous tribes’ settlement on specific areas of land, it follows that they were extremely territorial. They had a strong connection with the land that derived from hunting customs, rituals, performances, songs, and sacred sites that were passed down through generations by means of oral stories (9). These tribes were “linked together by a common religion, language and by an intricate web of family relationships;” however, they had no chief, nor any form of leader (9). Despite the vast number of Indigenous tribes in Australia, members of different tribes were able to communicate with one another if they happened to meet. The Indigenous tribes tended to have patterns of movements within their territories, but this semi-nomadic lifestyle meant that they would meet up with other tribes occasionally. Thus members of Indigenous tribes often spoke their own language as well as the languages of their surrounding tribes in order to communicate with one another (10).

Although it would be impossible to explain the differences in culture for each specific Indigenous tribe, there are some generalizations that are important to identify. The Indigenous peoples held the upmost respect for their tribes’ elders due to their tribal wisdom and ability to
pass down the heritage and history of the tribe from one generation to the next (17). The Indigenous peoples were primarily a hunter/gatherer culture, and the women often helped the men hunt. For example, if a man were hunting for fish, a woman would hook the fish and then pull it close enough for the man to spear it (10). Furthermore, the Indigenous peoples had a highly developed hunter/gatherer culture and created a variety of hunting tools used for specific situations. They created fishing lines and spears for hunting fish, and also used boomerangs and axes for hunting on land (12). To the British colonists, the Indigenous people did not seem technologically advanced; however, the Indigenous peoples had a deep understanding of the land, plants, and animals that were native to Australia that the colonists could not hope to match. The Indigenous peoples understood what vegetation would grow and how to conceal it from the hot sun. They were excellent trackers and knew all of the details about the animals that they hunted (such as habits, migratory patterns, and feeding) (12). Essentially, it is important to understand that the Indigenous peoples had a distinct way of living that, although quite different from what the colonists would view as refined, met all of their needs and allowed them to survive on their land since time immemorial.\footnote{The phrase “time immemorial” refers to a point in time so far in the past that there is no memory nor written record of it, and thus refers to the longevity of the time that the Indigenous people have been on their land.}
History of the Colonization of Australia

Although the first colonists did not arrive in Australia until 1788, the first interactions between the Indigenous people and Europeans began in 1606 when Captain Willem Janszoon voyaged to Australia to chart the coastline. In between 1606 and 1770 it is thought that around fifty-four merchant ships traveled to Australia and interacted with Indigenous people. In 1770, English Lieutenant James Cook claimed the east coast of Australia for King George III and named it “New South Wales.” Shortly after Cook claimed Eastern Australia for King George III, the First Fleet of ships arrived in Botany Bay, Australia. Upon their arrival in 1788, it was determined that Botany Bay was inhospitable and would not allow for a sustainable colony, and the fleet moved on to Camp Cove (modern-day Sydney harbour). The Captain of the fleet, Governor Arthur Phillip, was under instruction to set up the first colony in Australia, but the British were severely underprepared for the task ahead of them. Australian soil was unlike the soil in Great Britain, and thus the new colony relied on supplies from the development of farms large distances away from the colony, and occasionally traded good with Indigenous Australians (“History”).

Having established where and when the colonization of Australia began, it is important to understand who the colonists were, and how they ended up in Australia. The majority of the Australian colonists did not move there by choice, but rather, were convicts who were forcibly transported. For some, their options were to be transported to Australia, or face death in England, meaning that the convicts who were sent to Australia were considered the worst members of English society. As such, Australia functioned as a large jail which “was settled to defend English property from . . . the marauder within. English lawmakers wished not only to get rid of the ‘criminal class’ but if possible to forget about it” (Hughes 1). Throughout the period of
colonization, England “shipped more than 160,000 men, women, and children in bondage to
Australia” (Hughes 2). Not all of these people were convicts, since the convicts were
occasionally allowed to bring their families along, but the majority were sent by forced exile.
The Stolen Generation

The term “The Stolen Generation” refers to the group of Indigenous (or in most cases partially Indigenous) Australian children who were taken away from their families starting in 1907 and moved to settlements, schools, or missions (“Sorry Day”). The first attempts to separate Indigenous children from their families began in 1837 when the British Select Committee began to examine the treatment of the Indigenous people of Australia. The Committee determined that the best course of action was to appoint “Protectors of the Aborigines” to Australia (“History”). Following this appointment of the Protectors of the Aborigines, the Aborigines Protection Act “established an Aborigines Protection Board to manage the interests of the Aborigines” (“History”). The document was essentially meant to regulate the lives of the Indigenous people. It placed parameters on where Indigenous people could “live, work, what kinds of jobs they could do, who they could associate with, and who they could marry” (“History”). The act also gave the Governor of a particular area the power to remove a child from their family for the purpose of sending the child to a “reformatory” school (“History”).

By 1937, an Assimilation policy was adopted that required States to begin “assimilating” Indigenous Australians who were of mixed decent (“Sorry Day”). The government “targeted Indigenous children for removal from their families” in order to instill them with European values and train them to serve white settlers (“Bringing Them Home” 22). It became apparent that the Indigenous family ties were so strong that children of mixed decent would not willingly choose to identify as white or European, thus the government felt it needed a way to distance these mixed children from their families (24). These children were taken to schools or settlements far away from their original homes. They were separated from their tribes and
culture, were not allowed to speak their own language, and had limited (if any) communication with their families (“Sorry Day”). The greatest number of Indigenous children were stolen from their families in the 1950s and 1960s, with the Australian government often claiming that the children were abused as an excuse to remove them (“Bringing Them Home” 28). Although it is impossible to state the exact number of Indigenous children that were stolen from their families with any degree of accuracy, the conclusion was made based off of survey data that “between one in three and one in ten [Indigenous] children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970” (31).
Literature Review

The following literature review contains a short summary of the articles, criticism, and interviews that are pertinent to each text that will be examined throughout the following project. The review will be broken-up based on the larger written work each article is associated with, and the review will follow the order in which the texts will be examined within the project. It is important to note that the literature review does not contain a summary of every piece written about each of the larger works, but rather focuses on those most closely aligned with the purpose of the project.

*Rabbit-ProofFence*  
Doris Pilkington

To date, much of the literature about *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is in regards to the movie based on Pilkington’s narrative. Although the movie and book are similar, it is important to address that the majority of the literature chooses to focus on the cinematography of the film, rather than on analysis of the book. One of the reasons for the lack of literature about *Rabbit-Proof Fence* appears to be the inability to classify the work. Specifically, as Sue Ryan-Fazilleau points out in her article, “Re-visions of Two Aboriginal Histories: *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Australian Rules,*” *Rabbit-Proof Fence* does not seem to fall into a typical category of literature (such as novels or biographies) due to the fact that the story comes from the oral tradition. Instead, Ryan-Fazilleau reiterates a point made by Australian writer Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo) that stories like *Rabbit-Proof Fence* are “life stories.” That is, biographies or autobiographies written by Indigenous authors to help them “come to terms with the trauma of oppression” (105). Anne Brewster also addresses this “life writing” in her article “Aboriginal Life-Writing and Globilization: Doris Pilkington’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*;” however, she chooses to focus on how Pilkington’s work can
be situated in a political context. Brewster discusses the importance of Pilkington beginning her work with a hypothetical look at the distant past when colonization had just begun. Brewster argues that these flashbacks are “an important political and imaginative act providing Indigenous people with a sense of autonomy and solidarity, and enabling their survival amidst a continuing legacy of dispossession and loss” (52). Thus, Brewster engages with the idea that the beginning of Pilkington’s work, which introduces readers to what life before colonization was like for the Indigenous peoples, is equally important to the Indigenous tradition and culture seen through the story of Molly, Gracie, and Daisy being stolen from their families.

Many of the film-related articles about *Rabbit-Proof Fence* take a critical view of the adaptation of the story into a film. Ryan-Fazilleau’s article critically discusses the ways in which the film version of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* alters much of Pilkington’s work, insofar as the film eliminates much of the happiness that can also be seen in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* by choosing to only focus on the negatives, and also eliminates Pilkington’s critical assessment of both white Australians and Indigenous Australians (107). As Ryan-Fazilleau puts it: “while Pilkington[‘s] revision of Molly’s story is restrained, and her condemnation of white colonization clear but qualified with shades of grey, Noyce’s is emotional and all in shades of black and white” (107).

Conversely, many critics found the film adaptation of Pilkington’s work to succeed in bringing attention to the Stolen Generation and the importance of understanding the lives of the children who were stolen. John Martin, author of the article “Rabbit-Proof Fence,” believes that the film “focused squarely on the essential issue – the trauma of the separation of children from their parents and the yearning of the children to get back to their parents and live once again in their home community” (531). In his article, Martin also discusses the importance that Molly, Gracie, and Daisy’s attachment to land has to their survival. He believes that this attachment is
seen clearly both within Pilkington’s work and within the film adaptation. Although his article pertains to the movie, Martin hits a key point of the following project, that being that the young girls’ connections to their land and family drive their attempts to return to their home country.

Overall, the literature about Pilkington’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence* has mostly focused on the movie adaptation of her work, with mixed reviews from multiple critics. Some believe that the film manages to masterfully present the horrors of the Stolen Generation, while others believe that the film strays too far from Pilkington’s intent for the story. Those who engage with the text praise Pilkington for choosing to use a life story to recount her relative’s journey after they were stolen, while also acknowledging her ability to critically look at both white and Indigenous Australians.

*We Are Going*  
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Oodgeroo Noonuccal is often considered to be the mother of Indigenous creative works, and as such there has been a multitude of research about both the author and her poetry. James Devaney, who wrote the forward for Oodgeroo’s first published work, *We Are Going*, articulates his belief that the collection effortlessly combines a discussion of the past (specifically murders, slavery, and crime in general) with a positive nod towards the future. He states that the main concern throughout her works seems to be acknowledging the continuing racism faced by Indigenous people, and that her primary audience for the collection appears to be “native Old Australians” (Devaney). William Wilde, Joy Hooton, and Barry Andrews, the authors of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, also briefly examine the broad meaning behind Oodgeroo’s first publication, focusing mainly on the title of her collection. They assert that the title, *We Are Going*, “is not . . . an indication of her resignation to the loss of Aboriginal identity” (712). They go on to state that throughout all of Oodgeroo’s poetry collections readers can see
her dismay at white intolerance, and uses her poetry as an “assertion of pride in her Aboriginal identity” (713).

Since Oodgeroo’s poetry tends to assertive and straightforward, a majority of the literature about the author is not analysis of the meaning of her works, but rather analysis of who her intended audience was, what effect she hoped her writing would have, and who she worked alongside. In her article, “Why Weren’t We Listening,” Jennifer Jones discusses Oodgeroo’s poetry in the context of white Australians overlooking the hatred their ancestors created towards the Indigenous people. In the article, Jones addresses the fact that even during the 1990s the Wilderness Society in Australia “refused to acknowledge Aboriginal rights in wilderness areas” (44). She claims that much of Oodgeroo’s writing reflects the continued lack of rights afforded to Indigenous Australians, specifically regarding land. Jones’ main argument revolves around the idea that “the question non-indigenous Australians need to ask is not ‘why weren’t we told?’ but ‘why weren’t we listening?” (44). Jones argues that Oodgeroo’s first work was so powerful that it “end[ed] a period of white deafness, by bringing a powerful Aboriginal voice into earshot of large, mainstream audiences both in Australia and over-seas” (44). Although Devaney seemed convinced that Oodgeroo was writing mainly for her fellow Indigenous Australians, Jones believes that Oodgeroo kept a far broader audience in mind. The poet’s works often include calls of action both to white and Indigenous Australians, which suggests that Oodgeroo was speaking to both audiences. Furthermore, Jones sees Oodgeroo’s work as bringing an end to white Australian’s ability to ignore the injustices faced by Indigenous Australians. While the remainder of Jones’ article contains little analysis of We Are Going, it is important insofar as it allows readers to understand that Oodgeroo’s rage toward the treatment of her people did not mean that
she was not open to forming relationships with white Australians. Rather, what she promotes in her poetry is a society where both cultures can live equally (49).

One author who examines the meaning behind Oodgeroo’s poetry is Bob Hodge, who authored the article: “Poetry and Politics in Oodgeroo: Transcending the Difference.” In his article, Hodge discusses that while Indigenous people are not the majority in Australian society, Oodgeroo has been able to reach an astounding number of people through her poetry. Hodge goes on to defend Oodgeroo’s simplistic style of writing against other critics. He argues that many of her critics “situate her writing in the Fringe which is the situation of all Aboriginal writing, and in the context of the Fringe the judgements of the centre are complicated and inverted, even when they seem to be invited, as was the case with Oodgeroo’s early work” (2). Essentially, Hodge argues that when the centre (the white Australians or other white literary critics) examine Oodgeroo’s work, they tend to compare it to their own works. However, as Hodge goes on to discuss, Oodgeroo’s work cannot be placed in a box with other poetry, as her work stems from a different culture and should be considered within the context that it was written. Hodge looks specifically at Oodgeroo’s choice to adopt her own Indigenous name, rather than go by her “white” name, Katherine Walker. Hodge believes that Oodgeroo’s choice to change her name from Katherine Walker to Oodgeroo Noonuccal shows that she had a deep understanding of the hypocrisy of calling for Indigenous people to strongly claim their rights and culture while going by a white name. Finally, Hodge dissects a few of Oodgeroo’s pieces, most notably “White Man, Dark Man,” as a means of arguing that Oodgeroo’s poetry was simultaneously beautiful with a powerful message.

The literature that has been written about Oodgeroo presents an extensive look at her active political work, her call to action for Indigenous people, and her ability to look past her
rage toward the injustice against Indigenous people to form friendships with white authors and poets. Although many critics are quick to write off her poetry as being too simple, others argue that she is able to flawlessly present her argument in a straightforward fashion. Thus, Oodgeroo’s first poetry collection appears to have served its purpose of starting the debate of Indigenous rights and the importance of Indigenous literature.

*Ruby Moonlight*                
Ali Cobby Eckermann

To date, there are no analytical essays about Eckermann’s *Ruby Moonlight*, since it was recently published in 2012; however, there are a multitude of interviews and articles about Eckermann’s background and influences for her work, as well as many reviews of her poetry collection. Eckermann is the most recently published author examined in the project, as her first poetry collection, *Little Bit, Long Time*, was first published in 2009. Michael Brennan, who wrote Poetry International’s article about Eckermann, describes her poetry as “a strong and vital emotive voice within Australian literature.” When Brennan asked Eckermann about the intended audience of her pieces, she stated that “I guess I write for both my families . . . mostly though for the Aboriginal audience . . . Poetry has also been the tool to assist my adopted family to understand some of the changes that occurred deep within myself” (Brennan). Eckermann was adopted by the Eckermann family as a child, and thus spent much of her life dealing with balancing her adopted family and discovering her Indigenous heritage. Through her discovery of her Indigenous heritage, Eckermann was able to find the inspiration for her writing, which Brennan argues is “courageous in its ability to look at present and past brutalities directly and remain compassionate.”
Two other notable articles containing Eckermann’s writing and inspiration are “The Northern Territory Emergency Response: Why Australia Will Not Recover from the Intervention,” and “The Place of Terrorism in Australia,” both of which are written by Eckermann herself. The first piece is an essay that sheds light on the current injustices still being faced by Indigenous Australians. In 2007, the Northern Territory Response Act was passed by the Australian government based on the claim that child sexual abuse cases were on the rise in Indigenous communities. Because of this act, soldiers were sent into many Indigenous towns. Eckermann recalls the fear of her fellow Indigenous women that their children would be stolen from them, based on the long-standing fear created by the Stolen Generations. New rules were put in place in Indigenous communities regarding alcohol restrictions, the shortening of land tenures, and the extreme reduction in tourism. In response to the Northern Territory Response Act, Eckermann wrote a poem entitled “Intervention Pay Back,” which she includes in her essay. The speaker in the poem is an Indigenous man who finds his entire life uprooted by the assumption by the Australian government that Indigenous Australians are incapable of caring for their children appropriately. Through the poetry and her essay, Eckermann expresses her outrage toward the unwarranted embarrassment that Indigenous people are forced to feel for their culture. By weaving her poetry in with her essay, Eckermann is able to make a similar argument about modern Australia that she makes in *Ruby Moonlight*: the unfair and racist treatment that Indigenous Australians are subjected to must end, but understand that the elimination of this vile treatment will not dispose of the memories of the destruction of Indigenous culture and society (“Northern Territory”).

Eckermann’s other piece, “The Place of Terrorism in Australia,” presents a similar story of Indigenous Australian mistreatment; however, this article looks at events that occurred as
recently as 2016. In the article she reflects on witnessing video footage of fourteen year-old Indigenous boys being beaten by white prison guards, and on the moment when white Australia finally awoke to the realization of the institutional racism that continues to exist in Australia. Following her recount of the video footage, Eckermann discusses why she chooses to research and write about massacres that happened long before her time. While she notes that it is always important to look toward the future, Eckermann also points out that modern Indigenous Australians and white Australians should not forget to look back at the past, as many old injustices continue to occur. Eckermann ends her piece with a simple plea: “I want to live my culture, my way of life within my country.” Her words are meant to resonate with both white and Indigenous readers, as she asks only for the ability for her people to live their lives without fear.

Although Eckermann’s piece, *Ruby Moonlight*, does not yet have any critical analysis written about it, interviews with the author and her own essays allow for a deeper understanding of her topic choice, and why she continues to look to the past as inspiration for her current works. Eckermann has been outspoken about her desires for Indigenous peoples, and her poetry collection reflects her desire to shed light on the continued racism and injustice faced by the Indigenous peoples.

*My Place*  
Sally Morgan

Since Sally Morgan’s memoir, *My Place*, has sold over 500,000 copies, and as a result the body of literature surrounding her work is far greater than many of the other works discussed in this project. Morgan has also been harshly criticized because her book became so popular. Anne Brewster points out in her article, “Aboriginality in Sally Morgan’s *My Place*,” Morgan has often been questioned about the “authenticity of her Aboriginality” due to the “instant and enormous success of the book” (14). Literary scholars Nene Gare, Patricia Crawford, Arlene
Elder, and Martin Renes all express similar sentiments in their pieces; however, all defend Morgan’s representation of her discovery of her Indigenous heritage and her attempts to reconnect with her extended family.

Brewster’s article offers the most relevant analysis of Morgan’s work for this project, as she discusses the authenticity in Morgan’s memoir with specific focus on the concept of belonging. She believes that the concept of belonging is seen throughout the autobiography in the sense of both belonging to a specific place and belonging with a specific group of people (25). She argues that Morgan’s attempts to understand her grandmother’s past shows a connection with the past, and that by connecting with the past she is simultaneously rediscovering it (20). In this way, Brewster also argues that Morgan rejects the assimilation of Indigenous people into white Australian society. Nene Gare and Patricia Crawford’s article, “Sally Morgan’s My Place: Two Views,” also addresses the concept of belonging as it is felt by the Indigenous people. They state that, through Morgan’s memoir, “the tie that binds the black man to his land is almost tangible” (80). They believe that Morgan’s work clearly articulates the connections that Indigenous people have to their land, to the point where that connection seems tangible to readers. They close their article by stating that Morgan’s memoir shows a “continued and continuing relationship in which the humanity of Aboriginal people [is] denied” (83).

Martin Renes makes a similar argument to Brewster in his article, “Sally Morgan: Aboriginal Identity Retrieved and Performed Within and Without My Place.” Like Brewster, Renes begins his article by discussing many of the criticisms Morgan has received about her authenticity in her writing. Then, diverging from Brewster, he examines Morgan’s work in the context of her writing style, which he claims proves that she does not succumb to the pressures of white Australian society. Renes believes that Morgan’s memoir depicts the growth process
that many Indigenous people undergo, and uses the “voices of the past” through oral stories to do so (84). Arlene Elder also chooses to dissect the way in which Morgan wrote her autobiography. Elder praises Morgan’s ability to use the silence of her relatives (specifically her grandmother) to show a piece of Indigenous tradition (17). Sally’s grandmother, alongside many Indigenous people, faced such tragedies throughout their lives due to colonization that silence became a part of Indigenous culture. Elder believes that Morgan’s grandmother’s refusal to share all of her secrets is an extremely accurate representation of this silence, and thus shows the authenticity of the narrative.

Essentially, the vast volume of literature that has been written about Morgan’s My Place includes much criticism about the author’s authenticity, but is also comprised of a multitude of defenses for Morgan’s work. Many authors discuss the sense of belonging she creates in her memoir through her self-discovery, and her success in portraying Indigenous culture and traditions.

Steam Pigs

Melissa Lucashenko

As one of the three living authors (along with Eckermann and Morgan), Melissa Lucashenko has been extremely outspoken about her opinions on being Indigenous and Indigenous connections to their land. In an interview, Lucashenko said that she began writing partially due to the fact that there were not many mainstream Indigenous Australian authors at the time. She also takes a hard stance on the idea that being Indigenous does not just mean having Indigenous blood, but rather going through the journey of accepting one’s heritage and the past that comes with being Indigenous (“Q&A”). Lucashenko’s attachment to the idea of a journey to accept one’s Indigeneity is clearly seen throughout Steam Pigs. Although Steam Pigs has not received as much international recognition as My Place, there is still a variety of
literature that addresses Indigenous belonging in the novel, as well as Lucashenko’s engagement with Indigenous people in contemporary Australia.

Three authors who engage with Lucashenko’s work are Nathanael O’Reilly, Margaret Henderson, and Tomoko Ichitani. Each of the three authors explores Lucashenko’s discussion of contemporary Indigenous people living in suburbs, as well as the feminist tones throughout the novel. In his article, “Exploring Indigenous Identity in Suburbia: Melissa Lucashenko’s Steam Pigs,” O’Reilly unpacks the concept of Indigenous identity in suburbia and the intricate issue of Sue’s heightened understanding of her Indigenous heritage due to her abusive relationship with her boyfriend and her newfound friendship with two white women. O’Reilly argues that Sue’s salvation by white women “suggest[s] that the solutions to Indigenous problems are to be provided by university-educated non-Indigenous (usually white) persons” (1), and sees such a suggestion as problematic due to the harm caused to the Indigenous people by the white colonists and their descendants. O’Reilly also points out the irony of Sue “embracing” her Indigenous roots and her independence through her relationship with Kerry (her white friend) rather than Roger (her Indigenous boyfriend). Alongside his discussion of the extent to which Sue’s empowerment comes from white people rather than Indigenous people, O’Reilly also discusses Indigenous identity and belonging in his article, thus making it pertinent to the following project. He explores Sue’s decision to claim Yuggera country as her place of belonging, despite not knowing the extent of her Indigenous roots, and discusses the ways in which this choice by Sue may be justified.

Similarly to O’Reilly, Ichitani uses her article, “Negotiating Subjectivity: Indigenous Feminist Praxis and the Politics of Aboriginality in Alexis Wright’s Plains of Promise and Melissa Lucashenko’s Steam Pigs,” to discuss the feminism and lack thereof seen in
Lucashenko’s novel. Ichitani frames her piece by arguing that Indigenous women face vastly different struggles than white women due to stereotyping, and claims that Indigenous women often question “white feminism” (189). Within *Steam Pigs*, Ichitani points to the oppression of Sue by not only white men and women, but Indigenous men as well, as a clear example of Indigenous women’s struggles for rights. Ichitani argues that Kerry uses a broader form of feminism than “white feminism” when she works with Sue, which she believes is an important way to engage with the idea of feminism for Indigenous people. Thus, Ichitani believes that Lucashenko has created an example of a way in which feminism can be applied on a broader spectrum to engage women who face multiple forms of oppression.

Finally, Henderson’s article, “Subdivisions of Suburbia: the Politics of Place in Melissa Lucashenko’s *Steam Pigs* and Amanda Lohrey’s *Camille’s Bread,*” looks at the importance of place within *Steam Pigs*, specifically with regards to Sue’s movement from the suburbs to the city. Furthermore, Henderson looks at the ways in which Sue has a sense of belonging in Eagleby while simultaneously being an outsider because of her Indigenous roots. Essentially, Henderson examines the importance of place in Sue’s journey to find a true home (75). Overall, the three authors discussed here unpack the feminism within *Steam Pigs* as well as the ways in which Sue interacts with the other characters in the novel and its setting in order to deepen her understanding of her Indigenous heritage.
The Endurance of Connection

Before the colonization of Australia, the Indigenous peoples had deep connections with their land, traditions, and families that stemmed from the longevity of time spent on a specific land and the enduring traditions of each individual tribe. The cataclysmic experience of the Indigenous peoples following the colonization of Australia ostensibly suggests that these connections would wither, or disappear entirely. The Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their land, their children were stolen, and they were treated as sub-humans by the white settlers and their descendants. As the settlers began to enforce their “civilized” way of life, the Indigenous tribes were broken up, and Indigenous people became hesitant to align themselves with their heritage for fear of the treatment they would receive. However, despite both deliberate and inadvertent attempts by the settlers and their descendants to destroy the Indigenous peoples’ connections to their land and way of life, the literature from Indigenous authors throughout time suggests that these connections remained steadfast. Furthermore, the sustained strength of these connections over time allows for a maintained sense of belonging for the Indigenous people that is also undeniably present in the written works of each generation of Indigenous writers.

Due to the oral tradition of Indigenous culture, there are no creative written works from Indigenous Australians before 1929 when David Unapion published *Native Legends* (Wilde, Hooton, and Andrews 700). Despite the lack of creative written work by Indigenous Australians during the first one-hundred and fifty years of colonization, many Indigenous authors have used the stories of their families to detail the important aspects of the traditions and culture at that time in their works. Looking back at life for Indigenous people in the early days of colonization

\[2\text{ Although the creative works started with David Unapion, there were many other written works from Indigenous people long before Native Legends, such as letters, political pamphlets, etc.}\]
allows authors to juxtapose pre-colonial life with post-colonial life, while also showing the endurance of the connection to the three pillars (connection to land, tradition, and family) of the Indigenous people’s way of life through their character’s interactions with their land and one another. Even authors who choose to write about the present rather than the past continue to stress the importance of the Indigenous people’s connection to land, tradition, and family in their writing.

The choice made by Indigenous female authors to write about Indigenous connections to land, tradition, and family also emphasizes the deep connection that each individual author feels to their culture and heritage. Continuing to write about these connections serves the dual purpose of spreading Indigenous culture while also educating the settlers’ descendants on Indigenous culture and the torment that the Indigenous people faced following colonization. Because there were no creative written works by Indigenous authors before 1929, the first writings about Indigenous culture were by white settlers. In these writings, the Indigenous people were portrayed as uncivilized, lacking culture, and sub-human. According to Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a professor of Indigenous studies, the settlers assumed that the Indigenous people were not attached to their land since they did not “own” it in the way that the settlers viewed ownership. This premise that Australia “belonged to no one informed the relationship between Indigenous people and the nation state from its very inception and continues to do so” (Moreton-Robinson 33). The inaccurate representation of Indigenous culture, alongside the harrowing mistreatment of the Indigenous people and Indigenous authors’ own connections to land, tradition, and family became catalysts in the decision by Indigenous authors to voice the injustices faced by their people and to illustrate the inextinguishable nature of their culture despite the nearly insurmountable obstacles it faced.
Throughout this project I will examine one written narrative that began as an oral story, two poetry collections, and two novels, which span the timeline of approximately 1826 to the present day. I will first engage with the significance of each author’s choice of subject matter, and then dissect how the connection to land, tradition, and family drives the protagonists in the retelling of an oral story and the novels and is entwined within the poetry collections. The literature will be examined chronologically by timeline, rather than publication date, in order to best track these connections over time. Although it will become clear that the connections have adapted with the changing times, they will prove to be unmistakably present within each piece. Finally, I will examine how the timeless nature of these connections creates an unwavering sense of belonging for the Indigenous people that transcends colonization and all of the tragedies that it encompassed.
Rabbit Proof Fence – An Incredible Journey Home

Doris Pilkington, the author of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, was born in 1937 as Nugi Garima at the Balfour Downs Station northwest of Jigalong in Western Australia. As a child, Pilkington, along with her mother, Molly, and younger sister, Annabelle, was taken to the Moore River Native Settlement. These settlements taught young Indigenous children to hate their heritage, and trained them to be laborers for the descendants of white settlers. This settlement was the same one that Pilkington’s mother was taken to as a child and had escaped. Molly once again escaped the settlement, this time with Annabelle, but was forced to leave young Doris behind (Pilkington 132). Pilkington was later transferred to the Morelands Native Mission, and it was not until the 1960s that she was able to reconnect with her birth parents. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is Pilkington’s recount of her mother’s first escape from the Moore River Native Settlement after being stolen from her family at the age of fourteen. Pilkington’s choice to tell her mother’s incredible escape story demonstrates the responsibility felt by Indigenous authors to share the stories of their ancestors in order to shed light on the injustices that they faced. Furthermore, as Sue Ryan-Fazellieau points out, Pilkington’s choice to write down an oral story demonstrates a type of writing more closely aligned with Indigenous traditions that the typical Western-style novel. These “life writings” are biographies or autobiographies written by Indigenous authors to help them “come to terms with the trauma of oppression” (105). By writing down her mother’s story, Pilkington is able to pass on her family’s history, much in the same way the Indigenous tribes orally passed down their own histories.

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3 The rabbit-proof fence was a barrier fence built by the white settlers to keep rabbits and other pests out of Western Australia’s pastoral areas.
Although her mother’s story takes place in 1930, Pilkington begins *Rabbit-Proof Fence* by illustrating life in Australia during the early days of colonization, around 1826. In her article, “Aboriginal Life-Writing and Globalization: Doris Pilkington’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*,” Anne Brewster argues that Pilkington’s choice to begin her work with a hypothetical glance into the past is “an important political and imaginative act providing Indigenous people with a sense of autonomy and solidarity, and enabling their survival amidst a continuing legacy of dispossession and loss.” Thus, the beginning of Pilkington’s story serves to juxtapose Indigenous culture before and after the settlers fully uprooted the Indigenous people’s way of life, while the story as a whole demonstrates the maintained connection between the Indigenous people and their land, traditions, and families (the three pillars) both before and during the time of the Stolen Generations.

Pilkington begins her story by depicting the life of Indigenous tribal leader, Kundilla, and uses his life as an example of the strong connection that the Indigenous people had to the three pillars before colonization. Each morning, Kundilla wakes before his family to perform his morning rituals, meditate, and plan the future activities for his tribe (Pilkington 1). His knowledge of the land is immediately evident as he notes that “there was no shortage of trees and shrubs around . . . [which] is why th[e] spot was chosen for the winter camp” (1). Kundilla’s choice to have his family make camp in this spot was not unintentional, as the settlers liked to assume the Indigenous people’s lives were, but instead was well thought out in order to provide the best shelter for his family during the winter months. The winter camp serves a traditional purpose for Kundilla’s tribe as well. It is the location of their annual scrub firing. The scrub firing “was a special time on the seasonal calendar when [Kundilla’s] family clans from far around would gather on their territory to set fire to areas of dense undergrowth to flush out any
game, such as kangaroos and wallabies, that might be sheltering there” (2). Not only does the scrub firing demonstrate the Indigenous tribes’ understanding of the habits of the animals they hunt, it depicts an annual ritual where family clans return to one area of land to participate in a tradition of their culture together. Although the Indigenous people were nomadic, their travels were always in the same area of land that the tribe had lived on since time immemorial and their traditions (such as an annual scrub firing) brought them back to the same areas each year to be with family.

As Kundilla reflects on the ritual, Pilkington describes the members of the tribe who are still sleeping and emphasizes the importance of family to the Indigenous people. Kundilla’s two teenaged sons are still living with their direct family, as they are not yet old enough to start their own and are not considered to be men yet by the tribe. Kundilla’s three older sons have married and started families of their own, but still return to the winter camp each year for the scrub firing ritual. Apart from Kundilla’s direct family, sixty other members of the tribe have returned to this spot to take part in the tribe’s annual ritual. Though direct families often split up for parts of the year, it is clear that they returned to this specific area of land each year as a custom. The family gathering was not just for one day, though, as Kundilla notes that the group will soon migrate together to the mouth of a river for another annual trip (3). Thus these annual gatherings served the purpose of hunting and fulfilling ancient rituals, as well as enjoying time with the full extended family.

Just as connections to land, traditions, and family were the three pillars of Kundilla’s life, so too are these connections the driving elements of Molly, Daisy, and Gracie’s story. In the case
of the three young girls, these connections drove them to make a treacherous journey back to their country and family after they were stolen.

Molly, Gracie, and Daisy were half-caste Indigenous girls living with their families at the Jigalong depot. Jigalong was chosen by tribe elders as the “base-camp for holding their sacred and secret ceremonies. Sacred objects were brought in from their hiding places in the desert and buried there, thus signifying a permanent ‘sitting down place’” (35). Although the tribe elders made the decision to become less nomadic, they still took care to bring all of the sacred objects from their culture with them to this new area in order to continue the traditions of their ancestors. Jigalong was viewed by many members of the Indigenous tribes as a safe area where they did not have to fear being attacked by white men, and it had access to food and water that was becoming scarce in the desert (34). However, living in Jigalong also posed a threat to half-caste children like Molly, Gracie, and Daisy. White Australians commonly believed that half-caste children were intellectually superior to full Indigenous children and thus should be taken from their families to be trained as servants or laborers. The Australian government put policies in place in the early 1900s to create training camps for half-caste children, and station masters were tasked with noting the births of half-caste children so that they could eventually be moved to the training camps (“Sorry Day”). Indigenous families were well-aware of the danger that their children faced if they were half-caste and often gave birth in the bush to avoid their children being taken from them at the hospital. Molly, Gracie, and Daisy’s family took extreme measures to protect them, and their grandfather often took them into the bush to rub ground charcoal on their skin so that they would not be noticeably whiter than the other Indigenous

\[^4\] Country here means the specific area of land that the girls grew up on, not Australia as a whole.
\[^5\] Half-caste refers to children who had one Aboriginal parent and one white parent. Typically the mother of the children would be Aboriginal, and the father would be white.
\[^6\] The Jigalong depot is in Western Australia and is adjacent to the rabbit-proof fence.
children in Jigalong. Despite their family’s attempts to protect them, the three girls were eventually discovered and taken to the Moore River Settlement Native Camp to be trained.

Once at the camp, the girls quickly realized that life on the Moore River Settlement meant giving up all of their traditions. After a disorienting first day on the Moore River Settlement, Molly, Gracie, and Daisy speak to each other in their native language, and are immediately warned against using it again: “you girls can’t talk blackfulla language in here you know,’ came the warning from the other side of the dorm. ‘You gotta forget it and talk English all the time’” (72). Using only English was a part of the training Indigenous children received at these settlements, but the girls are dismayed by the fact that they will no longer be able to use their home language of Wangka even to one another. Furthermore, Molly (the oldest of the three girls) sees the Moore River Settlement as a jail, which directly opposes the freedom that she had when she lived in Jigalong. It is the lack of freedom that solidifies her decision that she and her sisters must escape: “[The dorm] looked more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Indigenous children . . . Molly listened to the slide of the bolt and the rattle of the padlock, then silence. It was in that moment that this free-spirited girl knew she and her sisters must escape from this place” (72-74). Once Molly realizes that living on the Moore River Settlement will mean giving up her culture and her freedom, she can see no other option but to return to her homeland and her family.

An important element of Molly, Gracie, and Daisy’s escape was their connection to the land. Not only was this connection a driving force in their decision to run away, it also proved to be an asset during their journey home. The trek back to Jigalong from the Moore River Settlement was over one thousand miles of land that the young girls were not familiar with. As Pilkington points out, “it would be difficult for an adult without the most thorough knowledge of
bushcraft not to become disoriented and lost in a strange part of the country where the landscape is filled with thick undergrowth” (82). However, Molly (the oldest of the three girls):

had no fear, because the wilderness was her kin. She had learned and developed bushcraft skills and survival techniques … She memorized the direction in which they had travelled … Also, she had caught a glimpse of the sun when it appeared from behind the rain clouds at various intervals … that enabled her to determine that she was moving in the right direction. (82)

Essentially, Molly’s Indigenous heritage provided her such a deep connection with and knowledge of the land that, even in a country that was not her own, she was able to quickly navigate through the bush during the escape and determine the correct direction to travel.

Molly’s connection with the land not only allowed the girls to escape from the Moore River Settlement, it allowed them to find food and shelter and avoid capture throughout their journey home. The first night after their escape, Molly advises the girls to dig a hole in the ground next to rabbit burrows in order to hide from white trackers. Due to the rain patterns, Molly has the girls dig the burrow to face east to avoid the rains coming from the west, ensuring she and her sisters will stay dry during the night (87). On a separate occasion, in another different region the girls utilize thick heath bushes to create a shelter (101). Although they are traveling through areas of Australia that they have never explored, the girls use their strong understanding of the land to protect themselves from the natural elements that might hinder their escape. Throughout their journey, the three young girls also demonstrate the ability to strategically hunt, despite having no weapons to use. In order to catch rabbits, the girls block three of the four rabbit burrows they find, forcing the rabbits out of the remaining burrow. Once the rabbits are in the open, the girls are able to run them down and catch them (94). Thus, even
with extremely limited resources, the girls are able to use their connection to the land to not only protect themselves at night, but also to sustain themselves during their long journey home.

Regardless of the girls’ connection to the land, their capture seemed inevitable since they were so far from home, yet none of the policemen or professional trackers found any trails left by the young girls. News of the girls’ escape from the Moore River Settlement quickly spread across Australia, and articles were posted in newspapers informing the public that they should be on the lookout for the girls. The police assembled search parties to find the girls, and called on farmers to send notice if they spotted the girls, but none of the search parties were able to find any leads. Furthermore, the girls were careful to light their fires in holes so that they would not be seen, and to cover the ashes before they left (104-106). Just as the young girls knew that they could use animal tracks to catch food, so too did they understand that trackers would be able to follow any trail they left behind to catch them. Thus they were extremely careful to cover any evidence that they might leave behind that could lead the trackers to them. As news passed along to officers located along the fence, professional trackers were called in to try and locate the girls. Police brought search parties and private motor cars to search both sides of the fence, but to no avail. The young girls were more knowledgeable about and more connected to the land than any of the men that tried to track them down, and were able to use this connection to remain untraceable throughout their entire journey.

The girls’ strong desire to return to their family eventually led them to separate, and caused Gracie’s downfall. Gracie was the most reluctant of the three girls to escape, and quickly wanted to head back to the settlement for the fear that they would not make it back to Jigalong; however, her desire to return home with her sisters outweighs her desire for food, water, and comfort along the journey. As they near the end of their journey home, Gracie gets word from a
woman at a station that her mother is at Wiluna\(^7\), and that she could take the train to see her. She promptly refuses to walk any further, since it is more important to her to return to her mother than to Jigalong. Although Molly and Daisy beg Gracie to come with them for her safety, they eventually accept that Wiluna is closer than Jigalong, and that going to Wiluna would mean that Gracie could be with her mother again (116). When Gracie arrives in Wiluna, however, her mother is not there. While Gracie is waiting in Wiluna with the hopes that she will be reconnected with her mother, she is spotted by a police tracker and captured. She is taken back to the Moore River Settlement and never returned to Jigalong (132). Gracie was willing to risk capture and separation from the other two girls in order to return to her mother because her connection to her family was so strong. This deep desire to return to her mother ultimately lead to her capture, but was nonetheless a driving force in her story. Molly and Daisy continued on their incredible journey and “overcame their fears and proved that they could survive. It took a strong will and purpose, and they had both” (120). Their connection to their homeland, traditions, and family gave them the drive to travel over one thousand miles to return to Jigalong and overcome each obstacle that they faced. Without the drive that their love of their family and culture provided them, and their deep understanding of the land, the journey home would have been entirely impossible.

Although the circumstances faced by Kundilla in 1826 and those faced by Molly, Gracie, and Daisy in 1930 are vastly different based on the time period in which they occurred, the connection to the land, tradition, and family are undeniably similar. Kundilla and the girls all have a strong understanding of and attachment to their specific area of land. Kundilla’s tribe comes back to the same area each year to perform traditional ceremonies, while the girls’

\(^7\) Wiluna is an area southeast of Jigalong.
connection to the land allows them to safely travel across it to return to Jigalong. Furthermore, the girls are unwilling to give up their traditional language when they are moved to the Moore River Settlement and find themselves longing for the free lifestyle that they had back in Jigalong. Just as Kundilla’s family’s connection leads them back to the same area each year to spend time together and participate in annual traditions, so too do the young girls feel such a strong connection to their family that they are willing to risk death to return to them. Pilkington’s depiction of these themes throughout the large timeline of her book suggests that these connections neither change, nor wither despite the hardships faced by the Indigenous people as the settlers continued to further impose themselves on the land.
We Are Going – The Defiance of Mistreatment

Katherine Walker, also known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, was born a member of the Noonuccal tribe and was the first female Indigenous author to publish a collection of poetry (Wilde, Hooton, and Andrews 712). She received limited primary education as a child and began working in domestic service at the age of thirteen. Throughout her adult life she campaigned against the discrimination faced by the Aborigines, and used her poetry to promote Indigenous pride (712). She also changed her name from Katherine Walker to Oodgeroo Noonuccal as a way of avoiding succumbing to the white/western style of thinking (Hodge 4). Her poetry is considered to be a starting point of the renaissance period for Indigenous literature since it prompted other Indigenous people to start writing about their culture and influenced all of the Indigenous literature that followed. Oodgeroo entitled her poetry collection We Are Going not to signify the loss of Indigenous identity, but rather to serve as a warning to white settlers that “the Aboriginal people will not go out of existence; the whites will” (712-713). Jennifer Jones, author of the article “Why Weren’t we Listening,” argues that Oodgeroo’s first poetry collection also “[ends] a period of white deafness, by bringing a powerful Aboriginal voice into earshot of large, mainstream audiences” (44). Thus, Oodgeroo uses defiance in the face of loss as the overarching theme in her collection to illustrate the permanence of the Indigenous people’s connection to their land, tradition, and families to a wide audience.

It is important to first note that not all of Oodgeroo’s poems openly depict these lasting connections. Her poem “Then and Now” instead describes the difference between the connections that the Indigenous people felt before and after the settlers took over their land:

In my dreams I hear my tribe

Laughing as they hunt and swim,
And I see no more my tribe of old
As I walk alone in the teeming town. (1-6)

Here, Oodgeroo paints the picture of her tribe before the settlers imposed their way of life upon the Indigenous people. It was a free life spent out in nature where the tribe could connect with the land and one another. Once the settlers arrived, they brought their “modern” way of life and seemingly shattered the intense connection that the Indigenous people had to their land. The settlers forced tribes to disband, meaning that many Indigenous people no longer saw the other members of their tribes, or even their direct family members. They were no longer allowed to live on the land that their families had been on since time immemorial, and instead were forced to live on the outskirts of the settler’s societies, where they were considered to be sub-human. The speaker in the poem thus can only dream about his or her old life of peace and happiness.

Throughout “Then and Now,” Oodgeroo also emphasizes the point that the settlers have forced the Indigenous people to assimilate to their “modern” way of life:

No more playabout, no more old ways.
Children of nature we were then

Now I am civilized and work in the white way. (22)

Here, Oodgeroo uses irony to discuss the prejudices faced by the Indigenous people, who were considered to be the inferior race. Not only were the Indigenous people separated from their tribes and forced to leave their land, they were also coerced into living by the new settler’s standards. The settlers viewed their culture and language as superior to that of the Indigenous people, and used this mentality as a justification for treating the Indigenous people as lesser
humans. As a result, Indigenous traditions were destroyed, Indigenous children were stolen from their homes to be taught English and Christianity, and the remaining Indigenous people were forced to work for their white oppressors as a means of survival. In the midst of all of this loss, the Indigenous peoples’ deep connections to their way of life seem to be shattered by their forced assimilation.

Another of Oodgeroo’s poems, “The Dispossessed,” similarly suggests that the connection between the Indigenous people and their land, traditions, and families dwindled following colonization. She begins the poem by again noting the distinct difference between life for the Indigenous people before and during colonization:

Peace was yours, Australian man, with tribal laws you made,
    Till white Colonials stole your peace with rape and murder raid;
    They shot and poisoned and enslaved until, a scattered few,
    Only a remnant now remain, and the heart dies in you. (1-4)

The picture Oodgeroo paints of the lives of Indigenous people following colonization is exceedingly bleak. The Indigenous people were at peace when they made their own laws for their tribes, but the settlers destroyed that peace and the culture, and killed the Indigenous people in order to take over their land. The death of their tribe’s members and traditions was so devastating to the Indigenous people that their hearts seem to die from the ache of the loss. Oodgeroo also comments on the loss of homeland faced by the Indigenous people as equally tragic: “The white man claimed your hunting grounds and you could not remain / . . . Your tribes are broken vagrants now wherever whites abide” (5-7). Not only were the Indigenous tribes broken apart by the settlers, but the lands that they had lived and hunted on since time immemorial were stolen from them. They were forced to move lands and disband tribes as a
means of survival, or face death. In short, “The Dispossessed” reiterates the sentiments of “Then and Now”: that the Indigenous people’s way of life was damaged beyond repair by colonization.

While many of Oodgeroo’s poems voice the tragedies faced by Indigenous Australians, including these changes to the Indigenous peoples’ way of life can also be seen as a method of writing back to the settlers and their descendants. Oodgeroo cannot ignore the fact that many parts of Indigenous culture were drastically altered when the settlers arrived, and she would be unable to portray the lasting connections that the Indigenous people have to the three pillars without addressing these changes to both white and Indigenous audiences. The idea that Oodgeroo is writing back to the white settlers and their descendants opposes the opinion of James Devaney, who wrote the forward for *We Are Going*. Devaney believes that Oodgeroo’s primary audience for the collection is “native Old Australians” (Devaney); however, Oodgeroo directly addresses a white audience on many occasions throughout her collection, suggesting that she had a far broader audience in mind and that she was intending to reach out to them.

Furthermore, since Oodgeroo attempts to show the settlers the devastation that they have caused the Indigenous people, it is important that she juxtapose her people’s culture before colonization with their culture following colonization. However, instead of surrendering to the will of the white settlers, Oodgeroo addresses their negative impact on Australia and then rejects the hierarchy they created. As a whole, *We Are Going* emphasizes that the Indigenous people’s connections to their land, traditions, and families are eternal by remembering old traditions and examining the inaccurate assumption the white settlers made about Indigenous culture. Thus, the collection serves as a call to Indigenous Australians to fight for their rights as a society.

An important aspect of the continued connection between the Indigenous people and their traditional culture is the reflection on life before colonization. As stated by Sue Ryan-Fazilleau
in her article regarding Pilkington’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, reflecting on life before colonization allows both the authors and the readers to “come to terms with the trauma of oppression” (105). This reflection in *We Are Going*, similar to that in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, serves as a reminder of how much better life was when the Indigenous people were able to live by their own laws and provides motivation to fight back against their oppressors. Oodgeroo’s poem “Corroboree” is not infused with an obvious political message (like many of her other poems), but instead shows the beauty of Indigenous traditions before the settlers arrived: “The hunters paint black bodies by firelight with designs of meaning / To dance corroboree” (4-5). The dance that Oodgeroo is describing is a ceremony in which an Indigenous tribe would perform songs and dances to tell stories of history, spirituality, and mythology (Corroboree). Family gatherings and traditional ceremonies are an important part of Indigenous culture, and Oodgeroo purposefully mentions that each part of the ceremony is significant to the tribe. Oodgeroo also incorporates the oral tradition of Indigenous culture into the poem: “As naked dancers weave stories of the tribe / Into corroboree” (14-15). Indigenous culture was passed down from generation to generation through oral stories and dances, like the corroboree, and these stories were the primary ways in which Indigenous people learned about the history of their tribe. Because Oodgeroo was only the second Indigenous Australian to publish a book of creative writing, any previous depictions of ancient Indigenous traditions would have been written down and interpreted by white settlers, missionaries and anthropologists. Therefore, the poem serves the purpose of reminding younger generations of Indigenous Australians of the beauty of their heritage, and provides an accurate depiction and interpretation of Indigenous traditions to white settlers and their descendants.

Throughout colonization Indigenous culture was dismissed by the white settlers who were quick to assume the Indigenous people were uncivilized because they did not have the same
customs or beliefs as the settlers. The white settlers believed that it was their right to claim the land that the Indigenous people lived on for themselves because of this assumption (Moreton-Robinson 24). However, in her poetry Oodgeroo points out that the differences between the Indigenous people’s way of life and the settlers’ way of life did not necessarily correlate with the Indigenous people being less civilized. Rather, she argues that the Indigenous people’s connection to their land, tradition, and families made them a happier race than the settlers. Her poem, “The Unhappy Race,” addresses white settlers’ lack of relationship to land directly: “You alone have left nature and made civilized laws. / You have enslaved yourselves as you enslaved the horse and other wild things” (2-3). Essentially, Oodgeroo is equating a life connected to nature as one of happiness, and the “civilized” life of the white settlers as enslavement. She argues that the settlers’ made their own decision to leave nature, and by doing so they have enslaved themselves in the laws that they created for their society, much in the way that they enslave animals. Oodgeroo goes on to argue that although the settlers see their culture as more civilized than the Indigenous people’s culture, the Indigenous people want no part of this “civilization.” Instead, they would prefer to continue with their simple lives spent in nature:

Leave us alone, we don’t want your collars and ties,

We don’t need your routines and compulsions.

We want the old freedom and joy that all things have but you

Poor white man of the unhappy race. (12-14)

Again, Oodgeroo emphasizes that the aspects of the settlers’ culture that seem more civilized than the Indigenous people (dressing up to go to work, daily routines, etc) are not appealing to the Indigenous people. The Indigenous people enjoyed living by the routines of their tribes in nature, a happiness that Oodgeroo believes the settlers cannot attain. Instead, she sees the rules
by which the settlers live their lives as the cause of their unhappiness, and directly calls them the unhappy race at the conclusion of her poem. This sentiment is one that would be foreign to any settler who might read the poem, since the colonizers always assumed that their way of life was far superior to that of the Indigenous people, yet Oodgeroo argues that the Indigenous people not only have no desire to be like the settlers, but that they even view the settlers as an unhappy people.

In her poem “White Man, Dark Man,” Oodgeroo touches on another aspect of Indigenous life that the settlers misunderstood: laws. Because the Indigenous tribes did not have leaders or laws in the same way the British did, the settlers assumed that the Indigenous people were lawless and thus were a lesser society; this could not be further from the truth. The settlers failed to understand that the Indigenous tribes were led by their elders, and that the various tribes were able to interact peacefully with one another. To show the inaccuracy of the settlers’ assumptions about Indigenous culture, Oodgeroo writes “White Man, Dark Man” as a conversation between a settler and an Indigenous man:

White Man

Abo man

..........

You we have taught

Our white democracy


Dark Man

White man, who

Would teach us and tame,
We had socialism

Long before you came,

And democracy too. (1-10)

Bob Hodge, who authored the article “Poetry and Politics in Oodgeroo: Transcending the Difference,” notes that within the poem, the dark man replies in stanzas that mirror the white man’s, which Hodge says is “like a dance, an image of the perfect justice between white and black that is not reciprocated as it ought to be from the other side” (6). Essentially, Hodge argues that the Indigenous man is attempting to show respect toward the white man, but that the respect is not being returned. The white settlers were under the impression that they were saving the Indigenous people from their primitive culture by teaching them about Christianity and giving Australia English-style laws and structure. Thus, the white man in Oodgeroo’s poem believes that the Indigenous man should be pleased that the settlers have arrived and helped teach the Indigenous people how government should work. As Hodge points out, throughout the poem the Indigenous man listens and responds to the arguments made by the white man, but the white man ignores the Indigenous man’s arguments and merely begins a new argument with each stanza (6). The Indigenous man, however, does not agree with any of the white man’s arguments, and instead calls out his true intention to “tame” the Indigenous people. Upon their arrival, the settlers forced the Indigenous people to work for them as slaves. When Indigenous tribes did not comply they were separated from one another, or worse, massacred. The Indigenous man in Oodgeroo’s poem goes on to correct the white man by reminding him that the Indigenous people had their own form of laws and regulations before the settlers arrived. Just because this Indigenous democracy did not reflect the English democracy does not mean that it was not just as effective (if not more). Finally, the Indigenous man notes that his people had an efficient form
of government long before the settlers arrived, which again stresses the longevity of the Indigenous peoples’ connection to their traditions and the time that they have spent on their land and with their tribes.

While many of Oodgeroo’s poems touch on the topics of tradition and misinterpretation, *We Are Going* is ultimately guided by Oodgeroo’s defiance regarding the mistreatment her people face, as well as her hope for a better future. She chooses to frame her collection with these themes by making them most apparent in the first and last poems. Prominently displaying the themes of defiance and hope throughout her collection emphasizes Oodgeroo’s belief that the Indigenous people’s connections to their land, traditions, and families are so ingrained in them that neither time nor mistreatment will alter them. Rather, the Indigenous people will continue to hold onto these connections and will fight to be treated as equals in the new settler-dominated society. The first poem in the collection, “Aboriginal Charter of Rights,” was first presented at the fifth annual meeting of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement in 1962 (Walker 10). In the poem, Oodgeroo voices the wishes of the Indigenous people to the white settlers:

We want hope, not racialism,
Brotherhood, not ostracism,
Black advance, not white ascendance:
Make us equals, not dependents.

Opportunity that places
White and black on equal basis. (1-20)

Oodgeroo makes no attempt to alleviate the grievances of the Indigenous people, but instead maps out all of the wrongdoings that have occurred in Australia since colonization. Her choice to
begin the poem by stating that the Indigenous people desire hope instead of racism identifies one of the key issues that influenced many of the other actions taken against the Indigenous people. Despite the fact that there were hundreds of different Indigenous tribes, all with distinct customs and languages, the settlers grouped them all into the same category based on the color of their skin. This racism lead to the ostracism of the Indigenous people and allowed the settlers to justify their creation of a hierarchy. By identifying their own culture as superior, the white settlers were able to portray the Indigenous people as the lesser society, and thus as sub-humans. It is important to note that Oodgeroo’s tone throughout the poem is not one of hatred, nor one that insinuates that violence should occur. Rather, Oodgeroo appeals to the white settlers by calmly stating that equality in society is deserved by the Indigenous people. Jennifer Jones notes that Oodgeroo was, in fact, open to the idea of friendships between Indigenous and white Australians, and formed a close relationship with white poet Judith Wright. Although Oodgeroo’s “primary allegiance was to Aboriginality . . . she maintained the freedom to choose, moving between ideologies” (45). Thus, the calm tone that Oodgeroo takes in “Aboriginal Charter of Rights” allows her to simultaneously call on her fellow Indigenous people to peacefully fight for their right to be equal members of society, while reminding the white settlers that the Indigenous people are not going to allow their mistreatment to continue.

While Oodgeroo uses “Aboriginal Charter of Rights” to open We Are Going by speaking directly to the white settlers, she concludes the collection by directing her final poem towards the Indigenous people. When We Are Going was first published, the Indigenous people had been colonized for just under two hundred years. The longevity of the white settlers’ rule over the Indigenous people surely plagued their hope that their lives would ever reflect that of their
ancestors, and yet Oodgeroo leaves Indigenous readers with a promise of hope. In “A Song of Hope” she reminds her fellow Indigenous people to stay strong:

So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,

Night’s nearly over,
And though long the climb,

New rights will greet us. (17-29)

Oodgeroo acknowledges that the Indigenous people have waited for far too long to regain their land and be reunited with their tribes, yet she is certain that their waiting is nearly over. Her choice of the word “bound” again reminds the white settlers that the time the Indigenous people have spent waiting to regain their rights has not been an easy one. Rather, the Indigenous people were forced to work under the white settlers and face the abuse that came with being considered the lesser race. As previously stated, though, Oodgeroo stands firm in her belief that the white settlers will not remain the more powerful race, and instead believes that Indigenous culture will remain long after the settlers’ culture has crumbled. Finally, Oodgeroo states that “new rights” will be given to the Indigenous people. This line ties “A Song of Hope” back to the first piece in the collection, “Aboriginal Charter of Rights.” Oodgeroo made clear in the beginning of We Are Going what rights the Indigenous people must be afforded, and chooses to close her collection by reminding the Indigenous people to continue to defy their mistreatment and to maintain hope for a more positive future.

Oodgeroo’s combination of hope and defiance throughout her collection reinforces the idea that she believes the Indigenous peoples’ connections to the three pillars are too strong to be
demolished by the settlers. Beginning her collection with defiance and ending it with hope allows Oodgeroo to speak not only to the Indigenous people, but to the settlers as well. The inclusion of Indigenous tribal traditions emphasizes her belief that the Indigenous peoples’ connection to these events remains an important part of their culture. Finally, she boldly asserts that the white settlers have enslaved themselves with their rules and government, and that their belief that the “civilized” lifestyle is superior is undoubtedly mistaken. Oodgeroo’s passion for the rights of the Indigenous people epitomizes the concept that the connections the Indigenous people have to their land, traditions, and families will remain steadfast throughout time, and her collection serves as a starting point for Indigenous authors to begin the process of writing back to the white settlers about their mistreatment.
Ruby Moonlight – Land as a Savior

*Ruby Moonlight* author Ali Cobby Eckermann is a Yankunytjatjara woman who was adopted by the Eckermann family shortly after she was born. As an adult, Eckermann was able to reconnect with her Indigenous family and now regularly visits them in rural South Australia. When interviewed, Eckermann stated that “poetry has also been the tool to assist [her] adopted family to understand some of the changes that occurred deep within [herself]” (Brennan). Eckermann’s decision to reconnect with her Indigenous roots was for the purpose of learning and healing, and she has dedicated her research to historical Indigenous massacres like the one she depicts in *Ruby Moonlight*. As a modern Indigenous author, her choice to write about historical Indigenous tragedies and rituals illustrates the continued importance of Indigenous history and culture to Indigenous authors. Although the massacres of Indigenous tribes have ended, Eckermann still sees them as a topic that needs to be addressed and one that the descendants of the settlers should be aware of.

Similarly to Pilkington, Eckermann chose to use her 2012 verse novel, *Ruby Moonlight*, to reflect on life as an Indigenous person in the late nineteenth century. In *Ruby Moonlight*, Eckermann illustrates the massacre of a young Indigenous woman’s family as a means of showing the Indigenous people’s deep connection to their families and the importance of the rituals that follow the death of a family member. Furthermore, the young woman’s journey throughout the collection to find herself following her tribe’s death emphasizes her understanding of the land as well as her unmoveable relationship with it. It is important to note that, while each piece of Eckermann’s collection is an individual poem, the poems all connect to tell a completed story. Although her poetry (like all Indigenous poetry) was likely informed by Oodgeroo’s work, Eckermann’s collection is less combative than Oodgeroo’s. Rather, she allows
her character’s reactions following the death of her family to portray the connections seen in both Pilkington and Oodgeroo’s pieces.

Eckermann begins her collection by illustrating the traditions of an Indigenous tribe. The tribe she describes is migrating back to an area that they have traveled to many times before and there are “murmurs [of] delight as / landscapes become familiar” (Harmony 3-4). Although the Indigenous people were nomadic, their migration patterns were always within the same area of land that their tribe had been on since time immemorial. Thus, they were always returning to familiar areas in their travels as part of their migration route for important rituals. It is clear that the tribe Eckermann depicts has been to this familiar area of land many times before, and are thrilled to return once again. If the longevity of the tribe’s time on the land was not clear from the beginning of the collection, Eckermann describes the tribe after their slaughter as having “lived here / since time began” (Shadow 3-4). In other words, Eckermann is reminding readers that Indigenous tribes were so deeply connected to their land because their ancestors had been living on it since before any living person can remember.

Although readers never get to see the young woman interact with her family and tribe, her connection to them is evident by the loss she feels after their death. In the wake of her family’s death, the young woman “sits like a rock / staring at her husband and mother / . . . arid eyes silt with sand / tears will no longer flow” (Silence 4-8). Following the death of her family, all the young woman can do is sit and stare at the dead bodies. Eckermann makes it evident that the woman has spent a significant amount of time crying over the loss of her family by pointing out that she is unable to cry any longer. Even after she can cry no more, she continues to sit and watch her family, unsure of how to continue on without them.
In the wake of the immense loss the Indigenous woman feels after her family’s deaths, her decision following her grieving is to be close to nature, and her relationship with nature allows it to become her savior:

Senses shattered by loss
she staggers to follow birdsong

_trust nature_

chirping red-browed finches lead to water
ringneck parrots place berries in her path

_trust nature._ (Birds 3-6)

Eckermann here italicizes the words “trust nature” to signal that these are the words the woman hears in her head, while the non-italicized words represent actions. Although she is all alone and has just lost her entire tribe, the woman’s instincts tell her to trust nature. With her family gone, the young woman recognizes that she must rely on her connection to nature to survive, and is able to follow birdsongs to find food and water. Her understanding of nature further allows her to feel comfort despite having no tribe to depend on. When the woman eventually finds shelter, she permits herself to be one with nature and is overcome by “A safe feeling / instinct intact” (Sedge 15-16). The woman knows that even though her family is no longer with her, she can rely on nature to help her survive on her own, and that her natural instincts and connections to the land will not falter. The land continues to be her savior over the following days, providing her familiar comforts and food:

The gift of gentle rain
washes over the stony outcrop
Eckermann’s choice to depict the land as the young girl’s savior following her family’s death clearly illustrates the deep connection that the Indigenous people have with the land. To the Indigenous people, the land was not an object to be conquered as the white settlers believed it to be. Instead, the land was a provider - something to be respected and cherished. In this young woman’s time of need she fully trusts that nature will provide her with food, water, and shelter. She views the different elements of nature (rain, the scent of kangaroo scat, etc.) as comforting and ceases to be overwhelmed by the prospect of living without her family.

Entwined with Eckermann’s depiction of the importance of land and family to the Indigenous people is the value they place on traditional rituals. After the death of her family, the young Indigenous woman completes the ancient ritual of her tribe to signify the death of a loved one:

She washes herself in the stream
Scrubs her skin with handfuls of coarse sand
With a stone knife she razors her matted hair
It burns acrid on the embers
The knife slices into her thighs
One sorry mark for each family member
She rubs ash into the wounds

Dictated by cultural ritual. (Wash 3-8)

The young woman has just lost her entire family, yet the traditions of her tribe are so important to her that she quickly takes part in a death ritual on her own. Instead of simply performing the ritual once to signify the death of her entire tribe, she follows the specifics of the ancient ritual by cutting herself once for each member of the tribe. Her sense of loss for each member of her family is clear as she completes the ritual over and over again to represent the death of each of her loved ones. Even the traditional rituals of the woman’s tribe demonstrate her connection to the land. Each part of the ritual involves a part of nature: washing herself in the stream and scrubbing herself with sand begins the ritual, and she rubs ashes on her wounds to signal the end of the ritual. To the Indigenous people, the land was such an important part of life that it was a part of their sacred rituals.

The reaction of the young Indigenous woman to the slaughter of her family in Ruby Moonlight clearly shows the importance of family and ancient customs to the Indigenous people; however, the clearest connection can be seen between the young woman and the land. After she completes the traditional ceremony to signify the death of a loved one, and throughout the stages of her mourning this loss, the woman relies heavily on the land to protect her and provide for her. Her connection with the land allows her to feel comforted despite being alone, and she is able to use her knowledge of the land and her instincts to find food and water. Eckermann undeniably paints the land as a protector for the Indigenous woman, which emphasizes intense relationship that the Indigenous people have with the country while the death of the young woman’s tribe highlights her attachment to tradition and family.
My Place: Reconnecting to Indigenous Culture

Sally Morgan is a descendent of the Indigenous Palku people of the Pilbara; however, while growing up she was unaware that she was Indigenous. As a child, Morgan’s mother told her that their family was from India so that Morgan could avoid the ridicule she would face from her peers at school if they discovered her true race. Morgan’s memoir, My Place, is a personal account of her discovery of her Indigenous heritage and her journey to deepen her connections with Indigenous culture. Upon discovering her Indigenous background, Morgan became determined to learn as much as possible about her culture through the stories of her mother, uncle, grandmother, and other relatives. As she reflects on her childhood, Morgan realizes that her grandmother attempted to teach her smaller aspects of Indigenous traditions in order to foster the continuation of Indigenous culture. Morgan’s desire to understand her connection to Indigenous culture goes beyond her grandmother’s teachings though, and is driven by her pre-existing connections to land, tradition, and family. Morgan, like many other Indigenous people who did not grow up knowing their heritage, chooses to explore Indigenous culture rather than reject it to fit in with society. While the experiences of the different generations examined in Morgan’s text vary greatly, the connection to land, tradition, and family remains constant for each of the characters.

Although the Indigenous peoples’ connections to land, tradition, and family (the three pillars) is undeniable, this connection does not ensure that Indigenous people who were previously unaware of their heritage will decide to outwardly connect with it. That is, the connections alone are not enough to cause Indigenous people to accept their culture; they must

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8 Due to the fact that Sally Morgan is both the author and the main character of her narrative, she will be referred to as “Morgan” when she is an adult, and “Sally” when she is a child.
have a self-driven desire to do so. Anne Brewster argues that in My Place “Aboriginality [is] by no means a constant thing” for any of the individuals in Morgan’s narrative, as “they all had at one time or another an ambivalent attitude towards identifying as Aboriginal” (16). When Sally first discovers her grandmother’s heritage she is inquisitive, but her sister, Jill, is mortified: “‘Boongs, we’re Boongs!’ I could see Jill was unhappy with the idea . . . ‘God of all things, we’re Aboriginal!’ . . . [Jill] was much more attune to our social environment. It was important for her to be accepted at school, because she enjoyed being there” (98). Sally is not overly concerned with her social life at school, but to Jill, social status and inclusion mean everything. Sally is open to exploring her heritage and, as her life progresses, sees her “Aboriginality [as] a badge of pride rather than of shame” (Brewster 17), but Jill’s desire to fit in with her peers overrides her Indigenous identity. Instead, she internalizes the stigmas that her peers have placed on Indigenous culture: “‘You still don’t understand, do you?’ Jill groaned in disbelief. ‘It’s a terrible thing to be Aboriginal. Nobody wants to know you . . . you can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal! I suppose it’s all right for someone like you, you don’t care what people think . . . but I do!’” (98). Jill cannot understand why Sally attempts to defend their Indigenous heritage, nor how she can find positive aspects about being an Indigenous person. Thus Jill serves as a reminder that not all Indigenous people want to be connected to a culture that is seen as “lesser” than that of the dominant white culture in Australia.

Sally’s mother and grandmother also choose to outwardly reject their family’s Indigenous heritage; however, their choice is rooted not in embarrassment of their culture, but rather in the desire to keep their family safe. Sally and her siblings’ childhoods occurred nearly fifty years before the Australian government issued an official apology to Indigenous people, and fell during the later years of the Stolen Generations. During this time period, Indigenous children
were often stolen from their families and taken to assimilation camps where they were taught European values, Christianity, and how to serve white families, as seen in Pilkington’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Furthermore, as is evident through Jill’s interactions with the other school children, extreme racism against Indigenous people was still extremely prevalent during this time. Essentially, there were many risks that came with growing up as an Indigenous child.

In an attempt to combat these potential threats, Sally’s mother and grandmother refuse to tell the children that they are Indigenous, and instead they insist that the family is Indian. Literary scholar Martin Renes states that after Sally’s mother and grandmother reunited after being separated when Sally’s mother was young (during the earlier days of the Stolen Generations), the two decided to “live their ‘white’ life in post-war Perth, locked in a self-defeating circle of fear and silence about their Indigenous roots” (79). Essentially, Sally’s mother and grandmother hide their history and culture out of fear that the children will be stolen from them. As an adult, Morgan interviews her mother about growing up as an Indigenous woman, and her mother finally explains the true reasoning behind her choice to hide the family’s Indigenous heritage from her children: “Mum and I decided that we would definitely never tell the children they were Aboriginal. We were both convinced they would have a bad time, otherwise. Also, if word got out, another Welfare person might come and take them away . . . Mum said she didn’t want the children growing up with people looking down on them” (305). Although as a child Sally was confused as to why her mother and grandmother hesitated to align themselves with Indigenous culture, her mother’s story makes it clear that the protection of her family has always been her first priority. By not telling the children that they were Indigenous,

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9 During the time that Morgan wrote her book the term “Aboriginal” was used more frequently than the term “Indigenous;” however, the term “Indigenous” is now more widely accepted since “Aboriginal” is seen as derogatory.
Sally’s mother was able to better protect them from the ridicule and racism they would face from their classmates and other members of society. Furthermore, hiding their Indigenous roots allowed the Morgan family to stay together and kept the children from being taken to assimilation camps. For Sally’s mother and grandmother, the protection of family was far more important than being openly Indigenous.

Telling the children that they were Indian rather than Indigenous worked to protect them from young judgmental classmates, but the adults in the community presented a real threat of discovering the family’s true background. In order to further protect her family, Sally’s grandmother bribes the rentman for their house in order to ensure that the family is not evicted for being Indigenous. Sally is too young at the beginning of the memoir to understand the complexity of her family’s situation, and confronts her grandmother about these bribes: “Nan … I think I’ve just realized … You’ve been bribing [the rentman], haven’t you? … I don’t think you understand about the house we rent … you only get evicted if you don’t look after the place. For example, if we were to smash a wall or break all the windows, they might think about throwing us all out, but otherwise as long as we pay the rent, they let you stay” (104-105). Sally’s attempt to explain how paying rent works to her grandmother serves the dual purpose of showing Sally’s innocence as well as her desire to help her grandmother. Sally is genuinely convinced that her grandmother does not understand how the process of renting a house works, and wants to explain that her grandmother’s bribes are not necessary. This reminder of Sally’s innocence allows the reader to understand that Nan’s response would not have been understood by the young girl.

Nan’s response does, however, educate the reader on the importance these bribes play in keeping the family safe: “‘You don’t know nothin’ girl. You don’t know what it’s like for people like us. Were like those Jews, we got to look out for ourselves … In this world, there’s no justice, people
like us’d all be dead and gone now if it was up to this country”’ (105). Nan’s comparison of Indigenous people to Jews left Sally confused, but the reader is meant to understand that the torture that would be inflicted on the family if their true heritage was discovered is a driving factor in the family’s decision to hide it. Thus, as Arlene Elder points out in her article, “Silence as Expression: Sally Morgan’s My Place,” Nan’s hesitance to discuss the past, or even the rent, with Sally also represents a “continuing fear of white authority” (21). It is this desire to protect their family from violence, the devotion to keep the family together, and the fear of what might happen if they are found by the white authorities, that causes Sally’s mother and grandmother to outwardly deny their Indigenous roots.

While Sally’s mother and grandmother’s connection to family is seen through their efforts to protect the children from harm, Sally’s connection to her family manifests itself in her unrelenting quest to find out more about her Indigenous roots and her family’s hidden history. In Sally’s opinion, her discovery that she was Indigenous brought her closer to her mother and grandmother, whether they realized it or not: “Jill’s assertion that we were Aboriginal heralded a new phase in my relationship with my mother. I began to pester her incessantly about our background … When I wasn’t pestering Mum, I was busy pestering Nan” (99). Although Sally’s initial fascination is driven by a childlike desire to understand the secrets that her mother and grandmother are keeping from her, her fascination with her family’s culture and history continues into her adult life. Sally is never fully satisfied with the small pieces of information she receives from her mother about the family’s history and, once she finishes university, decides that she is going to write a book about her family’s past. Morgan’s decision to write the book comes from her own desire to learn more about her family, as well as her dedication to showing the pain that Australia has caused to Indigenous people. When Sally informs her mother of her
decision to write about the family’s history, her mother is nervous that bringing up the past will only cause the family more pain, yet Sally believes that history “already hurt people. It’s hurt you and me and Nan, all of us. I mean, for years, I’ve been telling people that I’m Indian!” (152). She believes that writing down her family’s history will not cause more pain, but will instead serve as a way to combat the pain that colonization caused the Indigenous people. Anne Brewster argues that, in this way, *My Place* “is a testimony to the effects of the assimilation policy, introduced in the late 1930s, which attempted to bring about the absorption of Aboriginal people into white society, thereby erasing their cultural difference” (17). By writing down her family’s story, Morgan is able to write back against the injustices they face, while also allowing other Indigenous people to see the importance in deepening their connection to their heritage. Sally’s persistence to know more about her family’s heritage draws her closer to each member of the family as she learns about their past, and her dedication to preserving her family’s history shows her deep connection to her Indigenous culture and her family.

Although Sally grew up without knowing that she was Indigenous, her grandmother still attempted to instill her with a connection to, and knowledge of, the land. In this way, Nan functioned as a sort of Indigenous teacher for Sally, and also provided her a link with her ancestors and their traditions (Elder 18). Shortly after Jill’s assertion that the family is Indigenous, Sally has a brief memory of an encounter with her grandmother that she views as important: “A mental picture flashed vividly before me. I was a little girl again, and Nan and I were squatting in the sand near the back steps. ‘This is a track, Sally. See how they go.’ I watched, entranced as she made the pattern of a kangaroo. ‘Now, this is a goanna here are emu tracks. You see, they all different. You got to know all of them if you want to catch tucker’” (99). At the time, Sally believed that she and her grandmother were just taking turns drawing in
the sand, and yet looking back she sees that her grandmother was actually attempting to teach her small pieces of Indigenous culture. Because her family was attempting to hide their Indigenous heritage, Sally had a limited opportunity to learn about the land in the same way that Indigenous children before colonization would have. Even though her grandmother is unwilling to discuss her life as an Indigenous woman with Sally, it is clear that she wanted Sally to understand important elements of Indigenous culture. Understanding animal tracks as a method of hunting was essential to the Indigenous people’s survival since they relied on hunting to survive for millennia, and Nan wanted to make sure that Sally had that same deep understanding of the land whether she related the connection to Indigenous culture or not.

As her grandchildren got older, Nan continued to encourage their love for nature. The children began to bring home a wide variety of animals to foster, and Sally recalls her grandmother showing deep interest in each of these animals. However, Sally also distinctly remembers Nan’s feelings toward the children’s treatment of the animals they brought home: “Nan would never forgive us if she thought we’d been deliberately unkind to a wild animal” (57). Each animal that the children showed to Nan came with the warning from their grandmother that they needed to respect wildlife. Furthermore, while domesticated animals, such as cats and dogs, were allowed to stay at the house, Nan made sure that wild animals were released back into the wilderness. As children, Sally and her siblings simply assumed that Nan enjoyed nature, yet it is clear that Nan has a deep respect for wild animals and does not want them to be forced to live in a domestic environment. Her choice to foster her grandchildren’s love of nature also shows her desire for her grandchildren to have the same deep relationship with nature that other Indigenous people do.
With the help of her grandmother’s influence and teachings, Sally develops a deep connection to the land at an early age. Of her siblings, she forms the closest relationship with nature. Most importantly, Sally develops her connections to nature before she discovers that she is Indigenous. Thus, the connections are not a result of her discovering her family’s background, but rather have been a part of her from a young age. As a child, Sally loved animals and continuously brought them into her family’s home, despite her mother’s insistence that they do not need any more pets. On her way home one afternoon, young Sally notices that a baby mudlark has fallen out of his nest and determines that she must take him home and nurse him back to health. Although her mother is hesitant (based on the large number of animals Sally has already brought home), Nan encourages Sally to take care of the bird. The baby mudlark dies overnight, and Sally feels as though a small part of herself has died along with the baby bird (59). Sally has not yet discovered that she is Indigenous, yet she has a connection with animals that goes beyond simply enjoying their presence. She longs to protect and care for animals, and treats them with the respect consistent with the Indigenous people’s respect for nature.

Similarly to her connection with animals, Sally demonstrates a strong connection to the land before she realizes that she is Indigenous. As a child, Sally forms a deep relationship with the land behind her home: “The swamp behind our place had become an important place for me. It was now part of me, part of what I was as a person” (59). Sally is infatuated by the small bit of nature that seems to belong to her. It presents her new opportunities for adventures and learning, and feeds her active imagination. While playing in the stream with her mother, Sally asserts that the family does not need a swimming pool because they have the swamp to swim in. While other children (potentially even Sally’s sister, Jill) would be perfectly happy to swim in a pool, Sally loves being in the swamp since she declares it to be a part of her. Sally’s love of nature goes
beyond enjoyment of the outdoors, and rather is driven by a deeply-rooted connection that she does not yet understand.

Because Sally’s family was essentially in hiding while she was a child, she had a limited opportunity to learn about her Indigenous traditions until she was an adult. Upon starting her book, many of Sally’s relatives were open to sharing stories of their relationship with their Indigenous background, yet her grandmother remained hesitant to do so. After years of outwardly denying her Indigenous heritage, and refusing to discuss it with Sally, Nan finally opens up about her connections to Indigenous culture and traditions. It is through her final discussion with Sally that readers see Nan’s deep connection to Indigenous traditions. One of the specific memories Nan shares with Sally is from a time when the family was denying being Indigenous. Despite this rejection, Nan articulates that she was unable to disconnect herself from the culture. She tells Sally about sitting on the porch listening to Indigenous music after the family first moved to their home: “‘We was listenin’ to music. It was the blackfellas playin’ their didgeridoos and singin’ and laughin’ down in the swamp. Your mother could hear it . . . You see, we was hearin’ the people from long ago. Our people who used to live her before the white man came’” (346-347). Nan’s description of listening to Indigenous songs and ceremonies of tribes who had long since left the land the family now lives on illustrates the deep-seated connection that Indigenous people have to their culture and traditions. Although she is able to outwardly deny her Indigenous heritage, Nan cannot ignore her connection to Indigenous culture. Nan’s story shows her longing to continue to be a part of Indigenous culture, and her decision to share the story with Sally provides a connection to the past for both women, as well as a rediscovery of their roots and their past (Brewster 20). Although she outwardly rejected her culture to protect her family, Nan still longs to hear Indigenous music, see Indigenous dances,
and participate in Indigenous traditions. Her choice to pass her understanding of the deep connection that Indigenous people have to their land, tradition, and family to her granddaughter shows her desire for Indigenous people to be able to continue to uphold the traditions of the past.

Nan’s choice to pass parts of her Indigenous culture to her grandchildren depicts the desires of older Indigenous generations to see the continuation of their culture; however, it is not her brief teachings alone that drive Sally to connect with her Indigenous heritage. From a very young age Sally demonstrates a natural connection to both the land and her family. That is, her connections to the three pillars were not formed following her discovery that she was Indigenous, but rather existed throughout the early years of her childhood as well. Although these natural connections do not drive all Indigenous people to deepen their connection to Indigenous culture, they are clear motivators in Sally’s attempts to discover more about her family’s heritage. While Sally has a personal desire to learn more about her Indigenous roots, her connections to land, family, and tradition also drive her devotion to vocalizing the mistreatment of Indigenous people by the colonists. Thus, it is ultimately Sally’s connection to her family, alongside her fascination with the Indigenous peoples’ traditions, which proves to be the strongest influence of her reconnection to Indigenous culture.
**Steam Pigs: Finding Oneself**

Melissa Lucashenko is a Murri\(^\text{10}\) woman who is descended from the Yugambeh and Bundjalung tribes, but is also of European descent. She was born in Brisbane and graduated with a degree in public policy from Griffith University. When Lucashenko began writing seriously in the late 1990s, there was a distinct lack of Indigenous voices in literature. Large publishers would not look at Indigenous work, so Indigenous writers struggled to write back to white Australia. Despite facing many barriers, Lucashenko continued to write, and has been open about sharing her experiences as an Indigenous woman:

> Being Aboriginal is about culture and family links, not just about biology … you do have to understand the culture before you call yourself Aboriginal. If you have ancestry without the understanding or connections, you have a very big journey in front of you. And people must make their own choices there. Nobody has any right to tell stolen generations descendants who they must be or become.

*(Lucashenko Q&A)*

Lucashenko has also been vocal about the importance of Indigenous people who were stolen from their families and tribes gaining an understanding about their culture, while also arguing that ultimately each person must choose for themselves whether or not they want to immerse themselves in that culture. That is not to say that an Indigenous person who chooses not to further their connection with their Indigenous heritage does not have connections to land, tradition, and family, but instead that their connections to these three pillars are not the driving force in their lives. These connections, although ever-present, are deepened only by the choice of Indigenous people to accept and explore them.

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\(^{10}\) The term “Murri” refers to Indigenous Australians of modern-day Queensland.
Lucashenko’s novel, *Steam Pigs*, is a coming of age novel that follows Sue Wilson, a young Indigenous woman, in her attempts to become an independent adult. Unlike Sally Morgan, who was unaware of her Indigenous heritage as a child, Sue is distinctly aware that she is Indigenous, yet is unsure what role her Indigenous heritage should have in her self-understanding. Additionally, Sue differs from the protagonists in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Ruby Moonlight* because her story takes place during the 1990s and is thus a more contemporary story. Whereas the protagonists in these aforementioned texts live with their tribes and are able to participate in their traditions and rituals, Sue lives with her brother, who is equally apathetic toward their Indigenous heritage, in a mostly non-Indigenous community. As literary scholar Margaret Henderson puts it, “Sue is both an insider, being working class, but also an outsider, a young Murri woman whose consciousness of racial and sexual politics is causing her to reject the space marked out for her in Eagleby” (74). Thus, while Sue’s story begins with her strong indifference towards her Indigenous heritage, her actions and development throughout the novel show that the connections to land, tradition, and family for Indigenous people have not disappeared in modern times, but rather that these connections are simply altered slightly to match a more contemporary time period. By the end of the novel, Sue not only comes to terms with her Indigenous heritage, but has submerged herself in it and fully embraced it, thus showing that, even hundreds of years after colonization began, the Indigenous people still have deep connections with land, tradition, and family.

At the beginning of the novel, Sue is entirely indifferent about Indigenous culture and Indigenous peoples: “Having a bit of Aboriginal blood was largely an irrelevance in her life, she tanned easy and could sprint at school, that was about the size of it” (9). She acknowledges that she is an Indigenous woman, but does not want her Indigenous appearance to be the defining
feature of her life. Much of Sue’s apathy toward her Indigenous heritage is undoubtedly rooted in the stereotypes surrounding Indigenous people. Even though Sue’s story is more contemporary than the previously examined works, in the 1990s (and continuing into the present day) there were still a multitude of negative stereotypes about Indigenous people regarding alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, etc. O’Reilly states that Lucashenko “candidly addresses problems within the Indigenous community” by having Sue engage with these different stereotypes (5). Throughout the novel Sue struggles with seeing her older brother, Dave, fulfill many of these negative stereotypes. He drinks too much, is unable to hold down a job, and becomes verbally abusive towards Sue when he feels that she is no longer giving him enough assistance in paying for the upkeep of their family. However, much like the characters and individuals in the previous novels, stories, and poetry collections, Sue still demonstrates a deep connection with her family despite not having a healthy relationship with all of them.

Even though Sue does not respect Dave’s inability to care for himself, she demonstrates a strong desire to support him and their family. She is particularly attached to Dave’s sons, Kirk and Lucky, whom she considers to be “good kids by Eagleby standards” and “come[s] to have an affection for [them] almost like that of a real mum” (11). Sue’s ever-deepening connection with her nephews comes from, in part, Dave often leaning on Sue to care for his children and know their whereabouts due to his failure to stay sober long enough to care for them: “‘Did ya see where Kirk went?’ Dave asked on his way to the shower, carrying the obligatory sixpack of Fosters” (17). Although she is by no means obligated to care for her brother’s young children, Sue adopts a parenting role, regardless of being only seventeen years old herself (54). She understands that her brother is incapable of caring for his own children, and she feels so

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11 Eagleby is the working-class suburb where Sue and her family live; it is situated in Logan City, on the southern edge of Brisbane, in the state of Queensland.
connected to her nephews that she begins to act as a protective pseudo-mother towards them in order to ensure that they do not grow up mimicking their father’s behavior, but that they also get to enjoy their time as children.

When Sue’s boyfriend, Roger, takes Sue, Kirk, and Lucky on a day trip to the beach, Sue refuses to leave Lucky’s side: “Sue and Lucky stay together at the water’s edge, since Lucky can’t swim properly yet and Sue’s scared about perverts if she goes in and leaves him” (29). While many teenagers would dread having their younger relatives tagging along on their dates, Sue remains with Lucky throughout the day because he cannot swim and instead builds sandcastles with the boy to ensure that he has just as much fun as his older brother, Kirk. Furthermore, Sue’s concern about perverts talking to Lucky if she were to leave his side indicates that she cares deeply about his safety and wellbeing. Sue also takes the education of her two nephews into her own hands, and she chooses to spend extra time with them when she picks them up from school:

The next afternoon, grey and pink galahs are fussing in their dozens on the sports field next to the community center. Sue and the boys sit watching them after school … ‘See that one?’ she asks Kirk. ‘That little one there with the funny leg?’ The bird is hoppity hopping in a funny rhythm of its own. ‘Mmmm, is it alright?’ ‘Probably the runt of the family, but if it’s managed to stay alive till now it’ll do okay.’ … ‘What’s a runt?’ ‘It’s the one in the family that doesn’t grow as much, the littlest one.’” (45)

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12 Although the relationship between Sue and Roger is by no means a healthy one (since it is filled with both physical and verbal abuse), Roger plays a large role in introducing Sue to Indigenous culture and emphasizes her connection with her nephews.

13 A galah is a red-breasted cockatoo that can be found in almost all parts of mainland Australia.
Unlike other teenagers who may be perturbed at the idea of spending time with younger children, Sue takes care to make sure that Lucky and Kirk understand the world around them and gives them the love and support that is typically associated with parenthood. She feeds the young boys’ natural curiosity and takes care to share her knowledge with them. Sue even takes time to explain her relationship with Roger to the boys, who voice concerns that she will be leaving them to live with Roger: “‘Listen, no matter what happens, I’ll still be your auntie, OK? I hope that I’ll always be able to see you and do stuff with you, no matter where I’m living. And if I have kids of my own, that doesn’t mean I won’t’ … (its hard to come out with talk of love, for all it’s what she’s saying) … ‘that I won’t have time for you as well’” (46). Even though she plans on having her own children someday, Sue wants her nephews to understand that she feels a deep loving connection to them and that she will always make sure to spend time with them and make them a priority, no matter where her future takes her.

As Sue’s story progresses, she begins to form a deep romantic connection with Roger; however, this connection never eclipses her connection with Kirk and Lucky, and she is quick to come to the boys’ defense when Roger snaps at them one evening after a disagreement over a videogame controller: “‘What’s going on Kirk? Give him the bloody control and don’t be such a little pain in the arse.’ Roger has snapped out of his daydream and starts unconsciously paying out on Kirk for the loss of his land. ‘You go too far, boy, one day you’re gonna find out...’” (53). Sue, in spite of being cautious toward male anger, immediately comes to Kirk’s defense: “[Sue] reaches gently for [Kirk’s] shoulder … ‘Settle down willya, Rog? How do you know it was Kirk’s fault?’ … [Sue] doesn’t like the way [Roger] has been acting with Kirk” (53). Sue also does not know whether the game controller debacle was Kirk’s fault, yet she refuses to stand by and watch Roger treat her nephew poorly. To Sue, protecting the boys and ensuring that they are
not being mistreated is more important than appeasing Roger (despite her knowledge that defending the boys could lead to a violent reaction from Roger toward her), making it evident that her connection to her family is far deeper than her connection to her boyfriend.

Sue’s connection with Lucky and Kirk is clearly deeper than her connection with Roger, yet it was through her relationship with Roger that Sue was able to learn more about her Indigenous heritage and the traditions of the Indigenous people. O’Reilly emphasizes that Roger “serves as a model and mentor for Sue, and instigates her exploration of her Indigenous identity” despite being a less than ideal mentor (2). With her new knowledge about Indigenous traditions, Sue begins her journey to deepen her connections with her Indigenous heritage. During the beginning of the novel, Sue seems indifferent toward her Indigenous heritage, yet the more she learns from Roger, the more interested in Indigenous culture she becomes: “Roger’s gone to uni already. He works really hard at his studies, she thinks, boring bloody shit it looks like … The only interesting bits were the Aboriginal studies lectures he talked about so much. Sue was learning a lot from him about that Murri stuff. Black Australia has a White History” (43). Just the bits of information Roger has shared with Sue about Indigenous people and their traditions have sparked her interest, and it is clear from the previous passage that she has gained a deeper understanding of how colonization negatively affected the ways that Indigenous people lived.

Sue’s curiosity about Indigenous traditions only grows as the novel progresses: “Rog is expounding on Aboriginal culture again and she wants to hear about the Gurindji fight of the sixties” (52). Once her interest is peaked on the topic of Indigenous people’s traditions and history, Sue desire for more knowledge about the topic cannot be satiated. She listens intently each time Roger begins to talk about the subject, and begins to identify herself more with the Indigenous people. Whereas Indigenous traditions and history seemed meaningless to Sue
before, her relationship with Roger opens her eyes to the importance of Indigenous heritage and history so much that she wants to take Kirk and Lucky to experience Indigenous culture and traditions: “Maybe one day she’d take them on full-time, show them the bush up north and try to get through to them how their people used to live” (54). Sue did not have the chance to grow up participating in Indigenous traditions due to the time period she was born into, but the growth of her curiosity about the meanings surrounding these traditions demonstrates that the Indigenous people’s connections with their traditions have not waned, even if their ability to participate actively in them has.

Sue’s longing to learn more about the Indigenous people and their traditions, in combination with a rude awakening about her lack of knowledge about Indigenous history, drives her to attend university to study Indigenous history and culture. One afternoon, while Sue is spending time with her friend Kerry, she recognizes a book in Kerry’s library by Judith Wright. Sue feels momentarily pleased with herself, until Kerry reprimands her for knowing so little about Indigenous literature and history:

‘have you got any Bruce Dawe or A.D. Hope there?’ ‘No.’ ‘Well what about Archie Weller? Audre Lourde? … What about Oodgeroo?’ … Sue! How can you expect to be a leader if you don’t have the faintest idea what your own poets are saying! … You’re not living in the boondocks now girl, and even if you were there’s no excuses – you’ve done twelve years of school and learnt fuck-all about Aboriginal politics or literature.’ (189)

Although Kerry’s words seem harsh, they shed light on the reality of both Sue’s lack of understanding about Indigenous people and the lack of Indigenous history that was taught in Australian schools during the 1980s and 1990s. Sue attended twelve years of schooling, but
never once learned about any of the famous Indigenous writers, including the mother of Indigenous creative works, Oodgeroo. Sue is not alone in this lack of knowledge, though, as even in the present day works by Indigenous Australians are often ignored in schools in an attempt to teach the English Canon. Sue’s lack of knowledge about Indigenous authors also illustrates how much Sue still has to learn about Indigenous history and culture. By this point in the novel, Sue has accepted her Indigenous heritage and attempted to deepen her connection with said heritage; however, as Lucashenko points out: “If you have ancestry without the understanding or connections, you have a very big journey in front of you” (Lucashenko Q&A).

Thus it is only once Sue decides to fully immerse herself in discovering more about Indigenous history and traditions through the Aboriginal Studies program at Griffith University that she is finally able to truly begin her journey to identify herself with the Indigenous people and deepen her natural connections to the traditions and heritage she used to reject.

Due to the suburban setting of *Steam Pigs*, it would be easy to assume that the connections between the Indigenous people and the land would be less prominent; nevertheless, Sue recognizes her connection to the land before she even begins her journey to deepen her connection with her heritage: “The familiarity with [her city] was a testimony to her belonging. She knew she was half at home in the dirt, and resented the knowledge. It shows in me face, she worried, it’s written in me bones” (6). However, it is important to point out that, while Sue is aware of her sense of belonging in Eagleby, she still spends much of the novel “searching for a home, a place she can be herself” (Henderson 75). Sue is connected to Eagleby insofar as it is where her brother and nephews are, yet she never feels truly at home in the suburb, nor is this connection identical to the connections the Indigenous people felt to their country.
Even though Sue resents her connections with the Indigenous people at the beginning of the novel, it is clear that she understands her connection to the land. As she begins to accept her Indigenous heritage, her connection to the land only grows as she embarks on a journey to explore this connection and the history of her people. After beginning to learn about Indigenous peoples from Roger, Sue begins to further recognize her connections to land: “Sue had great faith in the recuperative powers of the bush. If you could listen to the early morning magpies, or see the sun dawning on dew-wet grass without feeling something holy, you may as well go and put a bullet through your head, as far as she was concerned” (55). As seen in Rabbit-Proof Fence, We Are Going, Ruby Moonlight, and My Place, Indigenous peoples have an immeasurable connection to the land. Despite her original tendencies to distance herself from Indigenous culture, Sue demonstrates that her connection to the land is just as intense and meaningful as the characters and individuals in the previous texts.

At the end of the novel, after her journey to deepen her understanding of her Indigenous heritage has fully begun, Sue finally begins to finally explore and understand her connections with the land and becomes comfortable claiming it as her own:

… the Murri girl saw the city through different, more confident eyes, saw for the first time the possibility of claiming it as her own, a part of her life and her psyche … she remembered anew that it was Murri land, whatever they’d done to it or put on it. It was Yuggera country … that meant she had a connection to work from … her belonging roots reached deep into the soil, anchoring her like an old rivergum.

(239-240)

The land that Sue is referring to is not necessarily the land of her people, yet her understanding of her connection with it is meaningful nonetheless. In his article, O’Reilly points out that Sue’s
“claim to belong in Yuggera country is questionable” because “By Sue’s logic, any Indigenous people can belong to any land that was occupied before 1788 by Indigenous people” (6).

Historically, the differing Indigenous tribes had been on their land since time immemorial, yet throughout colonization the tribes were broken up and forcibly removed from their land.

Although some modern Indigenous people have been able to reconnect with the members of their family’s tribe who survived and with their country, many have not. Thus, Sue’s connection with Yuggera country represents a more modern Indigenous connection to the land. It may not be the land that her ancestors lived on, but her understanding that the country once was controlled by Indigenous people allows her to connect to it. As she puts it, this connection is “one to work from” (240), and as O’Reilly notes, Yuggera country is “a place which [Sue] can anchor herself [to] as part of her ongoing development of her Indigenous identity” (6). She understands that her connection to this land is not the same as her connection would be to the land of her people, and yet she still forms a sense of belonging on that land because she recognizes that nothing the colonists or descendants of colonists have done to the land takes away from the Indigenous people’s connection to it that goes back before any written records.

Although Sue grows up having no desire to explore her Indigenous heritage, her connection to the three pillars is still present. She forms a close maternal relationship with her brother’s children long before she begins her journey to understand her Indigenous background and also connects deeply with the land despite not fully understanding why. Sue’s apathy toward her Indigenous roots quickly vanishes as she begins to learn more about Indigenous people from her boyfriend, Roger, and her friend, Kerry. While Roger and Kerry sparked Sue’s interest in Indigenous culture, it is ultimately her own desire to understand Indigenous traditions and history that allows for the deepening of her already present connections with land, tradition, and family.
By the end of the novel, Sue has gained a new understanding of herself, while becoming further connected to her Indigenous roots. Lucashenko’s novel thus depicts the ever-present connection that Indigenous people have to the three pillars and the ways in which the Indigenous people continue to deepen these connections.
Endless Belonging

When the British colonists arrived on the land that they re-named New South Wales, they laid claim to a land that the Indigenous people had inhabited since time immemorial. Following colonization, the Indigenous peoples of Australia were subjected to extreme racism, massacres, kidnapping, and the destruction of their cultures. Both the purposeful and inadvertent attempts by the colonists and their descendants to deprive the Indigenous people of their connections to their land, tradition, and family lead to the assumption that the Indigenous peoples’ connections to these three pillars have been altered, or would disappear entirely; however, through the examination of written works by Doris Pilkington, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Sally Morgan, and Melissa Lucashenko, it is clear that the connections Indigenous people possess to the three pillars have not waned.

Each of the five authors examined throughout this project connect to the different elements of Indigenous culture so strongly that they chose to speak out and write back against the injustices against by their people. For Doris Pilkington, her grandmother’s kidnapping as a part of the Stolen Generations was too powerful not to share with white and Indigenous Australians. By sharing an oral story from her family’s past, Pilkington demonstrated her own connection to Indigenous traditions and her family, but also was able to depict her grandmother’s deep connection to land that drove her to escape from the Moore River Native Settlement. Oodgeroo Noonuccal not only became the mother of Indigenous Australian literature through the publication of *We Are Going*, but used her literature as a call to action against the racism faced by Indigenous Australians. Her pieces pass along traditions of Indigenous tribes in combination with a sharp reminder that the Indigenous tribes belonged in Australia long before the white colonists arrived. Her substantial dedication to the rallying of Indigenous people indicates a
strong connection to each of the three pillars, and an unwillingness to let the discrimination against the Indigenous peoples be forgotten.

Although her poetry collection is the newest of the works examined for this piece, Ali Cobby Eckermann chose to focus on massacres that happened long before her time. The effect of her choice is twofold, as she is able to show both her own connections to the three pillars, as well as the similar connections of the characters in her collection. Eckermann’s topic choice demonstrates the connection she maintains to the Indigenous people who were slaughtered by the colonists and their descendants, and throughout her personal life she has made attempts to reinforce her own connections to land and her Indigenous family. Within Ruby Moonlight, the young Indigenous woman’s attachment to her land, tradition, and family is clear as she is able to survive on her own due to her vast knowledge of her land as she mourns the massacre of her tribe.

While Pilkington and Eckermann’s pieces introduce readers to the traumas faced by Indigenous peoples following colonization, and Oodgeroo’s collection calls for action from the Indigenous people, Sally Morgan and Melissa Lucashenko’s pieces engage with how Indigenous people living in the later parts of the 1900s through to the present day can strengthen their own connections with the three pillars. Morgan’s autobiography emphasizes the fear felt by generations of Indigenous people with regards to being separated from their families and tribes, yet her story also shows the deep desire of people who discover their Indigenous roots to deepen their connections to their heritage. Although it would be easy to assume that Indigenous people would prefer to hide from their culture to avoid racism, Morgan’s story shows that, in many cases, just the opposite is true. The three living authors (Morgan, Lucashenko, and Eckermann) have all made efforts throughout their lives to enhance their connections to the three pillars, and
Lucashenko depicts a similar journey of self-discovery in *Steam Pigs*. Sue begins the novel as apathetic toward her Indigenous roots, but ends the novel as a strong and confident Indigenous woman who is dedicated to deepening her connection to the land and Indigenous traditions. Just like Morgan, Sue chooses to expand her connections with her Indigenous heritage rather than deny her culture.

In combination with one another, the five female Indigenous authors’ life experiences span nearly one hundred years, while the topics they depict in their written works extend to time immemorial. The damage done by the colonists and their descendants is undoubtedly irreversible, yet the persistence of the Indigenous people’s connections to land, tradition, and family clearly indicate that the Indigenous people’s sense of belonging in Australia has not dwindled. Rather, they remain determined to maintain their traditions, reconnect with family members or the tribe that they may have lost during the Stolen Generations, and to share the stories of Australia’s brutal past with the world. The colonizers and their descendants may have changed the landscape and broken up the Indigenous tribes, but the Indigenous peoples of Australia have connections to land, tradition, and family that transcend colonization, allowing them to maintain, deepen, and pass on their sense of belonging in their homeland.
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