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**„The Longing for Belonging -
The Vision of Australian Belonging
in Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* and
Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*“**

verfasst von / submitted by

Andreas Leonhardt

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1. Introduction

Since the first days of the British colonization of Australia, Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Australians have shared a very violent and troublesome history. The contradictory priorities of the spiritual Indigenous people and the economically oriented Europeans arguably laid the foundation of the ideological conflict that characterizes Australia to this day. Naturally, themes such as land and belonging have defined the Australian identity long before the British first set foot in Australia. The European arrival, however, marked a turning point in the continent's metaphysical development. Contrasting to its indigenous inhabitants, whose very essence is intertwined with their country and their people, the European settlers have defined themselves in terms of ownership of the land instead of being a part of it. This tendency becomes evident in the prevalent formulation of the term "traditional owners of the land" used to refer to Aboriginal people. Since the early days of the colonization of Australia, European settlers have done everything in their power to negate and deconstruct even the slightest claim of Aboriginal people to their ownership of and connection to the land. For example, the introduction of the term *terra nullius*, which starts from the premise that Australia had been vacant of human settlement, provided the legal justification of the British conquest of the country (Nikro 2013: 1-2). Since the 1960's and 70's, Aboriginal (land) rights have sparked off a heated political as well as cultural debate which still continues to this day. In this regard, identity and belonging are interdependent and construct some of the core elements of Australian nationhood (Sonn et al. 2014: 551).

The concept of belonging is one of the most dominant and controversial themes in the construction of Australian identity and has shaped the public and scholarly discourse for decades. While many aspects of Aboriginal tradition and history such as the "Dreaming" or the "Stolen Generations" have been explored extensively, the sense of belonging to land and community has often been underrepresented in literature. Being a considerably young nation with an extremely violent and contentious history, Australian people strive for a more meaningful and fulfilling relationship to their land and their nation. In this respect, it has often been claimed that non-Indigenous Australians construct their idea of belonging to the land around the spiritual concept of the Aboriginal people's connection to their country.

While the common theme of the struggling European settlers and their inability to adapt to the new world has been investigated at length in Australian literature, a lot of research has been conducted on the Indigenous Australian perspective over the last few decades as well. Particularly, the unique spiritual sense of belonging of Indigenous Australians has fascinated scholars for many years. In this regard, it is crucial to underscore that up until the 1960s, the Aboriginal beliefs were almost exclusively elaborated by non-Indigenous writers. Hence, Aboriginal people used to be unable to portray their own perception of belonging in literature and were rather written *about* by non-Indigenous authors than being active participants in the writing of their own cultural memory.¹

Regardless the numerous studies addressing the *white* Australian perception of belonging as well as the Aboriginal sense of belonging as a metaphysical phenomenon, significantly fewer scholars have previously focused on an extensive comparison of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective and its representation in post-colonial Australian fiction. Previous work on fiction writing has predominantly addressed the positions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal belonging individually instead of juxtaposing them against each other. Particularly, the novels presented in this thesis and their portrayal of belonging have primarily been investigated either in isolation or in comparison to similar works.

The purpose of this thesis is an examination of the Australian vision of belonging and its representation in post-colonial literature. The foundation of this paper is built on the analysis of the two award-winning novels *Mullumbimby* by Melissa Lucashenko and *The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan. The first novel is an Aboriginal writer's attempt to process the past crimes against Indigenous Australians by presenting an Aboriginal protagonist on her quest to reconnect with her culture and reclaim the land that is rightfully hers. The second novel represents a non-Indigenous Australian author's approach to construct a powerful sense of belonging of his non-Aboriginal protagonist. Both novels are set in the 1990s in the aftermath of the Mabo judgement, which redefined the public and political perception of Indigenous Australians. As a result of the absence of an apparatus that can provide valid data on the sense of belonging of

¹ Parts of this passage have been taken from an unpublished paper written by myself.

an individual (Miller 216), comparative literature analyses such as the one conducted in this thesis are amongst the few instruments to investigate the complex subject matter. The thorough investigation of these two literary works explores how the writers communicate their notions of belonging to the audience and what visions of belonging they promote.

The second chapter of this thesis provides the theoretical background that is pivotal for a profound understanding of the concept of belonging. After an elaboration of the meaning of the term 'belonging' and several attempts for definitions, an overview of the landmarks in Australian history, which are essential for the comprehension of the subject matter, is presented. This historical background is vital to comprehend the shift in the vision of belonging in Australia from the establishment of the settler colonies to the present. Additionally, an insight in the relevance of belonging in literature and fiction writing is given to facilitate the comprehension of the subsequent analysis.

The third chapter of this thesis presents the novels chosen as the foundation of the analysis of Australian belonging and provides concise summaries of the individual narratives. Subsequently, the fourth chapter analyzes the most relevant aspects of belonging in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*. The first subsection discusses the representations of belonging to land. Firstly, the longing for belonging and ownership are juxtaposed. Secondly, the notions of inheritance of knowledge and property in Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies are discussed. Thirdly, several accounts of metaphysical events in the novels are evaluated. The second subsection investigates the portrayal of the relevance of belonging to people in the presented literature. Apart from the significance of the affiliation to the Australian nation as well as to Aboriginal nations, the role of the family is outlined. The third subsection unfolds the numerous accounts of insecurity of belonging of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters and asserts how this insecurity eventually results in despair, nationalism and racism. The fourth subsection of the analysis of *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* deconstructs some of the most prominent stereotypes of belonging in the two novels. These deconstructions include the stereotypes of racist non-Indigenous people and uneducated Aboriginal people. Finally, the romanticizing of the Aboriginal sense of belonging in the literature is investigated.

2. The Theory of Belonging

In her essay *Gender, Genre and Geography*, Lucashenko claims that “[k]nowledge of land [and] knowledge of the spiritual world” are among the three core elements that “define us as adults” (51). Thus, she compares the spiritual connection a person can have with the land with a certain coming-of-age process. This connection symbolizes a spiritual path that provides the transition from a somewhat childish perception of the world, which is perceived as a mere habitat and locus where life takes place, to a mature and profound relationship, that lies at the very heart of human identity. As this example illustrates, it is evident that the abstract concept of belonging requires an in-depth investigation on its various meta levels.

In the past fifty years, people all over the world and Australians in particular have undergone a remarkable reevaluation of their attitude towards their lands and nations. In this respect, Linn Miller locates a “radical reassessment” in the relation of the Australian people towards their land and history (215). Particularly, non-Indigenous Australians have had to learn to adapt to their fundamentally reshaped role in the country’s colonial past after having been confronted with the despicable crimes of their ancestors. As a result, this investigation of the darkest chapter of Australian history has become the crucial component in the exploration of a new Australian national identity (Miller 215). Miller further elaborates that it is comprehensible that a large number of non-Indigenous Australians experience guilt, shame or pity in the light of these disclosures of Aboriginal “dispossession and oppression” (216).

The ability to comprehend these many-faceted historical and cultural processes requires a profound understanding of the complex concept of belonging. Therefore, the following section is dedicated to an elaboration of the meaning of ‘belonging’ as well as an overview of several attempts for definitions.

2.1. Definitions

As a result of the broad usage of the word 'belonging' and its use in everyday speech, it is vitally important to define the term in greater detail. A glance at the large variety of definitions for 'belonging' which can be found in dictionaries sheds light on the complexity and diversity of the subject matter. Subsequently, various definitions will be introduced to provide an overview of the different approaches to belonging, indicating the problematic nature of a definition for this abstract concept. The following definitions exemplify that there is no consensus as to which areas of life belonging is connected. They hint, however, towards a collective understanding regarding belonging in Western culture. It is relevant to mention that an explicit entry for 'belonging' itself is absent in several of the investigated dictionaries and merely the verb 'to belong' is elaborated.

Similarly to the majority of other dictionaries, Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary puts the meaning 'possession' in the first position while proceeding to define 'belonging' as a "close or intimate relationship". Likewise, the verb 'belong' is classified as "be[ing] the property of a person". It has to be noted that in all subsequently cited dictionaries, this is the primary definition of the verb 'belong' and, henceforth, will not be repeated in the following elaborations. Other definitions of 'belong' in Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary include "to be attached or bound by birth, allegiance or dependency" and "to be properly classified". In addition to the aforementioned meanings, Collins Dictionary further describes the meaning of 'belonging' as a "secure relationship" or "affinity". The Oxford Dictionary of English defines 'to belong' – among other meanings – as "to be rightly placed". It is further elaborated that 'belong' is based on the Old English word 'gelang' meaning "at hand, together with". Thus, it becomes evident that the originally inclusive meaning of the word developed into the modern exclusive sense.

Cassell's dictionary defines 'to belong' as "to be appropriate, to pertain; to be the property of" and remarkably adds the meaning "to be connected with, to be a native or resident of". Notwithstanding, 'belonging' is merely described as "anything belonging to one; one's possessions". The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary likewise defines 'to belong' as "to pertain, be proper; be connected with". Interestingly enough, the Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary describes 'to belong' as "to be rightly placed or

classified; to fit a particular environment". It is well worth mentioning that of all investigated dictionaries, this definition can merely be found in this one particular Australian dictionary. This indicates the unique position that belonging adopts in Australian discourse and identity formation.

While the noun 'belonging' is quite often not explicitly included, some sort of 'relationship' that goes beyond possession is solely mentioned in less than 50 per cent of the investigated dictionaries. This underscores the limited focus on belonging as a metaphysical concept in Western societies and illustrates the dominance of the possessive mentality in non-Aboriginal cultures. Before further examining the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous perspectives on belonging, the concept itself will subsequently be investigated on a neutral level to facilitate a transition to the Australian context.

One of the major challenges when attempting to provide a comprehensive definition for the term 'belonging' is its versatile usage in "everyday and scientific registers" (Mattes et al. 1). As a result of its excessive use outside of scholarly discourse, the meaning of belonging has often been reduced to an elementary level. Therefore, Mattes et al. pose the question how academics might approach the topic professionally while embracing "its contradictions and inconsistencies" (1). On the one hand, belonging has to be interpreted in "relation to [its] neighboring concepts such as 'identity' and 'affiliation'" (2). Accordingly, aspects such as "people's affective [...] attachments to places, landscapes, languages and material objects" need to be considered and it has been found that these factors are often more representative of the general perception of belonging than the "notion of cultural identity" (2). On the other hand, belonging is closely associated with community and being part of a group (2). This connection to a community or group and the sensation of belonging to the land are the foundation of the analysis of the Australian vision of belonging in the later chapters of this thesis.

As a result of the significance of belonging for social, cultural and historical debates, several studies have previously attempted to measure people's sense of belonging. Most of them underscore the relevance of belonging for a person's "psychological and physical well-being" and, therefore, belonging has been identified as "a basic human

need” (Hagerty & Patusky 9). In search of a more reliable tool to assess a person’s belonging, Hagerty and Patusky, for example, designed “a self-report instrument to measure sense of belonging in adults, the Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI)” (9). However, since belonging is such a complex, multilayered phenomenon, many scholars emphasize that a general approach to investigate people’s belonging would neglect its complexity and individuality. On this matter, Miller points out that “[t]here is considerable disagreement as to what kind of criteria might be used to measure correctly the phenomena of belonging” adding that researchers still lack a comprehensive apparatus to adequately measure a person’s sense of belonging (216). In this regard, another major difficulty is that the idea of belonging does not merely incorporate humans but instead involves “other agents [such as] animals, plants, spirits, places, things, institutions, memories, and discourses” (Mattes et al. 1). Particularly, the notion of belonging to animals in *Mullumbimby* and the relevance of places and spirits in both novels will be further elaborated in the subsequent analysis in chapter 4.

The investigation of the meaning of belonging does not merely take place on a factual but also on an emotional level. While a person can experience “a sense or feeling of belonging”, belonging also occurs in the absence of these emotions and, thus, has to be regarded as a more or less conscious part of our personal identity (Miller 217). As indicated earlier, a profound understanding of belonging is intertwined with its use in everyday lingo. Similarly to Horakova (113), Miller outlines three different “senses’ of belonging”:

[F]irst, the sense of belonging that refers us to social connections, to a sense of connection to a particular community of people; second, the sense of belonging that refers us to historical connections, to a sense of connection to our past or to a particular tradition; third, a sense of belonging that refers us to geographical connections, to a sense of connection to a particular locality or dwelling place. (Miller 217)

She further explains that while all humans establish a connection to the world in one or more of these senses, the philosophical approach towards belonging itself is “something more than this” (217). It can be described as a defining force of our personal identity, which decides whether or not our relationship with ourselves and the world is in harmony. Thus, at the very least, belonging can be regarded “as standing

in correct relation to one's community, one's history and one's locality" (218). Obviously, this can merely be regarded as the "minimum conception" of belonging (218), since the concept is far more complex and diverse and a fulfilling connection to ourselves is likewise vital to establish a correct relation – and therefore to belong (Horakova 113).

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard attributed an enormous significance to the notion of *correct relation*, claiming that it "denotes the quintessential mode of being human" (qtd. in Miller 218). Kierkegaard defined *correct relation* as "a mode of being in which all aspects of the self, as human, are perfectly integrated [and] in which we are as we ought to be: fully ourselves." (qtd. in Miller 218). In Kierkegaard's terms, "belonging is a condition of the self" (qtd. in Miller 219). Yet it is crucial to point out that in his philosophy, the self is inseparable from "the world it lives in", signifying that "the living self belongs in and to the world in which it is located" (Miller 219). These elaborations will be of great importance for the subsequent analysis of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' sense of belonging and the understanding why many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have such distorted emotions concerning belonging and being in correct relation to their land and their communities.

While the previously quoted definition of belonging primarily involves a meaningful relation to ourselves, it is pivotal to likewise take the various "physical and social contexts" that comprise the notion of belonging into account (Miller 220). In her analysis of belonging, Martina Horakova asserts that "[b]elonging [...] is a state of being that embodies an ideal condition in which we as human beings can exist" (123). This "ideal condition" is constituted of internal and external factors. The three different senses of belonging – "community, history and locality" – elaborated earlier, can be regarded as primarily "external" factors of belonging (Miller 220). Miller claims that "the fundamental prerequisite for belonging is transparency", concluding that in order to allow for the establishment of a meaningful sense of belonging, "individuals [must be] able to see themselves as they really are and where they come from" (220). This significance of the knowledge of a person's origins already indicates the problematic nature of settler societies' relation to their new environments. For the Australian context, Miller suggests that "any investigation into the condition of belonging must therefore begin by determining how far settler Australians fulfil the criteria of transparency with

themselves and their worldly inheritance” (220). Many non-Indigenous Australians ignore their descendants’ violent history and, therefore, fail to establish a more transparent account of their presence in Australia. Among the manifold reasons for this behavior might be ignorance, neglect and nescience. In any case, this demeanor inevitably results in the failure of many non-Aboriginal Australians “to come into correct relation” and therefore “to belong” (220).

A substantial amount of research indicates that many Australians “may be suffering from the existential condition of misrelation – a mode of existence that Kierkegaard names ‘despair’” (220). Miller describes this state as “the opposite of correct relation” and, thus, as “the opposite of belonging” (220). In his investigation into Australians’ feelings of belonging, Peter Read (2000) interviewed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to expand the understanding of their perception of belonging. Answering the question if non-Indigenous Australians “will [...] ever belong here [Australia]”, one participant of the study responded that “we are a culture based on financial gain, which doesn’t show itself to be very complex or deep; and until money isn’t number one priority I think we will never deserve, in the Aboriginal sense, to live here” (57). While this one particular sample cannot possibly be representative of a wider proportion of Australians, it indicates the heartfelt conflict many of them experience in relation to their sense of belonging.

The notion of despair and its relevance in historical as well as contemporary Australia will be further discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters of this thesis after providing the indispensable historical and political background for the analysis of the subject.

2.2. Historical and Political Background

An in-depth analysis of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian perception of belonging requires a profound understanding of the interplay of several historical contexts. Therefore, this chapter provides a concise summary of the essential historical background to be able to comprehend the shift in the vision of Australian belonging from the early settler colonies to the present.

2.2.1. Settler Colonialism

The “quest for belonging and identity” is a major reoccurring theme in settler colonies in general and in Australian history in particular (Horakova 110). Moreover, the topic of belonging is deeply interwoven with its interrelation to the country’s cultural identity. In this regard, Wisker (2007) rightfully argues that:

Historically, land has always been an essential ingredient in the determination of identity. Location, geography and land ownership contribute fundamentally to people's sense of belonging, and in many cultures, such as the Australian Aboriginal, they provide a fundamental sense of the wholeness of existence, of which all creatures and people belong. (Wisker 47)

Many scholars claim that this “fundamental sense of the wholeness of existence” is absent in most non-Aboriginal Australians for various reasons. Horakova herein stresses this failure of “non-indigenous Australians [...] to articulate a fulfilling relationship to their land” (110).

Since the beginning of the European settlement in Australia, cultural norms have been imposed on the settlers by the British Empire (Doering 142). Doering stresses that the European settlers were constantly reminded of the British dominance (142). This idea is perfectly exemplified by the fact that place names for the colonies such as New South Wales or Queensland were “imposed from outside” and simultaneously signified “cultural displacement in which all important reference points lie elsewhere” (Doering 135). In addition, Collingwood-Whittick argues that the settlers constantly inspected the new country in search of reference points with their native land (xviii). Wisker supports this argument when referring to the tendency of European settlers to perceive themselves as “cultural migrants” who still belonged to “an older or other world” (156). In their obsessive attempt to transform the new continent into a replication of Britain, the colonizers not only failed to appreciate the prevalent beauty of the land but also “caused irreversible damage to the country’s unique and fragile ecosystem” (Collingwood-Whittick xvii). Similar examples of British idealizations causing tremendous harm can be found in all areas of Australian culture. As a result of these practices, a formation of an independent cultural identity, which is distinct from the British identity, proved to be virtually impossible for many decades.²

² Parts of this passage have been taken from an unpublished paper written by myself.

Ever since the first Europeans settled in Australia, identity debates have dominated the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians, their ancestral homelands and the newly discovered continent with its indigenous inhabitants. These relationships always have to be regarded in the light of the “ideology of white superiority” (Sonn et al. 551). As a result of their maritime dominance, the dominance of the British Empire and the prevalent racist worldviews in Europe at the time, the settlers further developed the idea of white supremacy. Thus, they regarded themselves as superior to the Aboriginal Australians. At the same time, they also experienced a form of “colonial alienation” (Collingwood-Whittick xiii). On the one hand, they suffered due to the considerable physical distance from their motherland. On the other hand, the colonial experience itself proved to depart the colonizers more and more from their original culture. The settlers’ segregation culminated in their inability to relate to neither their native lands nor the recently conquered territory. This particular dichotomy has been investigated by several scholars. Martina Horakova, for example, identifies a veritable “crisis of belonging” (109) among non-Indigenous Australians. Moreover, Germaine Greer has coined the notion of “the pain of unbelonging” (xiv). This pain of unbelonging originates in the human desire and necessity to belong on a communal as well as on a geographical level, which is omnipresent in all human beings (Perrona 105).

The widespread image of the colonizer as the valiant explorer and conqueror has to be scrutinized in the light of the somewhat recent discoveries of the settlers’ incapability to establish a meaningful connection to the land. Therefore, Geoff Rodoreda, argues for a re-evaluation of “the colonialist enterprise in Australia” (1). In lieu of romanticizing the colonizers as “heroic pioneer[s]” (1) they should be analyzed in regard to their insecurity to belong to a country that was neither theirs by birth nor by right (Fjellestad 384). The initial sensation of settlers in Australia towards their “geographical and cultural deracination” was the pain of unbelonging introduced by Greer (Collingwood-Whittick xv). The challenges and incapacity to adapt to the new place on the far side of the world had paralyzing as well as fatal effects on the European colonialists and the Indigenous people of Australia:

It was the colonizer's absolute unfamiliarity with the alien space of the colony and his striving to overcome the feelings of existential homelessness such ignorance engendered that both prompted his initially destructive relationship with the physical environment and drove his genocidal fantasies about the indigenous population. (Collingwood-Whittick xv)

This insecurity led the colonizers to suppress the new continent in multiple ways.

One of the first steps the settlers took to familiarize themselves with the foreign continent was to eradicate "everything that was alien" to them in their new habitat (Collingwood-Whittick xv). In the process of the colonization of the country, the colonizers systematically eliminated as much of the unknown as possible. Among other things, they annihilated as many landmarks as they found that pointed towards any form of previous human settlement. Not only did the settlers successfully attempt to destroy traces of Aboriginal belonging, but they also suppressed the natural state of the land by flooding the original plains, which were vital for the nomadic Aboriginal hunter-gatherer lifestyle, with their vast flocks of sheep (Collingwood-Whittick xv). From the settlers' perspective, the indigenous reference points of belonging had to vanish to make way for their own history – and therefore their own establishment of a sense of national pride (Horakova 118).

From the Aboriginal perspective, the colonizers have to be regarded as "the invading other who redescribes your land and removes your land rights" (Wisker 48). For the majority of Western societies, land and natural environment are generally at the utmost one aspect of a person's identity. For the Aboriginal Australians the land has a mystic significance which explains identity (48). Greer rightfully argues that the systematic destruction of the country is symbolic for the settlers' insecurity and disbelief of being entitled to a profound connection to the land. She concludes that "[i]f we [Australians] truly felt that this country was our home we could not despoil it in this manner; we are trashing it because we suspect it belongs to someone else" (117). As a result of the absence of a legitimate claim to the continent which is built on an ongoing presence on the land, the settlers felt the urgency to take the land from its original owners and establish a colonial enterprise based on ownership and possession legitimized by the alleged supremacy of the British Empire.

One of the repercussions of the colonizers' implementation of private ownership is the increased dependence of the Aboriginal people on them. This "concept of ownership"

proved to be a highly effective method to ensure the subordination of the Indigenous people and simultaneously exploit the country “for economic purposes” (Dolin 3). A crucial component of the effectiveness of the concept of ownership included the erection of new borders. On the one hand, they inflicted on the Indigenous Australians the sensation of separation from their native land – and, thus, from a quintessential aspect of their identity and source of belonging. On the other hand, the new boundaries separated “the colonizer[s] from the colonized” and positioned the erectors of the fences and boundaries in a superior position as they also claimed the sovereignty over both sides of the borders (Edwards 62). The significance of borders and particularly fences plays a crucial role in the analysis of *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* and will be addressed in the later chapters of this thesis.

2.2.2. The Doctrine of *terra nullius*

Arguably the most significant element of the legal justification of the British colonization of Australia was the notion of *terra nullius*. The idea of *terra nullius* stems from the premise that Australia was vacant of human settlement upon the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove in 1788 – an empty land, so to speak, belonging to no one. The British had justified their invasion of the continent by claiming that there was no previous occupation of the land and constructed the fabrication that Australia had been settled peacefully by the British colonialists (Rodoreda 3). The prevailing European worldview at the time suggested that different forms of agricultural cultivation of the land are essential factors to be eligible to make valid property claims to the land (Banner 18). For the Aboriginal people, the fact that their way of farming was so different from European agricultural methods and that it was de facto invisible in comparison to the Western farming infrastructure and, thus, ignored by the colonizers, resulted in the legal basis for the violent dispossession of their land. Therefore, *terra nullius* neglects the authority and sovereignty of the Indigenous Australians and, thus, incorporates the assumption that they were “primitive and uncivilised, without recognisable land laws or social organisation and hence lower in the scale of humanity than the European settlers and their descendants” (Sharp 5). This viewpoint stresses the perceived feeling of white superiority of the colonizers over the Indigenous population.

The doctrine of *terra nullius* is still widely believed to have remained the legal basis for the neglect of Aboriginal land rights in Australia until as recently as three decades ago. However, this widespread belief has been revised by Henry Reynolds, the leading scholar in the historical reappraisal of Australian colonial history. He stresses that the notion of *terra nullius* had already been essentially revised by the Colonial Office itself in the 1830s (*The Law* 124). When plans to “establish the new colony of South Australia” started to take shape, the Colonial Office instructed “South Australia’s founders” (Rodoreda 10) to arrange the purchase of the territory from its native inhabitants (Reynolds, *The Law* 123). This dictate epitomizes the fact that the Australian officials recognized the validity and eligibility of the Aboriginal land rights no later than fifty years after the arrival of the first settlers. Nevertheless, the Australian government continued to systematically ignore the rights of the traditional owners of the land until the late 20th century.

The peaceful frontier stories of the courageous settlers who mastered the challenge of the unknown continent were a common theme in the construction of the Australian national identity. For the largest part of the Western presence in Australia, historians almost exclusively depicted the European colonization as a nonviolent endeavor, which makes an analytical analysis of the facts increasingly difficult. This historical fabrication started to be challenged and refuted from the 1970s onwards. Reynolds points out that Aboriginal resistance can be retraced to the very beginning of the British settlement in Australia (*Other Side* 67). He further elaborates that the systematic oppression of the Indigenous Australians by the colonizers had atrocious consequences threatening their way of life, which had been passed on from generation to generation for thousands of years. Upon their arrival, the settlers annexed the most prosperous territories and monopolized the access to water. Furthermore, “[i]ndigenous animals were driven away, plant life eaten or trampled and Aborigines pushed back into marginal country [...]. Patterns of seasonal migration broke down, areas free of Europeans were over utilised and eventually depleted of flora and fauna” (Reynolds, *Other Side* 72). There are various reasons for the dramatic decline of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. As the Aboriginal people saw themselves driven to the margins of existence, violent resistance was often their only resort. However, the superior military

force of the colonists doomed this desperate endeavor from the start. Combined with the outbreaks of diseases introduced by the Europeans such as smallpox or tuberculosis, malnutrition and systematic killings resulted in the tremendous reduction of the number of Indigenous Australians by the turn of the 20th century. All in all, it is estimated that up to two-thirds of the Indigenous population died between the European invasion and the end of the 19th century (MacLeod 70).

The genocide against the Aboriginal people is undoubtedly the most controversial reason for the decrease in the Indigenous Australians' population. Robert Manne estimates that their population decreased from around one million in 1788 to around 70,000 in the 1920's – already taking those with partial white parentage into account (103). It is crucial to underscore that historians have very opposing views to what extent the killings and massacres were systematic and how far they were responsible for the decimation of Indigenous Australians. On the one hand, Henry Reynolds (*Indelible Stain*) and Lyndall Ryan present high estimates and various exuberant cases of massacres where Aboriginal people were slaughtered by the hundreds. On the other hand, Keith Windschuttle argues that these figures are exaggerated and lists countless instances for the fabrication of such massacres, claiming that they are an approach to construct a dramatic chapter in Australia's history. Nevertheless, there are numerous historically verifiable cases which validate the brutal and systematic killings of Indigenous Australians. For example, Robert Hughes lists various stories where Aboriginal people were shot for "dogs' meat and as a form of sport" (414). Deborah Rose presents numerous accounts of Indigenous Australians who were "routinely shot, poisoned or beaten to death" (xxi). The persecutions and killings were one aspect of the tremendous cruelty inflicted on the Indigenous Australians by the colonizers. Another, no less harmful mechanism of suppression, was the previously elaborated denial of their existence implicated in the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Naturally, the dispossession and persecution caused irreversible traumas to the Indigenous Australians that still affect their descendants to this day.³

After years of systematic dispersal and displacement of the Indigenous population, many of them have lost the desire to procreate due to their desperate outlook for a

³ Parts of this passage have been taken from an unpublished paper written by myself.

better future. In this regard, the kidnapping of boys and girls and taking them away from their parents, which had been practiced until the 1970's, played a major role (Jacobs 58). After the Aboriginal Australians have been put into reserves and were controlled in every aspect of life by government officials for many decades (Armitage 18), Indigenous Australian children were taken away from their parents by force from the early 20th century onwards. The Australian government's new policy to eliminate the Indigenous population aimed at their strategic assimilation into the White Australian society. This policy included the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The government's goal was to raise Indigenous children in governmental institutions to annihilate the Aboriginal culture. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "Stolen Generations" (Read, *Stolen Generations*). The immense trauma caused by the separation of Aboriginal families has been passed on from one generation to the next and left the present one deeply scarred and deprived of its origins (Kennedy 163).

2.2.3. The "Mabo" Judgement

The idea of the "silent, dying race", which Australia's Indigenous peoples had been reduced to, started to be deconstructed in the 1960's. Following the "Great Australian Silence" (Stanner 182), the long period that largely ignored Aboriginal culture and their history of dispossession, "Aboriginal protests for better wages and working conditions, citizenship rights [and] land rights" spread all across the continent (Rodoreda 8). One of the first major Aboriginal protests started in 1966 when the Gurindji people protested for better working conditions at a local cattle station in the Northern Territory. One year later, they further extended their protest claiming that the land "belonged to them" and, therefore, they demanded their rights to be officially acknowledged by the government (Rodoreda 9). After eight years, the Federal Government finally recognized the Gurindji people's claims and "granted [them] leasehold rights to their land" (9). This marked the first official recognition of Indigenous land rights by an Australian government.

The "Mabo Case" is beyond doubt the most groundbreaking Aboriginal land rights case in Australian history. The case is named after the Indigenous Australian Eddie Koiki Mabo and initially began in 1982 when Mabo and "his [four] Torres Strait Islander co-plaintiffs" (Rodoreda 2) "claimed customary ownership of the land on the island of Mer

in the Torres Strait of Australia” (10). They argued that their traditional land rights over the island were still legitimate because their ancestors had inhabited the land “[s]ince time immemorial” (Mabo No. 1). “The Mabo decision consists of two judgments (1988 and 1992) in the High Court of Australia concerning the Meriam people of the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait” (Koerner 89). After its initial rejection by the government of Queensland, the High Court of Australia legally recognized their traditional ownership rights in a “landmark decision” on 3 June 1992 (Rodoreda 3). In general terms, the High Court’s historical ruling fundamentally changed the legal jurisdiction in Australia by recognizing “a new form of customary land title for Indigenous Australians: ‘native title’” (2). In the High Court’s decision, Indigenous Australians “were officially recognised as the first legal occupants of the continent” for the first time in the history of the country (2). The judges ruled “that under certain circumstances, indigenous land rights (or ‘native title’) had not been extinguished by white European settlement and indeed, under common law, still existed in some parts of what is now called Australia” (Mercer 195). While many scholars, such as Koerner, argue that the High Court “overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius*” (89), it needs to be stressed that this is not the case. Instead of addressing the doctrine, the High Court merely referred to the “enlarged notion of *terra nullius*” (Mabo No. 2, 24). To overturn *terra nullius* would have also signified a rejection of the British sovereignty of Australia and the recognition of Indigenous Australians’ sovereignty over the continent. The High Court did not “recognise Indigenous sovereignty over the island” and underscored that it was in no position to challenge the “British claim to sovereignty” since this was a matter of international law and could not be debated in an Australian court (Rodoreda 10-11). Instead, the High Court ruled that “the British claim to settle Australia was correct (and indisputable) but that Aboriginal rights to land should not have been denied upon settlement” (11). The recognition of the native title rights of Mabo and his co-plaintiffs explicitly included the recognition of “the native title rights of all Indigenous Australians prior to the establishment of the Colony of New South Wales by the British in 1788” (Rodoreda 10). The judges specifically referred to the past injustices and crimes committed against the Indigenous population in an unprecedented manner:

[T]he common law itself took from indigenous inhabitants any right to occupy their traditional land, exposed them to deprivation of the religious, cultural and economic sustenance which the land provides, vested the land effectively in the control of the Imperial authorities without any right to compensation and made the indigenous inhabitants intruders in their own homes and mendicants for a place to live. Judged by any civilized standard, such a law is unjust and its claim to be part of the common law to be applied in contemporary Australia must be questioned. (Mabo No. 2, 18)

In relation to the doctrine of *terra nullius* and its eligibility in contemporary Australian law, the justices emphasized that:

The fiction by which the rights and interests of indigenous inhabitants in land were treated as non-existent was justified by a policy which has no place in the contemporary law of this country [...]. Whatever the justification advanced in earlier days for refusing to recognize the rights and interests in land of the indigenous inhabitants of settled colonies, an unjust and discriminatory doctrine of that kind can no longer be accepted. (Mabo No. 2, 28-29)

Moreover, the judges defined the dispossession of Indigenous Australians as “the darkest aspect of the history of this nation” (Mabo No. 2, 82).

The Mabo judgement “was the first time an Australian court had recognised indigenous rights to land” and, thus, brought “enormous changes in Australian law, history, politics and culture” (Attwood, Law 1). On the one hand, it fundamentally transformed the “Australian jurisprudence” (Reynolds, *The Judges* 231). On the other hand, it led to a veritable “national crisis” (Atwood, *Mabo* 100) which challenged the legitimacy of the presence of the non-Indigenous population on the continent. The Mabo decision was embraced “by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia” since it introduced “a renewed phase of indigenous empowerment and self-determination” (Mercer 189). Veronica Kelly further described the Mabo judgement as “an irreversible historical moment” which had altered the perception of Australian history for ever (117). For non-Indigenous Australians, it was a turning point in the narrative of the colonization of the continent. As a result of the Mabo decision, they were forced to apprehend and acknowledge “Aboriginal ownership [...] and dispossession” of the land (Webby 17). The Mabo judgement redefined non-Aboriginal Australians’ understanding of the history of the country, its Indigenous Australians and their relationship to each other (Birns & McNeer 9). Furthermore, it resulted in great insecurity of non-Indigenous Australians concerning their right to belong and, thus, their national identity (Rodoreda 3).

2.2.4. Native Title and the Social and Political Aftermath of “Mabo”

Presumably the most important consequence of the Mabo case were the Native Title Act and the subsequent History Wars. These events signaled a shift in the Australian national consciousness regarding the origins and cultural identity of non-Aboriginal Australians. It forced them to reconsider their “identity as a collective community of immigrants” in somebody else’s land (West-Pavlov, *Who’s Australia* 6). Moreover, the new revelations challenged non-Indigenous Australians’ own sense of belonging and forced them to question the entitlement of their being in Australia.

In the aftermath of the Mabo judgement, the High Court’s decision developed into the dominant theme in Australian legal and political discourse. As a consequence of the Mabo decision, Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating delivered a groundbreaking speech at Redfern Park in Sydney on 10 December 1992, which came to be known as “one of the most famous speeches in Australian history” (Langton & Loos 244). In his speech, he denounced the injustices inflicted on the Aboriginal people of Australia by the non-Indigenous Australian population as well as the Australian public’s previous neglect to accept responsibility:

[I]t was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases and the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice and our failure to imagine that these things could be done to us. (Keating, *Redfern* par. 14)

Furthermore, he underlined the deconstruction of the myth of *terra nullius* and acknowledged the obligation of the Australian government to make amends for the committed crimes:

By doing away with the bizarre concept that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans, Mabo establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice. [...] Mabo is an historic decision – we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians.” (Keating, *Redfern* par. 22-23)

Keating’s speech marked the first time in the history of the continent that an Australian prime minister publicly acknowledged the murders, dispossessions and kidnappings of Indigenous Australian people (Rodoreda 14). In the subsequent months of the Mabo decision and Keating’s Redfern address, the government pursued a policy of

reconciliation in an attempt to improve the relationships between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Australians.

Arguably the most controversial step towards reconciliation that followed the Mabo decision was the Native Title Act. It came into force at the end of 1993 and states that Aboriginal people's native title rights remain "intact today in places where they had not been expressly extinguished by the Crown" and where Indigenous Australians can prove an ongoing presence and/or a "continuing attachment to the land" (10-11). These legal requirements have proven to be highly problematic for numerous reasons. On the one hand, the proof of an ongoing presence or attachment to land for Indigenous Australians is extremely difficult. Being a culture, which produced hardly any written documents or scriptures, the history of Aboriginal Australians relies predominantly on oral transmissions (Van Toorn 19). However, Native Title tribunals often fail to recognize this kind of evidence on grounds of limited verifiability. On the other hand, the most contentious aspect of native title is that it forces the traditional owners of the land to regain their lands and rights themselves. In this respect, Indigenous Australian writer Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that even though Aboriginal people were the ones robbed of their country, native title puts "the burden of proof for repossession of [their] lands" on the Indigenous people (*White Possessive* 16). She further points out the injustice and absurdity of the concept of native title claims:

Confirmation of the Indigenous belonging to country is dependent on the interpretation of white people. The legal regime of the nation-state places Indigenous people in a state of homelessness because our ontological relationship to the land, which is the way we hold title, is incommensurable with its own exclusive claims of sovereignty. The legal regime has reproduced the doctrine of *terra nullius* in order to give place and a sense of belonging to itself and its citizens. According to this regime, it is Indigenous people who belong nowhere unless they can prove their title according to the criteria established by the state. Those who are unable to demonstrate ritual, ceremonial and the exercising of continuous rights in land do not belong anywhere other than to be positioned within a discourse of citizenship that seeks to erase dispossession through privileging white sameness over Indigenous difference. (Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive* 16)

It is evident that the Native Title Act is merely an attempt to acknowledge the rights of the traditional owners of the land which is undeniably incapable of providing genuine compensation for the previously committed crimes. However, it was a first step towards

the reconciliation of the Australian people which sparked off a heated public debate dominating the Australian political stage for the following decade and beyond.

The most famous follow-up case after the introduction of the Native Title Act was the “Wik” decision of 1996. The case “Wik Peoples v the State of Queensland” sought to answer the question whether “native title [could] coexist on pastoral leases, or [if] the granting of a pastoral lease extinguished native title rights” (Rodoreda 112). The High Court eventually ruled in favor of the Indigenous Australians. For a brief moment, it appeared as if “the ground of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians [was] shifting towards coexistence” (Nicoll 179). Historian Tim Rowse asserts that due to the violence and brutality of colonial history, non-Aboriginal Australians are morally obliged to construct an environment which would enable a form of coexistence between all Australians – native and foreign (6). This peaceful coexistence appeared to be closer than ever before in the history of Australia. However, the Wik decision faced immediate resistance from farming and mining groups, who called for “exclusive rights” and refused “to be forced to share [the land] with native title holders” (Rodoreda 112). The conservative government led by prime minister John Howard immediately developed a resolution to diminish the effects of the Wik ruling. Howard argued that the Wik decision would threaten the economic stability of the country by jeopardizing the security of the farming and mining sectors. He justified this decision by claiming to establish “a fair balance between respect for native title and security for pastoralists, farmers and miners” (Howard, *Amended*). As a consequence, the “Native Title Amendment Bill” was passed by the members of parliament in 1997.

The years after the introduction of the Native Title Act were shaped by considerable resistance against the new historical narrative built on the revelations of the crimes against the Indigenous people. This period has been described as “a counter-revolution in sensibility concerning the dispossession of the Aborigines” (Manne, *Introduction* 5). Prime minister Howard, for example, called for a reevaluation of the events that had led to the Mabo judgement, claiming that the proud history of the Australian nation should not be demonized as one big colonial crime. The following debate resulted in great controversy among scholars in the field regarding the historical

interpretation of Australian colonial history and “became known as the History Wars” (Rodoreda 15).

Particularly the political stage epitomized the diverging positions of the Australian population regarding the Aboriginal history of the country. In 2008, then prime minister Kevin Rudd reinforced the necessity of a united Australian population and extended Keating’s apology to the Aboriginal people in his address to the Australian Parliament. He opened his speech by encouraging the Australian people, by saying that “there comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future” (Rudd par. 1). He further referred to the inadequate solutions of previous legislations, requesting the members of Parliament to “deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation’s soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia” (par. 3). Towards the end of his speech, Rudd insisted that “[i]t is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together” (par. 80).

An entirely opposing approach towards Aboriginal heritage can be seen in the statements of prime minister Tony Abbott in a question and answer session after delivering the keynote address to the Australian-Melbourne Institute in 2014. Abbott effectively declared that “[Australia] was nothing but bush” before the British establishment of the colony of New South Wales (Henderson par. 2). He further elaborated that Australia “owes its existence to Britain’s ‘form of foreign investment’ in the land” (Davidson par. 1). This statement naturally sparked considerable outrage throughout the Indigenous community. For example, Shayne Neuman, the Indigenous affairs spokesman of the Australian Labor party, stresses that “[i]t’s a denial of [the Aboriginal] culture, their language, their heritage and their custom and basically it shows the Prime Minister has a sort of *terra nullius* type approach to the continent” (Henderson par. 13). Professor Michael Dodson, director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University, asserts that Abbott’s statements are “a typical European colonial thing to say and it probably has its origins in the way in which history, for too long, has been taught in this country” (Davidson par. 9). Williams agrees with Dodson, stating that such commentary is an epitome of the

omnipresence of the notion of *terra nullius* in contemporary Australia (122). Abbott's disturbing comments are a testimony that reconciliation is still a highly idealistic goal which requires a tremendous amount of effort of the entire Australian nation.

Another striking example of the non-Indigenous insensibility and unawareness of the persistence of the doctrine of *terra nullius* is the following conversation between Aboriginal writer Lucashenko and non-Aboriginal author Kate Grenville. When the two met in a café in London, Grenville told Lucashenko how one of her ancestors "took up land" in Australia. Lucashenko responded "What do you mean 'took up'? He took." (Grenville qtd. in Rodoreda 18-19). Thus, Lucashenko challenges Grenville's worldview by rejecting the notion that Australia was an unsettled land upon the arrival of Grenville's ancestors. This incident illustrates that if even an acclaimed writer, who is more than familiar with Indigenous Australian history, can be prone to fall for such "colonial mantras", the doctrine of *terra nullius* is still deeply embedded in Australian society (Rodoreda 220).

2.2.5. Australians and Their Vision of Belonging in the Present

The previously elaborated transformation of non-Indigenous Australians' perception of the history of the country has resulted in a profound conversion of their vision of the Australian nation. The increased sensibility towards the Aboriginal culture and their sense of belonging to the land have brought two major repercussions with them. Firstly, the broader understanding of the Indigenous way of life "has become [...] a source of national pride and admiration" (Miller 221). Secondly, it also resulted in a form of "national envy" (221). The pain of unbelonging experienced by the early European settlers can also be identified in many non-Indigenous Australians today. The revelations of the past decades have promoted an "anxiety of misrelation" among Australians of European descent, who suffer from "a state of conscious despair", partially as a consequence of a lack of the *correct relation* to the land described by Kierkegaard, outlined in the section on the definition of belonging (221). Consequently, Gelder and Jacobs have established the notion of an "Uncanny Australia" (1), where many non-Indigenous Australians mourn the absence of the vital human sensation Ernst Bloch calls *Heimat*. As a result, many of them have embarked on the quest of

discovering a more authentic connection to the land and, thus, a more meaningful sense of belonging. Interestingly enough, a large proportion “of white, educated, middle-class public intellectuals” are highly “skeptical about their entitlement to a sense of belonging” (Horakova 112).

In an attempt to shed light on the contemporary Australian vision of belonging, Catherine Koerner conducted a thought-provoking study on the white perception of belonging in Australia. Her research focused on white Australians’ understanding of Aboriginal land rights (Koerner 87). The empirical ethnographic study investigated “rural people who self-identify as *white Australian* [emphasis added]” in order to examine “the key discourses of land, identity and nation and the complexities of how whiteness and race [are] socially produced and lived in rural Australia”. The “in-depth qualitative interviews” revealed that, according to the participants, “white Australian discourses of nation and identity limit most of the respondents’ ability to construct their identity in relation to Indigenous sovereignty” (87). The results further demonstrated that while many rural non-Indigenous Australians are threatened by the complex legal system that native title is comprised of, they are also concerned “that Native Title claimants do not know how to use their land properly and will need training on land management and agricultural practices” (88). Furthermore, the study’s respondents largely neglected the probability that Indigenous Australians would become a relevant factor in the future of the country (98). Moreover, they denied Indigenous sovereignty to reinforce the peaceful settler narrative and maintain “white settler hegemonic power relations” (99). These findings taken together suggest that the non-Indigenous Australian position in relation to Aboriginal rights and authority over land is still severely misguided and requires further extensive measures to reconcile the nation.

An investigation of the contemporary state of non-Indigenous Australians’ attitude towards their spiritual connection to the country poses the question how they can accomplish a fulfilling relationship to their national identity. Historian Peter Read, for example, concludes that their only option is “by ‘sharing’ the history and belonging of their Aboriginal counterparts” (Miller 222). It is obvious that this approach is incapable of building a self-determined consciousness of belonging as it merely models the Indigenous belief system, which is categorically different from the Western concept of belonging. Therefore, Miller rightfully asserts that “any model of identity that relies upon

appropriation of an 'other' in order to achieve self-authentication is, by definition, structurally flawed" (222). University professor and historian Manning Clark outlines the non-Indigenous Australian difficulty to establish a meaningful sense of belonging as followed (144):

Sometimes when I stand in the Australian bush on a clear windless day I am visited with strange thoughts ... I wonder whether I belong ... I am ready, and so are others, to understand the Aboriginal view that no human being can ever know heart's ease in a foreign land, because in a foreign land there live foreign ancestral spirits. We white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien. We must either become assimilated or live the empty life of people exiled from their spiritual strength. (144)

In order to comprehend this perceived inferiority to the Indigenous population in regard to the establishment of a spiritual connection to the land, it is essential to highlight the fundamental differences between the Aboriginal and the Western approach towards belonging.

One of the most distinctive features between the sense of belonging of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is the idea of land ownership and possession. While this concept is absent in the Aboriginal mindset, it is the dominant ideology of non-Indigenous Australians. Horakova asserts that the establishment of a sense of belonging of non-Aboriginal Australians is impeded by "an interrelation of ownership and possession" (117). This urgency of ownership can be related to the violence of the settler colonial history, where the colonizers killed and dislodged the traditional owners to validate their own claim of possessing the land (Edwards 63). As argued by Potter, the validation of belonging to and the ownership of the land by non-Indigenous Australians is solely built on the exclusion of the Aboriginal people (177-178). She concludes from this idea that the denial of the Aboriginals' humanity built the foundation of the case around which the white settlers constructed their identity (180). Therefore, it is not surprising that the national identity and sense of belonging of many white Australians were shattered under the historical assertions of the 20th and 21st century. Edwards further evaluates that the dislodgement of the natives and the construction of "new borders imposed on the natives' land" were essential to the settlers' attempt to legitimize their claim to the country (62). Interestingly enough, these exact borders were what limited their sense of belonging to the land in comparison to the Aboriginal

people, who perceive the oneness of the country as an essential feature of their identity. As a consequence of the violent dispossession of the traditional owners, many white Australians are still questioning the legitimacy of their sense of belonging to the land.

Probably the most relevant aspect in relation to Indigenous Australians' belonging is its spiritual component. Wisker hypothesizes that while nature and land are generally at the utmost a part of people's identities, their spiritual meaning is what actually "explains" the identity of Aboriginal Australians (48). Nikro pursues a similar approach, indicating that even though non-Aboriginal people can experience and develop this distinct connection to their country, their understanding will never be as substantial and innate as the one of the traditional owners of the land (6). This position is shared by many scholars in the field, among them Miller (216) and Horakova (115). Ashcroft, on the other hand, challenges this viewpoint by making a relevant observation when he argues that the cliché of the superiority of the Aboriginal connection to the land is exactly what obstructs the development of the non-Indigenous Australian identity (*Sublime* 145). Furthermore, he claims that this supernatural connection of the Aboriginal people, which he calls "the sacred", is in fact communicable and, therefore, promotes the idea that it can be acquired by white Australians as well (150). Obviously, this concept is worthy of further investigation since it challenges the dominant assumptions and provides an innovative approach to reconcile non-Indigenous Australians with their violent history. Miller provides an even more innovative dimension to the spiritual assessment of belonging when she points out that, generally, claims about the degree of belonging and, as a result, "true belonging" are subject to interpretation, since there is no apparatus which can actually measure belonging (216-217). Therefore, a general agreement on the degree of a person's belonging is more than unlikely and more research on the topic is essential to develop a deeper understanding of the subject.⁴

It is evident that the quest of non-Indigenous Australians for a meaningful sense of belonging is an extremely complex topic. Their attempt to construct a more fulfilling relationship to the land is pivotal to constitute a more positive self-perception of their

⁴ Parts of this passage have been taken from an unpublished paper written by myself.

Australian identity. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the Australian vision of belonging, an investigation of its representation in literature and, particularly, in fiction writing, provides meaningful insights into the realm of the formation of Australian identity.

2.2.6. Belonging in Literature and Fiction Writing

Narrativity has been an essential instrument in the foundation of Aboriginal societies as well as settler colonies. Story telling is an indispensable means of communities to share and distribute belief systems and construct national identities. Benedict Anderson perceives the nation as an “imagined political community” which is to a large extent represented in the novel (6). Attwood agrees, adding that “[a]ll nations engage in telling highly coloured stories about their origins but this seems to be especially true of colonial societies” (Law 2). Therefore, one of the crucial roles of the narrative is to consolidate individuals by forging overarching values, which can serve as identifying features for people of the same country or community. Such nation building strategies are pivotal in the construction of sensations such as national pride and a shared national consciousness. Ashcroft and Slater confirm this approach, elaborating that “narratives may be among the most effective ways” of constructing and “re-inscribing” national identities (19). In this regard, early settler writing primarily focused on topics such as “hardships endured, the surprising newness of the landscape, the culture, the perceived hostility of both landscape and indigenous peoples and the difficulties of adjusting and making the new place their own” (Wisker 157). A crucial aspect in the development of settler writing included the emancipation from “English cultural norms” by defining unique literary standards to differentiate itself from the British literary tradition (Doering 142).

From the middle of the 20th century onwards, a considerable shift in Australian literature can be recognized. In the past, Indigenous Australians were primarily written *about* by white scholars instead of autonomously describing their own culture, sense of belonging or traditional ways of life. In the same way as the early settler colonial writers in Australia, Indigenous writers had to actively challenge the prevailing standards imposed by white Australian writers and “work against [...] the clichés by which

Australian literature long used to represent their world” (Doering 142). Since the 1960s, Aboriginal authors have extensively elucidated the Indigenous *modus vivendi* in an anglicized Australia (West-Pavlov, *Antipodes* 71). A milestone in the wider recognition of Aboriginal literature was Anita Heiss’ and Peter Minter’s *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Literature* – the first comprehensive collection of Indigenous Australian literary works.

The major political and historical landmark, which initiated a paradigm change in Australian literature, was beyond doubt the Mabo judgement in 1992. Geoff Rodoreda has coined the term “Mabo-turn” in relation to the influence of the High Court’s Mabo decision on Australian literature. In denying the enlarged notion of *terra nullius*, the Mabo ruling has shifted the approach of Australians regarding their national identity (Baker and Worby 32). Furthermore, Mabo has abolished the “Great Australian Silence” in literature once and for all and initiated the broader discussion of Indigenous matters in literary research (Birns 145). Rodoreda argues that fiction writing has been the primary means in the re-shaping and re-configuration of “imaginings and understandings of land and space, settlement and belonging, race and relationships, and nation and history” after Mabo (4). On the one hand, “post-Mabo fiction” centers around “prior and continuous Indigenous occupation and possession of the land” written by non-Indigenous Australian authors (5). On the other hand, it can be manifested as fiction written by Indigenous authors that thematizes the dispossession of Indigenous Australians and the decline in sovereignty over their native land (Gelder & Salzmann 25). In this respect, Rodoreda points out that the term “post-Mabo” has to be perceived with certain reservation since it embodies a settler-colonial viewpoint and, thus, the period should rather be referred to as “post-*terra nullius*” (6). Regardless the official political Australian position that *terra nullius* is merely a concept of the past, the “psychological *terra nullius*” remains omnipresent in the minds of many Australians (7). Despite the prevalence of this colonial mindset, Rodoreda claims that Mabo’s influence on society’s perception of the subject has sparked a cultural change of such profound significance that he established the term “Mabo turn” to elaborate the “cultural shift” initiated by the Mabo ruling (7).

In the years after the Mabo decision, a considerable amount of Australian fiction was largely impacted by Mabo and Mabo fiction defined the political and cultural debate

and vice versa (Rodoreda 8). A substantial increase in the number of publications of post-Mabo fiction has raised the general awareness of topics such as the Aboriginal dispossession by European colonialists (72). Over the past two decades, post-Mabo fiction has shifted from its initial focus on the representation of the Aboriginal dispossession and the defense of their “right to identity” towards a new form of Aboriginal sovereignty (Heiss qtd. in Rodoreda 160; see Hodge & Mishra 92). Rodoreda identifies novels that can be ascribed to this category “sovereignty novels of Aboriginal-authored fiction” (165). Lever herein highlights “the monumental works” of the Indigenous authors Kim Scott and Alexis Wright (514). Particularly Scott’s *That Deadman Dance* and Wright’s *Carpentaria* have to be mentioned in this regard, since they epitomize the development towards sovereign Aboriginal fiction in the 21st century (Brewster, *Whiteness* 67). One distinctive feature of the sovereignty novel is the Indigenous protagonist’s discovery of “their ancestral lands” in the course of the novel (Rodoreda 165). Furthermore, sovereign novels function as creators of spaces, “in which Aboriginal people are depicted as exercising sovereignty” over their land as well as over their own lives (Rodoreda 232) Hence, while earlier Aboriginal fiction centered on the quest for identity, sovereignty novels focus primarily on the fulfillment of the Indigenous sense of belonging.

The two novels chosen as the focus of this thesis are Melissa Lucashenko’s *Mullumbimby* and Andrew McGahan’s *The White Earth*. The choice of these two award-winning works relies on their multi-faceted representations of the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australian vision of belonging in Australia. While both of them can be identified as “post-Mabo fiction”, merely *Mullumbimby* can be regarded as a sovereignty novel, since McGahan was not of Aboriginal descent. On the other hand, *The White Earth* presents the non-Aboriginal Australian perspective on belonging to land, place and community. Therefore, McGahan’s work provides an indispensable insight into the post-colonial mindset of Australians of European descent. The investigation of the non-Indigenous Australians’ perception of belonging is essential to elucidate their relationship to the country as well as to contrast the unique Aboriginal connection to the land with the Western position on the subject matter. Thus, the juxtaposition between the two novels unfolds the differences and discrepancies between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal vision of Australian belonging.

3. The Novels

The following chapter presents *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* and provides comprehensive summaries of the two novels. For a deeper understanding of the presented literary works, it is vital to evaluate them in consideration of the political, historical and “sociocultural [...] contexts” elaborated in the previous chapter (Leane 122).

3.1. *Mullumbimby*

Mullumbimby is the story of an Indigenous Australian single mother on her quest for identity and belonging. Jo Breen has just accomplished what many Aboriginal Australians have been longing for since their dispossession of the country. She has bought back a part of her ancestral homeland in the Byron Bay hinterland in northern New South Wales with the money from her divorce settlement. While the pride of this accomplishment vitalizes her, the tasks of raising her thirteen-year-old daughter Ellen, restoring her recently acquired decrepit farm and putting food on the table push her to her limits. Despite having a university degree in Australian history and comparative literature, she earns her living as the caretaker of the local cemetery. In her few spare moments, she tends her horses Athena and Comet and tries to cultivate her land to bring back its former glory and do her ancestral Bundjalung land justice. Despite telling herself how happy and content she is with her life, she longs for a more fulfilling connection to her land.

What Jo begins to understand in the course of the novel is that apart from her incomplete relationship to her country, partly due to the fact that she does not know her ancestral stories and heritage, she craves a larger “mob” to help her reconnect to herself and her roots. Her prayers seem to have been answered when Twoboy Jackson arrives in Mullumbimby claiming native title over the area. As Jo and Twoboy commence a romantic relationship, his native title claim not only turns Jo’s life upside down but begins to divide the whole Indigenous community of the region. While Twoboy and his brother Lazarus attempt to regain the native land of their ancestors by means of native title, Jo nurtures her connection to her land by taking care of it in a

more fundamental way by thriving in its beauty and exploring it on the back of her beloved horses.

When Jo hears mysterious voices, which turn out to be ancestral songs, in the forest of Bottlebrush Hill, she is frightened by the unknown and scared of the connection she initially longed for. Twoboy, on the other hand, recognizes his opportunity to provide the necessary evidence for his native title case but is incapable to hear the songs himself. After Jo's pride and joy Comet drowns in a creek strangled by the barbed-wire fence of her white neighbor Rob Starr, she falls into a deep depression. For a while, all she sees in the landscape are fences, boundaries and other markers of white colonization and suppression. Jo's joie de vivre resurfaces when she receives an anonymous gift – a young stock horse she goes on to name Gift.

Meanwhile, the ongoing dispute for native title between Twoboy and his mob and the resident Bundjalung clan, the Bullockheads, begins to escalate. Threatened by the possibility of the legitimacy of the Jackson's claim, the rivalling family's patriarch Oscar Bullockhead terrorizes Twoboy with death threats and assaults him with the assistance of his nephew. To maintain his image and calm Jo, Twoboy pretends to be unimpressed and presumes his quest of regaining his land. On a family trip to Lake Majestic, where Twoboy hopes to hear the ancestral songs, which have remained hidden from him so far, Jo's Nephew discovers that the lines on the palms of Ellen's hands are an exact copy of the map of the region. This revelation leaves Jo deeply perplexed and Ellen utterly terrified. Twoboy, however, is enthralled to have found the proof he was looking for to win his native title case. When he desperately attempts to convince Jo to make Ellen testify in front of the native title tribunal, Jo rejects him with the confidence gained from the power of her ancestors, "a mighty army of Goorie women" who had been protecting their children "for tens of thousands of years" (250). In this very moment, Jo not only develops her own sense of belonging by connecting with her ancestors and her land – she *becomes* them.

Devastated and overwhelmed by the signs her hands bare, Ellen intentionally burns them to erase the imprint of the country on her skin. Helpless to guide her daughter, Jo looks for advice and guidance from Aboriginal elders. As a result of the ongoing native title war, she turns to the only Bundjalung elder that comes to her mind – derelict

Uncle Humbug. She finds him in hospital after having almost been beaten to death by the local police. He points her into the direction of his sister, Granny Nurrung, who Jo has always believed to be a rather untypical Goorie⁵ because of her absolute faith in Jesus.

At the climax of the story, Granny Nurrung reveals the mysteries of the plot to Jo. She unfolds that the mystical voices Jo has heard in the hills are songs telling ancestral stories. These have been taught to the lyrebirds by the Bundjalung people upon the arrival of the colonizers to guarantee the inheritance of their knowledge through time. Just as the maps on Ellen's hands, the stories are meant to show Jo that she is home and has found the right country for her and her little family. Granny Nurrung further discloses that Ellen, together with her fifteen-year-old grandson Sam, is the next custodian of the land. Their purpose is to protect the waterhole on the border of Rob Starr's and Jo's farms, which has been a sacred site for Bundjalung people since time immemorial. In stark opposition to Jo's initial image of Rob Starr, he turns out to be a protector of Aboriginality, who has overwritten his farm to Sam to guarantee that the sacred waterhole is kept safe. Lastly, even Twoboy's native title claim has a happy ending as he makes peace with the rivalling Bundjalung clan and shares native title over the area. Not only has Twoboy finally received the land and recognition he has longed for, but also Jo has found her mob – and therefore her belonging.

It is well worth mentioning that this "Sovereignty novel of Aboriginal-authored fiction" draws on autobiographical material (Rodoreda 219). Lucashenko is of Bundjalung descent and spent several years in the area where *Mullumbimby* is set "raising children and horses" (Chenerey par. 13). She wrote this ode to her country over a period of five years in considerable isolation "after a divorce" (Chenerey par. 13). In an interview she has stated that her purpose in writing novels is "to show people that there is a living breathing Aboriginal culture in Australia" (Lucashenko, Q&A). In her work, she attempts to shed light on "the meaning of place, story and belonging, not just for Aboriginal people but (and increasingly so) for all Australians" (Gildersleeve 81). Consequently, these topics will be elucidated in the subsequent analysis.

⁵ Aboriginal person from far northern New South Wales or south-eastern Queensland (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 284)

3.2. *The White Earth*

McGahan's *The White Earth* is set in 1993 – one year after the Mabo judgement, which brought a shift in the perception of Australian colonialization, and shortly before the native title legislation was passed. Among the core themes of the novel are “postcolonial belonging, inheritance, and the violent foundations of the nation” (Barnwell & Cummins 156). At the heart of the narration lies the investigation of the legitimacy of non-Indigenous belonging in postcolonial Australia. The narrative presents two different chronological perspectives shifting back and forth in time. The first one illustrates nine-year-old William McIvor's coming-of-age-process in the aftermath of the Mabo decision. McGahan utilizes “William's supposed naiveté [to introduce] the unknowing reader to the region and the politics surrounding the lead-up to the Native Title Act” (Crane 5). The second temporal frame delineates the story of his great uncle John McIvor's life from the early twentieth century to the year 1993. Therefore, John's life story provides an overview of Australian history from the inter-war years to the Mabo decision. Thus, the novel skillfully “contrasts contemporary Australia with a bygone era” (Scott W. 57).

The novel is set on the Darling Downs in rural Queensland and commences with an explosion, which kills William's father and ends his childhood in the blink of an eye. Since his neurotic mother cannot provide for them, they have to sell their farm and move to his father's uncle John, who William has never met before. John's homestead is a derelict colonial mansion on Kuran Station, where his only company upon William's arrival is the malicious housekeeper Mrs. Griffith. William soon learns that his great uncle's motifs for taking him and his mother in are neither generosity nor compassion but the search for an heir to his property. In the process, John tries to pass on his understanding and knowledge of his land to William, hoping to convey his sense of belonging to him. The imminence of the native title legislation threatens John's ownership of his beloved country. He is the head of a nationalist movement that calls itself the *Australian Independence League* and aims to stop the legislation. The organization serves as a historical reappraisal of the nationalist ideology that led to the establishment of the Australian “One Nation Party” (Crane 2).

The second timeline of the novel unfolds the tale of John's youth, when he develops his lifelong dream to become the owner of Kuran Station, where his father Daniel works

as the station manager. After Daniel's plan to marry John to the female heir of the station is crushed by the death of her grandfather and family patriarch Edward White, John wanders the land looking for work in the era of the great depression. He takes up work as a logger, where he severely injures his leg and is marked with a limp for the rest of his life. After falling in love with the daughter of his employer, John impregnates her and later inherits her father's money. This inheritance lays the financial foundation to pursue his quest for ownership of his childhood home – Kuran Station. He becomes a farmer and subordinates his whole life to the acquisition of his native land. Even when his best friend Dudley returns from the battlefield a broken alcoholic and rapes John's only daughter, John decides to send his daughter to boarding school to ensure the inheritance of Dudley's property. Eventually, John manages to purchase Kuran Station in his mid-fifties, but he has sacrificed his relationship to his wife and daughter and even his own conscience for his obsession with ownership.

With the arrival of John's estranged daughter Ruth at Kuran House, William is offered a contrasting position on native title, the history of the Aboriginal Australians and settler colonial history for the first time in his life. After months of indoctrination by his great uncle, William is introduced to an alternative approach towards the non-Indigenous occupation of Australia. Ruth investigates accounts of Aboriginal settlements on Kuran Station and when she reveals her findings to William, he is torn between his great uncle's tales of settler heroism and his great cousin's disclosures of prior Indigenous presence on the land. William's confusion symbolizes the uncertainty and insecurity experienced by many non-Indigenous Australians towards their sense of belonging in the light of the revelations of the Mabo decision.

At the climax of the narration, Ruth unfolds the crimes of her grandfather Daniel to John. When John was a little child, his family was at the station's waterhole where they encountered a group of Indigenous people, who had come back to the place where they had been performing rituals and ceremonies for generations. John's father had killed them in cold blood and had buried their remains at the bottom of the water hole. This story would serve as proof in a native title tribunal that the Indigenous owners of the land had done everything in their power to maintain their connection to the land and their descendants would therefore have a legitimate claim to the country. After John makes William recover the bones of the Aboriginal people, he tries to burn them

to dispose the evidence and ensure his ownership of the land. At the same time, he names William his heir in his testament to pass on the burden of the house to him. This reflects the inheritance of the shame and guilt of the colonial crimes by present generations of non-Indigenous Australians. In trying to burn the bones and erase the evidence of the atrocities of the past, John accidentally sets the house on fire and dies in the flames. Driven by her craving for ownership, William's mother runs inside the burning house to retrieve the testament and dies as well. In the last scene, the pain in William's ear, which has accompanied him since the beginning of the narration, turns out to be a tumor that had resulted from a slap his mother gave him for helplessly standing by when his father died. Watching over William next to his hospital bed, Ruth decides to take care of him. With William representing the national conscience of Australia and Ruth being the guardian of the Aboriginal heritage, this last scene of the narration symbolizes a glimpse of hope for the reconciliation of the Australian nation.

The subsequent chapter is dedicated to an in-depth analysis and juxtaposition of the core aspects of belonging in the two novels.

4. Analysis

4.1. Belonging to Land

Belonging to land, country and place are presented as the leitmotif of the two novels. This chapter illuminates the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian approaches towards belonging to land and their representations in the presented literary works. After an introduction to the general aspects of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal belonging to land and place, the first subchapter discusses the differences between the represented positions towards ownership and possession in contrast to the notion of the longing for belonging to the land on a spiritual level. The second subsection examines the significance of the inheritance of knowledge in *Mullumbimby* and contrasts it with John McIvor's motifs to transmit his sense of belonging to his great nephew. The third subchapter outlines various metaphysical events in the two novels and analyzes their symbolic meanings in regard to the characters' relationships to land.

In her essay *Country: Being and Belonging on Aboriginal Lands*, Lucashenko attempts to give an explanation of the meaning of land and a definition of belonging to land that does the Aboriginal *modus vivendi* justice. She elaborates her month-long quest to explain a concept almost as old as time itself in the words of a language that is not equipped to elucidate the mystical world of Indigenous Australians. Eventually, she comes to the conclusion that there is no encyclopedic definition for the Aboriginal connection to their country. Instead, she decides to tell a poignant story of love, life and family, depicting home as a place of connectedness and family ties rather than a geographic location. She reveals that she "didn't ask many Aboriginal people what country 'meant'. To them it would have seemed a strange, almost ridiculous, question" (*Country* 7-9). Lucashenko's dilemma defining the Aboriginal concept of belonging to land epitomizes the difficulty to find an overarching formula that would satisfy scientific scholars and the Indigenous community alike. Therefore, this thesis aims to present the different perspectives on belonging to facilitate an insight into the Australian vision on the topic.

Lucashenko underscores the importance of the knowledge of one's country. This type of knowledge includes not only its geographic nature but also its stories. She

elaborates that “[k]nown Indigenous country is the place of healing, nurture, sanctuary, responsibility, and safety” (*Not Quite White* 28). For Indigenous people, such country functions as “myth and resource and history and economy” at the same time (28). Lucashenko herself comes from a difficult social background and a poverty-stricken family, but she refutes possible stereotypes in regard to the hardships of her youth claiming that “[w]e had land. What else mattered?” (24). For Aboriginal Australians, land equates the “source and the locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit” (Stanner qtd. in Collingwood-Whittick xxix). Lucashenko further points out that in the worldview of Aboriginal people, all country has value, but this value exceeds the economic definition of the term and materializes in the unification of the land and the self (qtd. in Chenery par. 8). Indigenous scholar Irene Watson agrees with Lucashenko, adding that Aboriginal belonging can be understood as “a traditional form of property whereby people are connected to place to the extent that they are, in fact, identified by and with place: [...] we are not merely on and in the land; we are of it” (*Buried* 92). Lucashenko expands on Watson’s explanation and provides an insight into the significance of a person’s origins in Aboriginal tradition:

We Aboriginal peoples around the globe identify ourselves primarily by the landscapes we call home. We are saltwater people, freshwater people, island people, forest people, desert people. It is taken for granted that the landscape which has fed and nurtured our ancestors has shaped us in deep, unspoken ways. Who understands this? Gardeners, perhaps. Stonemasons. Certain poets. Some farmers, and some fishermen. (Lucashenko, *Not Quite White* 27)

She provides an example from the Yugambeh language of the Indigenous people from the area of the present-day Gold Coast in southern Queensland where the common greeting between people of Aboriginal descent is “Jingawahlu?”, meaning “From where? Where have you travelled, stranger, and can you a tale unfold?” (27). This example illustrates the meaning Indigenous Australians attach to their native land. Lucashenko goes on to explain that:

[r]egardless of their origins, Aboriginal peoples share a devotion to their own country. No matter how stony, cold, barren, dry, hot, or harsh their country might appear to others, to its indigenes it is the only place that truly matters. It is where they or their parents were born, where their ancestors are buried, where the generations before them have lived and died. It is indisputably where they belong. It is where a correct life is possible; your true country is the Good Life incarnate. (*Not Quite White* 27)

These days, there are more and more non-Indigenous Australians, who have developed an understanding of the importance of land for Aboriginal Australians. Many of them equate “country [...] with belonging” (Lucashenko, *Country* 9). However, on a wider scale, the awareness of the Aboriginal sacred is frequently undermined and not taken seriously by the Australian public (Ashcroft, *Sublime* 149). To some extent, this is due to fundamental differences between the Aboriginal and the Western approach towards belonging and ownership.

In Western societies, land is generally understood in relation to ownership, possession and property. The foundation of this understanding lies “in the Anglo-Australian legal tradition, [where] property is primarily theorised in terms of rights, not in physical terms. Land, or ‘real property,’ as it is categorised, is viewed in very general terms, as defined parcels of space, as a commodity that can be exchanged, bought and sold” (Dolin 2). Lucashenko argues that this position is based on the analytical mindset of the Western world and defines different categories, how country is perceived by non-Aboriginal people: “Country as Economy. Country as Geography. Country as Society. Country as Myth. Country as History” (*Country* 10). Irene Watson summarizes that “[t]he white way of knowing country is forged by ownership, possession and control. The Aboriginal way of knowing comes through spirituality, identity and traditions of historical connectedness” (*Settled* 46). The failure of the European colonizers to acknowledge the Aboriginal philosophy regarding land resulted in the violent occupation and dispossession of the continent, which scattered the Indigenous sense of belonging (Wildburger 69). Subsequently, the different perceptions of belonging of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* are analyzed to elucidate the vision of belonging to land that is represented in the respective novels.

4.1.1. The Longing for Ownership and Belonging

At the center of the narration in *Mullumbimby* is the protagonist’s quest to establish a meaningful relationship to her ancestral homeland. Literary critic John Messnick asserts that apart from the broad variety of themes *Mullumbimby* addresses, the heart of the novel is “the deeper, spiritual, and essential conflict: the fight to retain a connection with the land” (226). Lucashenko states that among Aboriginal people, it is

believed that “[i]f a woman can only find the right country, [...] she will find her Home at last” (*Country* 9). In the early stages of the narration, Jo experiences a “deep solid vein of primal satisfaction” in having been able to buy back a piece of Bundjalung land (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 30). It is striking, however, that she is caught up in the Western concept of ownership in regard to her connection with her recently acquired farm. The pride she senses stems from the accomplishment to “own” such a vast piece of land (21). Rodoreda argues that her “possessive claim to entities in the landscape [*Her trees. Her mountain.* (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 30)] mimics the settler coloniser’s claim to possession of land” (223). Therefore, Jo is incapable to establish a form of belonging that is closer to the traditional “Aboriginal relationship to land” (Watson qtd. in Rodoreda 224). Yet in the novel, the fact that Jo has managed to regain a part of her ancestral country is presented as her success over the system of “white property ownership”, where she has “[b]eaten the colonisers at their own land game” (Rodoreda 224). Thus, the purchase of her native land by means of freehold title “is represented as a strategy for survival over colonialism” (224).

Another approach of Indigenous people to the reestablishment of a connection to country presented in *Mullumbimby* is by means of native title. For Twoboy, the outlook of retrieving his ancestors’ land allows him to accept the fact that he requires a white court’s approval to do so. It is his sheer lust for land that empowers him and he is willing to sacrifice his pride and put his big ego aside to reclaim his native land for himself and his family (41). Apart from the different possibilities of Aboriginal possession and ownership Jo and Twoboy demonstrate, namely freehold title and native title, the novel progressively unfolds that the quintessential form of Indigenous belonging is “based on an intimate *knowledge* [emphasis added] of the land’s history, its stories, its animals and its sacred sites” (Rodoreda 222-223).

Arguably the purest form of belonging to land in the novel is impersonated by Ellen. In an interview, Lucashenko explains that the key aspect of the Aboriginal path to a profound relationship to country “is to be mindful and to be observant of both people and of all sentient beings” (Lucashenko qtd. in Chenery par. 11). One of the first scenes that demonstrates Ellen’s transcendental connection to the land is when she has a nightmare that foreshadows a catastrophic event. Even though she is unable to define the imminent mischief, she is certain that it concerns someone of great importance in

her immediate surroundings. Referring to previous instances, Jo is well aware that “[l]ike Aunty Barb, Ellen had the second sight”, thus, indicating that this supernatural sense is passed on by ancestral spirits (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 106). When Jo finds Comet’s dead body strangled in the creek the next morning, Ellen’s metaphysical revelation is proved to be correct (117).

The image of Ellen as the epitome of Aboriginal belonging is further reinforced in various passages of the narration. When branches of a tree hit the earth “lethally fast, right beside Ellen, and [smash] open the closest beehive”, she is covered in bees and miraculously remains unharmed and appears to be protected by the land (166). Her drawings are another example, how her extraordinary relationship to land and culture is transmitted. Ellen’s artistic gift allows her to express her exceptional knowledge of Aboriginal tradition (179). Ultimately, her unique connection to the land is revealed when Timbo discovers that the lines on the palms of her hands are an exact map of the region:

The contour lines, roads and watercourses of the country shown by the map were marked in exact replica by Ellen’s red palm print. Starting just below her daughter’s fingers, the artery of the Brunswick River wound its ancient way through the valley. The major roads snaked over the land, with smaller gravel offshoots falling away to either side in the hills. There, mutually represented in clear red traces on the wide car door, where the bitumen roads, built on bullock trails, that where built on the paths that the Bundjalung had made with their bare jinung before Rome was thought of, before Christ walked or Mohammed breathed. Before almost anything. Ellen’s been carrying the entire valley around with her for thirteen years, unknowing, Jo thought wildly. *I gave birth to the valley.* (246)

The map symbolizes the profound connection between the country and the Aboriginal people, which are impersonated by Ellen. The detailed explanation of the similarities between the geographic details of the land and the structure of Ellen’s palm lines functions to present her as the embodiment of the Aboriginal relationship with the country. Therefore, this scene epitomizes that Ellen does not merely *belong* to the land – she *is* the land. This literary technique highlights Lucashenko’s attempt to communicate the singularity of Aboriginal belonging to the reader.

In the course of the narration, Jo gradually establishes a profound relationship to her land. By taking care of her farm and respecting the land and wildlife on it, she nurtures her knowledge of the country – and, therefore, her sense of belonging (Gildersleeve

82). Particularly, her love and respect for the flora and fauna on her land is a major reoccurring theme in the novel. Given the unique nature of the meaning of animals for Jo, her connection to them will be discussed in a separate chapter in relation to the belonging to people, since horses, dogs and birds are treated as divine beings and humanized creatures throughout the narration. This is especially apparent in Jo's use of Bundjalung language. The usage of Indigenous language in the novel is a means to express the inclusive Indigenous attachment to the land. Aboriginal words are most often used to refer to birds, horses, trees, places or even people. Therefore, the Bundjalung language in the book functions to establish an intimate relationship between the reader and the Indigenous world. The fact that the Indigenous expressions are "frequently embedded within the narrative and are not italicised" demonstrates that Lucashenko attempts to integrate the Aboriginal culture in everyday discourse (Vincent par. 9). Furthermore, it serves as a source of vitality that "breathes life into the language belonging to this place" (par. 9). In addition, the glossary appended at the end of the book serves to preserve the Indigenous culture in time.

In *Mullumbimby*, belonging to the land is more important than life itself. For Jo, "land means everything" (164) since it "is the foundation of absolutely everything in the culture" (50). Yet she does not merely refer to any kind of land, but one's native soil that is carried in the body and mind. In this respect, Lucashenko underlines the unique nature of land for Indigenous people, explaining that "[n]o bit of land is ever the same as any other" (*Not Quite White* 25). In Aboriginal culture, being in a healthy relationship to a person's ancestral land requires a profound knowledge of and respect for the country. In the course of the narration, Jo develops and cultivates this unique sense of belonging, but it is only when her own flesh and blood is threatened that she discovers the true essence of belonging.

Jo's quest for belonging to the land is eventually fulfilled when she protects Ellen from having to serve as a witness in Twoboy's native title case. When Twoboy pressures Ellen to use the maps of the area that are imprinted on the palms of her hands as evidence in his case, Jo draws enormous strength from the spirit of her land to face him:

Jo felt the fleshy boundaries on her skin weirdly dissolving. She became tremendously heavy and solid. [S]he was as massive as a mountain, as heavy and immovable as Chincogan or Bottlebrush. Standing in her kitchen with her hands on her daughters quaking shoulders, she had somehow grown large enough to contain every Bundjalung woman who had ever stood near the place she stood. With her palms on Ellen's shoulder's, she was a thousand black women, a mighty army of Goorie women who had been holding their jahjams safely on this same spot for tens of thousands of years. As her body swelled and rippled with this army's massive strength, Jo came to understand that she was no more alone than the stones in the creek were alone, or the blades of grass in the paddocks. (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 250)

In this very moment, Jo gathers the strength of her ancestors and develops the spiritual relationship to her country she has longed for. This realization is very similar to the scene elaborated earlier, in which the map on Ellen's palms is discovered. Just like her daughter, Jo does not only establish a powerful connection to the land – she realizes that she *is* the land. As outlined before, Jo's metaphysical connection to the country serves as a representation of the extraordinary relationship of Aboriginal people to the land.

This vision of Aboriginal belonging is also promoted in *The White Earth*. The significance of an Indigenous person's connection to land is even worth the risk of being killed for. This is highlighted by the Aboriginal peoples' return to Kuran Station, after having been violently chased off the land and threatened to be killed upon their return by Daniel Mclvor (350). The price the Kuran people pay for cherishing their native land and performing their rituals and ceremonies to honor their ancestors is their lives (351). Therefore, Rodoreda underscores that the possession of Kuran Station by the *White* family "had been secured by literally killing off Aboriginal connection to the property" (56). Consequently, Moreton-Robinson argues that while Aboriginal sovereignty is based on the connection between "ancestral beings, humans and land", the concept of Western sovereignty relies on "the idea of a supreme authority, territorial integrity and individual rights" (*Introduction* 2).

The Western notion of ownership and possession of land is vividly depicted in William Mclvor's understanding of land and place. The nine-year-old boy's perception of the human relationship to land is portrayed in the way how he experiences life on his native farm. Due to his young age, his character is presented as a tabula rasa and constantly used throughout the narration to communicate the ideas of non-Indigenous Australian

belonging to the reader. Instead of playing in the fields or exploring the surroundings of his home like other children his age, the small house he lives in is “the center of his world” (9). For young William, “the best place of all” is the grain silo because it enables him to see his whole property (10). Unlike the understanding elaborated in *Mullumbimby*, it is not wildlife or vegetation that breathe life into William’s world but manmade objects such as machines and farming equipment. As soon as these are sold at auctions after his father’s death, William’s native land turns “into a foreign place” (11). Thus, it is property and inanimate possessions that gave life to his former home.

For John McIvor, ownership is the vitalizing force that dominates his existence. At the center of his world is Kuran House, the colonial mansion on Kuran Station. The significance of the house is emphasized by the fact that it is always capitalized throughout the novel (22). Even before John’s birth, the primary purpose of his existence was always set out to guarantee the “survival of Kuran Station”. His father Daniel McIvor’s sole motivation to marry and start a family was the outlook of raising a man worthy of marrying into the White family and thereby inheriting the property (27). Contrary to Indigenous beliefs, where all living entities are a part of the whole and are interdependent, the life of the station is dependent on a human being who owns it. When the White family abandons the station and the only people left on it are the station workers, John asserts that it “lacked [...] a living, beating heart” (53).

The experience of being dispossessed of his home after his eviction from Kuran Station “mobilizes his quest for belonging” (Potter 178). The trauma of his dispossession encourages him to strive for the security of ownership (McGahan 71). John’s “aching desire” to own something for the first time in his life underscores the immense significance the idea of landownership evokes in his mind (Kelada 9). When he travels the land in search of work, it is outlined that he has no real love for the country as he “hated the coasts with their sweltering heat and tropical jungles, and the great emptiness of the west” (McGahan 74). It is the sensation of being disconnected from his native land, which is recognizable in Indigenous Australians as well, that encourages him to return to the Kuran Plains as “the most important thing was to keep to your own country. The Kuran Plains was where he belonged” (74). However, it is striking that John only cares about the part of the country that he owns. He explains to William that “[t]he mountains don’t matter to us [...] They’re the old Kuran Station, and

we'll never get that back. Now there's only twenty-odd square miles left, and that's what concerns you and me. What we're standing on right now. The land I *own* [emphasis added]" (85). Even John's claim to care about the land and Kuran House is undermined by the fact that he does not want the Heritage Trust to restore it to open it to the public every once in a while (259). His idea of ownership is exclusive and to him "[p]ossession [is] meaningless if it [is not] absolute" (192). Dolin points out that the idea of "exclusive control that property promises [in *The White Earth* is] destructive of both self and place" (2). Indeed, John's "possessive love of the land" (Kelada 11) is even more important than the love of his life, Harriet, or his only child, who he sends to boarding school after having been raped by his best friend Dudley, to secure his farm (McGahan 222). "[N]one of them mattered – only his profound link with the *property* [emphasis added] itself" (166). After finally gaining possession of Kuran Station, John feels life's energy flowing through his body. This energy is illustrated when he feels "the strength of the hills flowing into his limbs like youth" (266). Potter asserts that this metaphor is symbolic for Western culture where "material presence [...] is equated with life; its absence with death and finality" (178).

In *Mullumbimby*, an intriguing marker of the non-Indigenous idea of ownership, as it is presented by John McIvor in *The White Earth*, is the use of fences as a symbol of exclusion. Russel West-Pavlov claims that fences "form one of the archetypical icons of the Australian landscape" (*Antipodes* 87). He continues that in colonial times, fences simultaneously demonstrated European possession and "the line that marked the frontier between white and black" (98). Vincent further argues that in *Mullumbimby*, "[f]ences and roads are the means by which the colonisers 'bind the gift of a continent to themselves' using bitumen, wire and timber" (par. 1). Therefore, fences exclude the Indigenous population by separating them from their own country.

Considering the significance of their connection to the land, the fencing of the nation caused irreversible trauma to the Aboriginal people. When Jo adopts this colonialist behavior and erects fences on her farm "to control nature by separating her colt, Comet, from his mother", this Western approach to constrain and interfere with nature results in the death of her beloved Comet (Gildersleeve 82). In her desperation, she curses "the new wrongwire of a nonsense wrongfence that shouldn't be here, a hideous unwanted barbed wire fence *that doesn't belong here*" (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby*

117). Subsequently, she is devastated by the realization that her ancestral land is “lined with fences, boundaries, impenetrable borders [where] almost everything [is] locked up and claimed by other people” (133). Thus, her longing to establish a deeper connection to her country is impeded by Western society’s boundaries and fences. Jo’s aversion to fences is further depicted when she attempts to free the birds in a local pet shop. She describes the colonial obsession with ownership and separation by ironically promoting the idea to “[m]ake everything in the world live inside a tight little metal square, so we can feel safe” (200). Eventually, she overcomes her desperation and reconciles in part with the Western world when she finds a bird’s nest, which is made from old barbed wire (174). Thus, she realizes that the same fence that previously symbolized death, separation and exclusion could simultaneously serve as a protector of the land.

The following subsection introduces the different approaches to inheritance in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* and discusses the representation of the transfer of knowledge and property in Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.

4.1.2. Inheritance: Knowledge vs. Property

While the notion of inheritance is equally significant in the two novels, they approach the topic from an entirely different perspective. In *Mullumbimby*, the inheritance of knowledge is one of the core elements of the narration. Jo recalls having been instructed by Auntie Barb to learn to connect to the land and honor and respect everything on it. She labels these instructions “[Y]ou are a *blackfella* 101”, indicating the requirement of an elementary understanding of land and nature for Aboriginal Australians (11). Twoboy’s great-grandfather is another example that epitomizes how crucial the passing on of knowledge of one’s origins and roots is for Indigenous people. After having escaped from the Native Police, who had kidnapped him, he was forced to stay away from his ancestral lands, but he ensured that his whole family knew “where he really belonged” (42). The fact that Twoboy and his brother Lazarus abandon their previous lives and fight for their native title over the area three generations later outlines the priority belonging has in Indigenous Australian culture. However, the epitome of the inheritance of knowledge of land is the role Sam and Ellen

are supposed to take on as the next custodians and protectors of the most sacred site on Bundjalung land. Granny Nurrung elaborates that the waterhole requires the care of the Indigenous community and, therefore, Sam and Ellen are supposed to be introduced to the sacred ceremonies and rituals to guarantee their survival over time (274). She further explains Sam's crucial role as Rob Starr has overwritten his land to him, making Sam the new "manager of the country both ways. Dugai⁶ way *and* Goorie way" (277). Thus, Sam embodies a new generation of Aboriginal owners of the land, who combines the ancient wisdom of the land and the Western entitlement of ownership.

In *The White Earth*, the objective of the transfer of knowledge of the land and its history is restricted to transmitting a lust for ownership and possession to William. John's ubiquitous desire to pass on this mindset to his grand-nephew through inheritance is one of the central motives of the plot (Crane 2).⁷ His quest for ownership was sparked off by his father Daniel, who taught him "to regard the place as his birthright" (Green 86). A major cornerstone of their claim to own the land is based "on the principle of acquired knowledge of country" (86). After finally having purchased Kuran Station in his mid-fifties, John experiences a feeling of emptiness when he realizes that there is no one "[w]ho could even understand his achievement" (McGahan 266). He had dedicated his whole life to the acquisition of the property only to be confronted with the fact that there was nobody there who would follow in his footsteps after his death. Therefore, he is looking for an heir to his property and since his idea of ownership is intertwined with great passion for and a deeper knowledge of his land, he wants to convey this love for his country to William. It is John's understanding that none of his knowledge of the land has any significance, if he does not "leave someone behind who remembers" it, which pushes him to pass it on to William (163). He even makes his acquaintance Dr. Moffat examine the boy to ensure that he is in good health and instructs the doctor to give him a medical certificate to stay home from school for the rest of the year to "have time to get to know the place" (43). Thus, it is evident that William's training to become the next heir to Kuran Station has absolute priority for John.

⁶ dugai – white Australian/white person generally (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 284)

⁷ Parts of this passage have been taken from an unpublished paper written by myself.

Over time, William establishes the connection to the land John is indoctrinating. William comes to the conclusion that “knowledge [is] the essence of ownership” (181). In his understanding of the land, the knowledge of the country is held by its owner. He believes that after the Aboriginal people “had held the knowledge when they had owned the land”, it was now John who knew the stories and secrets of the place, indicating that William himself could become the next owner of the country by “learning everything there was to know” from his great uncle (181). However, what the young boy fails to comprehend is that John’s motivation for educating him is entirely selfish. Ruth tells him that John’s sole purpose is to find a suitable heir with McIvor blood who can guarantee “that his precious station survives after he’s gone” (279). John even hints that he would rather see William dead, if the boy was not worthy to follow in his footsteps, than to choose him as the heir to Kuran Station. When he sends him out to the waterhole by himself, he risks the boy’s life intentionally to find out if he could survive on his own (341). This illustrates John’s ruthless predictability that places his property above all else. Yet, regardless his obsession with ownership, John is always in search of a more profound relationship to his country. In several occasions, he believes to experience supernatural phenomena that he interprets as indicators of his connection to his land. These metaphysical experiences will be examined in the following subsection.

4.1.3. The Metaphysical Spirit of the Place

Similar to Indigenous Australians, John perceives his station as a living entity that is part of his own flesh and blood. He believes that his connection to the place is so extraordinary that when he is evicted from Kuran Station, he experiences the loss like an amputation of a limb from his body (71). Likewise, in his imagination the land too “had suffered in his absence” (146). Moreover, he claims that the land is speaking to him in several occasions (146, 295). In particular, John imagines that he is instructed by the land to take possession of it. While his relationship to the country points towards traces of a meaningful connection to it, his experiences are always limited by his obsession with ownership and possession. Interestingly enough, it is William’s character that conveys a metaphysical connection between land and people in *The White Earth*.

During William's exploration of the station, he uncovers the real essence of the land and witnesses metaphysical powers. When he is in a delirious state caused by dehydration after wandering the station alone for several hours, he has several daydreams that reveal the history of the country to him. In his dreams, he is confronted with various ghosts of the past such as the first white explorer of the station and the loggers that used to work in the mountains like his great uncle (311, 312). At the same time, the land talks to him and protects him by "warning [him] of imminent danger" (315). Shortly afterwards, he encounters the mystical bunyip, a horrific creature from the Aboriginal mythology, who "held the history of [this place] and of far more" (316). In this moment, the land being embodied by the creature, unfolds its secrets to the boy:

The black men dreamt me, long ago. [...] Old things still wait. In the special places. [...] It stood guard here, William realized, and had done so for thousands of years. But why? What was special about this place? William had felt something – but there was nothing to be seen. No ring of standing stones, like his uncle had shown him, no ancient meeting place. Dead stones on a hill, and little fires. The old man is blind. Understanding shook William. The hilltop at the campground was not a meeting place, and the stones there had no meaning. *This was the only place, and his uncle had never found it. But somehow, through all his wanderings, William had. The monster nodded its huge head. You bear the mark boy. [...] The rivers have run dry. Caves have opened to the sun. [...] The dead are ready for you now. [...]* The bunyip called. (316-317)

The revelations of the spirit of the land point William towards the past crimes committed on the country and the bunyip serves as the embodiment of a protector of the Aboriginal people. William's ability to interpret these signs indicates his deep connection to the land and to its living soul. Simultaneously, the creature points out John's inability to grasp the real essence of the sacred place.

In *Mullumbimby*, the metaphysical spirit of the land is best illustrated by Jo's connection to her land and to all living beings on it. For example, she underlines the importance of caring for nature's creations at all times when she greets the lilli pilli trees, which "had finished fruiting months before" and elaborates that there is no need "to ignore someone just cos they don't have a feed for you. Respect is a fulltime job, twenty-four seven" (11). It is essential for her understanding of belonging that her land can feel her love. She stresses that her work and effort on her farm are dedicated to the purpose that "the land *knows* somebody loves it" (47). Eve Vincent explains how "the country responds to [Jo's] presence, welcoming her. She experiences the land as vitally alive

and it communicates to her through subtle signs, weather patterns and, especially, birds” (par. 2). Upon her arrival on her native land, her country acknowledges her presence and welcomes her in the form of a majestic wedgetail eagle (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 22). The approval of her being on the land is crucial to her sense of belonging and fills her with peace and confidence. She feels safe and protected by the land of her ancestors, while the Bottlebrush mountain and the forest serve as her own barrier, guarding her “from the rest of the world” (21). In cultivating her awareness of her surroundings, Jo listens attentively to the country in the hope of receiving messages and guidance from the place and her ancestors. The ancient Aboriginal form of meditation *dadirri* helps her to cultivate peace in her hectic life and eventually enables her to connect with the land and its ancestral spirits. When she rides up to the national park and is thrown off her horse, she initially confuses the *talga*⁸ on the hill with mechanic sounds of the Western world such as a chainsaw and a water pump. Then, she finally hears the land talking to her and is able to identify the sounds as “[a]ncient human voices. Chanting. The hills were singing to her” (97).

Arguably the most significant messengers in *Mullumbimby* that communicate the supernatural connection between the land and its Indigenous inhabitants are birds. These are illustrated to be ambassadors of Aboriginality, which is epitomized when Jo admires a brush turkey, whose “brilliant red, black and yellow colouring” reminds her of the Aboriginal flag and make the bird appear to be “constantly dressed for a land rights demo” (159). Another messenger of the land is the eagle, who is Twoboy’s spirit animal. The bird welcomes them on their way to the lake, where Twoboy hopes to hear the sacred *talga* for the first time and is delighted that “the eagle had come to give him safe passage onto the country they were about to enter” (238). Similarly, Jo is guided by two fairy-wrens when she is looking for answers after detecting the maps on Ellen’s hands. She interprets the flight of the birds as a compass that directs her west, towards Uncle Humbug, who later proves to know where Jo can find the guidance she is looking for (263-264). At the climax of the narration, she discovers that the lyrebirds were the ones who sang the sacred songs of the land and by passing on the knowledge of her ancestors, they show her that she is home (276-277). Rodoreda asserts that the spiritual connection of “the sovereign ‘owners’ [of the land] is privileged in the novel. [It

⁸ talga – music (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 285)

is] a form of Indigenous sovereignty [...] that is alive and present in Indigenous Australia” and is presented as the ultimate goal of Indigenous belonging (223). Hence, it can be argued that the flora and fauna are symbolically presented as the real sovereign owners of the land in the novel. Just as tens of thousands of years before, this profound knowledge of the country still lives on in the stories of Aboriginal communities.

In stark contrast to the land acting as a guardian and protector for Aboriginal people in *Mullumbimby*, the land appears to be against the presence of the non-Indigenous Australians in *The White Earth*. Throughout the novel, there are several signs that hint towards a defensive attitude of the country, when it is cultivated by white farmers. This is first indicated by the failure of William’s father to grow vegetables on his farm, where “nothing much ever seemed to grow” (9). Upon William’s arrival at Kuran Station, he notices the dead vegetation on his great uncle’s property (15). Similarly to his nephew, John’s first years as a farmer are characterized by misfortune and bad harvests:

One year a late frost blighted his wheat just as it was ripening. Another year a sudden hail storm battered his corn. He suffered plagues – of weeds, of mice, even of locusts. And once, during harvest, it stayed wet and dreary for five weeks on end, and his barley rotted in the paddocks. The list went on, and somehow, bumper crops never quite seemed to eventuate. (192-192)

After several years of misfortune, John himself starts to believe that the land is oppressing him (196). Green argues that this literary strategy used by McGahan depicts the settlers’ illegitimate claim to the land by making them “unable to maintain a hold on stolen gains. The land itself seems to turn against them” (85). Thus, the novel promotes the idea that the land avenges the dispossession of the Aboriginal people by punishing the non-Indigenous settlers and their descendants for the crimes committed against the Indigenous population.

A similar notion of the resentment of the land against the non-Aboriginal people is also displayed in *Mullumbimby* in several occasions. For example, when Jo points out that the fish in the Brunswick river could be easily gathered by spitting “down a mouthful of chips”. They would come so close that they were almost within reaching distance but would “refuse to bite” for the white tourists, who tried to catch some of them with their fishing rods (2). Thus, the land appears to withhold its abundance from non-Indigenous people, signaling a form of punishment for their mistreatment of the country.

Another core element of the representation of the metaphysical spirit of the land are the sacred sites presented in the two novels. In *Mullumbimby*, the sacred is experienced in various locations and can be found in numerous places in nature. Jo's farm itself serves as an entire sacred area for her. In a scene in which her friend Therese asks her to accompany her to a Buddhist retreat to practice meditation and mindfulness, Jo explains to her that she is penniless and that "the river's [her] church" (153). In hard times, she turns to natural sites where she can reconnect with the land to experience healing. Undisputedly, the spiritual center of the narration is the waterhole at the base of the creek between Jo's and Rob Starr's farms. On this spot, the traditional owners of the land have gathered since time immemorial to hold their rituals and ceremonies and celebrate their connection to the land, which had been passed on for hundreds of generations (274).

In *The White Earth*, the waterhole also serves as the magical site for Aboriginal ceremonies and rituals. The Kuran people cherished this sacred place to such an extent, that they escaped from the reserve travelling long distances and faced the danger of being spotted by Daniel McIvor. Even after having been severely beaten by the station manager in previous years, they pursue their annual quest to reconnect with their sacred place. Eventually, their love for their spiritual site and their longing to preserve their culture results in their brutal murder by Daniel McIvor and other station workers.

Even though John McIvor claims to have a spiritual connection to the whole land he possesses, his holy place is Kuran House. The manmade house is the center of his world (28) and despite the fact that he loves the whole station, his sacred site is the house: "He loved the wide golden spread of the plains, and the hills that swept up smoothly in the east. He loved the herds of cattle and the mobs of sheep straying lazily in front of the house. [...] Most of all, he loved Kuran House" (52). His striving for ownership constrains him from recognizing the sacred spot of the Indigenous people on his land – the waterhole. Regardless his attempts to build his sense of belonging on the foundations of what he believes to be ancient Aboriginal bora rings, which is indicated by his choice of the place for the rally of his league, he remains trapped in his possessive desires and, therefore, fails to construct a deeper spiritual connection to his land (179).

The previous passages exemplified the pivotal meaning of land and country for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*. These representations function to promote the importance of the belonging to and ownership of land in contemporary Australia. While these themes play a crucial part in the Australian vision of belonging, the relevance of the sense of belonging to people is another core element of the two novels. Consequently, the following chapter discusses the portrayal of the significance of belonging to people in the presented literature.

4.2. Belonging to People

Belonging to people is a decisive factor in the formation of the Australian vision of belonging. Therefore, this chapter investigates how the need for people and community shapes the sense of belonging of the characters in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*. After a general insight into the role of community in Aboriginal societies, the function of the affiliation to a nation in Aboriginal as well as in Western contexts is explored. This is followed by an investigation of the importance of family in the two novels.

In her short story “Very Small Story”, Lucashenko concludes that neither the people nor the land are more important than the other. Each of them is individually relevant to establish belonging but the essence of true belonging can merely be found in a combination of the two (*Not Quite White* 23). She further points out that other Aboriginal people reassured her in this matter and who elaborated “that country meant Home, but who added the caveat that Home resided in people rather than places” (*Country* 9). The Aboriginal writer and poet Oodgeroo agrees that community is the foundation of belonging and outlines in one of her poems that “[m]uch that we loved is gone and had to go, / But not the deep indigenous things. / The past is still so much a part of us, / Still about us, still within us. / We are happiest / Among our own people. [...]” (22). Perrona argues that “[t]his poem envisages that a reinforced sense of belonging may promote social progress and community healing” (107). Likewise, Lucashenko explains that “[w]e all need the land, as it needs us. We all need each other — Aborigines and whites and all other living creatures. That is what a family is — a group whose members may squabble and disagree but who ultimately need each other to exist” (*Country* 66). In a larger context, this interdependence of different people is found in the concept of the nation, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.1. The Importance of the Nation

A shared sense of community is a fundamental human need. Therefore, Perrona outlines that “belonging to a community/nation is a dimension which contemporary individuals (citizens) strive for” (106). In his groundbreaking work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes how and why nations were invented and

explains their relevance for the individual. Naturally, a detailed discussion of the origins and functions of the nation are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this section serves as a concise overview to facilitate the analysis of the use of the concept of the nation in Australian culture in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*.

During the Enlightenment of the 18th century, shared belief systems such as the idea of religious omniscience and salvation, as well as the organization of the state under a sovereign monarch, gradually lost their significance. Thus, the common people lost crucial reference points that had previously shaped their existence (Anderson 36). This secularization of the European continent paired with an interplay of the rise of “capitalism and print technology” and the broad “diversity of human language” provoked the establishment of numerous nation-states (46). Since a community of such a respectable size required specific concepts to bind large groups of individuals together, distinctive nation-building elements were installed to ensure solidarity and identification among the people of a nation. Ryan-Fazilleau underlines that “[t]here is no such thing as a ‘natural’ national identity. Every political strategy of identity is a construction rationally undertaken by identifiable actors” (119). The purpose of a collective national identity was “to give the members of the community a sense of belonging” (119). This was accomplished by the construction of a shared heritage “based on national History, cultural monuments, historical monuments, popular traditions [and] emblematic landscapes” (119). At the same time, “this cultural heritage” not only functioned in the formation of a mutual identity, but also as a tool to oppress the colonial subjects in the European colonies (120). The school systems in the colonies imposed the notion of superiority of the imperial culture on the Indigenous people. Simultaneously, this resulted in a lack of confidence of the colonial subjects in regard to their own culture (121). At the same time, the settlers themselves had to establish a new collective identity, since the shared heritage of the empire lost its radiance as a result of the enormous physical and emotional distance to the motherland.

In *The White Earth*, several scenes function to illustrate the Australian national identity. One of the most famous national myths depicted in the novel is the idea of mateship. Being a particularly large territory with a harsh environment, the early settler colonies promoted a particularly helpful attitude among the settlers to assist each other in all

sorts of predicaments. The shared understanding of mateship helped them to overcome the challenges on the foreign continent. When the farmers inhabiting the surrounding area of William's childhood home see the fire on the fields, they immediately "race directly across the plains" to come to help. After his father's death, they offer all possible forms of assistance such as food and even money (3). Another aspect which demonstrates the affiliation to the Australian nation in the novel is John's position towards Australia's engagement in World War II. When his best friend Dudley unfolds his plan to enlist in the army, John himself has not the slightest intention to enlist because of his aversion to the British Empire, stressing that "the Empire's wars were no business of his" (123). However, as soon as "Japanese bombs were dropping on Darwin and Townsville" and his own beloved nation is under attack, he "volunteered immediately" (141). Therefore, his rejection on account of his injured leg leaves him in great frustration to be unable to express his loyalty to his country.

John's engagement in his *Australian Independence League* highlights his strong sense of belonging to the Australian nation. The league is his mouthpiece to communicate his love for his country to the world. However, even though John and his acquaintances strongly feel patriotic for Australia, he does not want the league to engage in politics by running candidates in elections to actively change the issues they are opposed to. Instead, he wants to change the political system (186). Thus, it is evident that he follows an anarchistic approach and that his sense of belonging is restricted to the country itself. To express their resistance against the Australian government and promote their own idea of an independent Australian nation, John and the members of his league utilize nation building elements such as their own national anthem and flag to form their exclusive national identity (202). As vividly illustrated in the tumultuous events at the rally on Kuran Station, the league eventually develops into a racist nationalist movement as a consequence of a perceived inferiority of belonging. Nationalism and racism in *The White Earth* will therefore be further discussed in the following chapter on the insecurity of non-Aboriginal Australians towards their right to belong to the country.

In contrast to the focus on the Australian nation in *The White Earth*, *Mullumbimby* concentrates on the sense of belonging to an Aboriginal nation. As already pointed out, the Aboriginal nation presented in the novel is the Bundjalung nation, located in far

northern New South Wales and south eastern Queensland. It is striking that Jo never identifies as Aboriginal but instead refers to her Bundjalung heritage or uses the term *Goorie* to describe her national allegiance. This demonstrates that Aboriginal origins are usually simplified and ignored by non-Indigenous people by referring to all Indigenous people as Aboriginal people, therefore rejecting the complexity and diversity of the manifold Indigenous Australian nations. The differences among Aboriginal nations are illustrated when Jo is looking for answers to the origin of the map on Ellen's hands. In this scene, she asks DJ, who is of Aboriginal descent, where to find Uncle Humbug and when he tells her that Humbug is imprisoned and asks if he could help Jo, Jo knows that he could not since "no Wiradjuri man, however decent, would have the answers to her Bundjalung problems" (260). The importance of belonging to an Aboriginal nation is further highlighted when Aunt Sally acclaims Jo's friend Chris from the Gadigal people to have become "officially Bundjalung" after having lived on the land for over thirty years (31). This initiation serves as a gesture of great respect and honor. Similarly, Jo privately declares Cheery Dan, a non-Indigenous local, "an honorary Bundjalung" when being consoled by him after Comet's death (124). In the moment of mourning for her dramatic loss, this act underlines the meaning being part of her Aboriginal nation has for Jo. In the development of the narration, she finds the confidence to express this pride publicly. The act of painting her car with Bundjalung motives with Ellen and her sister Kym is a demonstration of her national pride and identity which "proudly proclaimed that here were Goories driving around" (231).

The relevance of belonging to an Indigenous nation is further underscored in Twoboy's native title claim. When he talks to Jo for the first time, his brother Lazarus claims that their intention in lodging their native title claim is based on their concern for the Bundjalung nation. He solemnly declares that they have "a nation to rebuild" (40). However, the importance of the Aboriginal nation in *Mullumbimby* is undermined by the following native title war between the Jacksons and the Bullockheads, which are all members of the Bundjalung nation. This paradox will be further analyzed in a later chapter of this thesis on the deconstruction of the idealization of the Aboriginal sense of belonging.

4.2.2. The Role of the Family

One of the central topics in *Mullumbimby* is the role of the family and its representation of Aboriginal kinship ties in contemporary Australia. The novel emphasizes the Aboriginal longing for larger community structures in Indigenous societies. Moore *et al.* illustrate that “evidence [...] of precolonial social structures” suggests that Aboriginal people from “clan and family groups” who lived great distances apart “came together for occasional large meetings” (46). In addition, many Indigenous “societies used classificatory kinship systems in which a person is considered to be related to all others by actual or classificatory relationships. People behaved towards their classificatory kin in the same way as they did towards biological kin” (49). This is particularly relevant since “[t]hese kinship systems were the basis of all social relationships [...] and a person could not function as a member of society without a kinship category” (49). Therefore, it is understandable why many Aboriginal people today live in a state of constant desperation in the absence of these vital kinship relations.

Jo epitomizes a generation of Indigenous Australians who suffer from the separation from their communities. Her reconnection to the land depends on the establishment of close family ties and, since a large part of her family has died, she “needs to find a ‘mob’ to help her reconnect with country” (Rodoreda 222). Brewster agrees that for Jo, the formation of a meaningful sense of belonging is only possible through a closer connection to her kin (250). The development of Jo’s understanding of the importance of these relationships is best illustrated by the reference to the captivating opening of the narration in the final lines of the story. The novel starts with Jane Austen’s famous quote “It is a truth universally acknowledged” just to initiate the unanticipated shift “that a teenager armed with a Nikko pen is a pain in the fucking neck, and if it isn’t then it fucken well oughta be” (1). The novel’s ending carries the same intriguing tone as its beginning, yet includes a surprising twist, where Jo’s spiritual and emotional journey lead her to conclude that “It is a *fact* universally acknowledged, she thought, bending to kiss the top of Ellen’s head, that a teenager armed with a Nikko pen is a wonder to behold, a precious, precious thing that we all must keep close to our hearts, and protect by any means necessary. And if it isn’t, then it fucken well oughta be” (280). Naturally, Jo’s journey towards this epiphany is marked by endless doubts and insecurities concerning the relationship to her kin. However, even in the beginning of the story, Jo

is fully aware that the comfort of her inner circle and their wellbeing are the only things that truly matter (4). Nevertheless, she longs for a closer connection to her kin, stressing that the reason she is cleaning up and restoring her farm is her mob. She wants to make a home for herself “and Ellen, and Stevo when he comes home – and Kym and the boys eventually” (30). Jo describes her vision of utopia as “the farm with five or six houses dotted instead of just one, and an Aboriginal family living well in every building, thriving, healthy, prosperous” (172). Her longing for a larger community is further indicated by the loneliness she experiences when she admits to herself that her daughter, the animals on their farm and the land itself are simply not enough (52, 169). She expresses her devastation as a “craving for the dream of a real family, a Mob. Belonging. A couple of dozen people who hung together and shared and laughed, who were all on the same team. Her team” (88). In her desperation, Jo has to acknowledge that finding a mob is much more difficult than buying a piece of land: “It was one thing – and a bloody big thing – to buy your country back off the landgrabbers. But where do you buy back a tribe? Where do you shop for a mob to call your own?” (82). Ultimately, the novel has a happy ending when Jo, Twoboy and Ellen live together on the farm and the outlook of the Jacksons’ win in the native title case promises the arrival of more Bundjalung people to become part of Jo’s mob (279).

One aspect of the dilemma Jo experiences in her longing for a mob is the absence of guidance by Aboriginal elders. After the sudden death of her parents, “that took her world away” her Aunty Barb stepped in and taught her the essentials of Aboriginal lore (87). However, since her aunt is dead, Jo is left without elders to draw knowledge from. Lucashenko accentuates that “[i]f you have ancestry without the understanding or connections, you have a very big journey in front of you” (Q&A). Gildersleeve elaborates that the characters in *Mullumbimby* require the support of their elders, their knowledge of story, and a place in a community” (83). After the discovery of the maps on Ellen’s hands, who is left terrified of this revelation, Jo recognizes her responsibility to become a guiding figure herself, when she states that “she had to keep holding on. She would become Aunty Barb, keep Ellen close in her turn, and in that way, her terrified daughter’s world would be kept from splintering further into chaos” (248). This realization empowers Jo to stand her ground against Twoboy, who wants to use Ellen’s hands as evidence in his native title case. In this scene, Jo draws her strength from

her Auntie Barb and all the Bundjalung women, who had guarded their children for millennia (250). Yet, Jo is unable to find the answers to help Ellen herself and is desperate for elder advice, “someone with a direction to point her in; someone with something useful to say about this whole mess and confusion. Someone older, someone wiser, to tell her what the fuck to *do*” (271). As soon as Jo discovers where to find the guidance she had lacked to help her daughter, she is deeply relieved and feels “the impossible load of responsibility begin to lift from her shoulders” (271). Eventually, her prayers are answered and she finds the advice she seeks in Granny Nurrung. The absence of elders in Aboriginal communities and the longing for their guidance to develop an understanding of belonging illustrated in the novel symbolize the crisis Indigenous people all over Australia are confronted with.

Another crucial part of the Aboriginal sense of belonging presented in *Mullumbimby* is the connection to animals. Jo tends to idealize them and regularly shows to have closer relationships to them than to most of the people in her life. Early in the novel, she reveals that “[h]orses and dogs were the people for her” (5). Her brother Stevo even calls her “Horse” sometimes and unfolds that Jo used to think “she was a horse” at the age of five (46). Furthermore, she firmly believes that heaven is found on horseback (93). In opposition to her sister Kym, who perceives horses and dogs as pets, they are “*family*” to Jo (103). As a result, Comet’s death is synonymous to the death of a child for her. In her opinion, animals hold the key to true belonging to the land and “they’re the ones who know the country more than any of us ever will. They have no rights and yet all the deep, deep knowledge is written in their muscles and in their bones” (182). In the final scenes of the narration, Jo stands on her land in deep admiration of her horses, who remind her “of her own heartbeat” and she declares her love for them once more: “*Oh my baugul yarraman, you’re the heart of me and you always were*” (278). Her horses are a part of her own flesh and blood and just as all other animals, they are a part of the spirit of the world and, therefore, as important as people and the land in the establishment of a meaningful sense of belonging.

In comparison, the role of the family in *The White Earth* is rather trivial. The novel presents non-Indigenous family relationships as loose connections of marginal relevance. Despite having lived merely a few miles away, William has never seen or even heard of his own great uncle, even though John is his last living relative (3-4).

When William and his mother Veronica are allowed to live with John, she explains to her son that “[h]e’s not really your uncle [...] [h]e’s your great-uncle, on your father’s side. That means he’s not obliged to me and you at all” (5). Veronica’s understanding of family and care for kin is therefore in considerable opposition to the role of family in Aboriginal societies.

The most important purpose of family presented in the novel is the inheritance of property outlined in an earlier chapter of this thesis. Numerous family ties in *The White Earth* are solely dedicated to the transfer of property. John’s father Daniel, for example, married a random girl “certainly without any affection”, just to get a son to have a chance of his offspring inheriting Kuran Station by marriage, adding that “a son was all that mattered” (27). In accordance to his father’s plans, young John longs for Elizabeth White but in reality, he only yearns for the land a marriage with her would offer (31). He admits that by stating that “Elizabeth White’s prime role would be to confer ownership upon him” (50). Family itself means nothing to John, which is epitomized by the fact that he neither feels grief at his father’s funeral, nor has any intention to see his own mother and sister again afterwards (96). Thus, the abuse and lack of care for others transfers from one generation to the next, which suggests a strong legacy of the brutal colonial mentality into present day Australia.

John’s motives for human relationships are always driven by and subordinated to the thrive for ownership. Apart from his affection for Elizabeth White, John also realizes that his love for Harriet is based on her father’s wealth and rooted in his hope to inherit his money and company (169). Even his best and only friend Dudley, who John considers to be a member of his family, is no more important than the land John can acquire from him (195). In the course of the narration, John sacrifices the relationships to his wife and daughter for the outlook of eventually coming into possession of his land. He decides to keep the person who raped his only daughter in his own house and sends her to boarding school (223-224). When he finally grasps that he has lost any chance of his daughter succeeding him as the next manager of Kuran Station, he pretends to be indifferent about it and claims that “everything he did from now on would be for himself, and that would be enough” (271). However, Will’s schooling to become familiar with John’s land and values proves otherwise.

The prospect of having an heir to his beloved station means more to John than the prosperity of his own family. In retrospect, he considers the death of his own nephew a stroke of good fortune because it led William to him and gave him the heir he needed (340). His cruelty is further underlined when he leaves his nine-year-old great nephew alone in the vastness of the plains for days just so William can get to know the country and prove himself worthy (323). John stresses that he would rather see William dead than naming him heir to the station if he was unworthy of it. The old man reflects that he had “surrendered” everyone he had ever cared for to accomplish his lifelong dream of ownership (341). In his obsession, he even talks William into believing that his own mother is his “enemy” because “[s]he’d sell the property” if she could (240). The vision of family illustrated in the novel is best demonstrated by William’s evaluation of John’s and Ruth’s relationship when he concludes that “a hatred so profound” was only possible “within families” (344). This perception highlights the dichotomy of the image of family presented in *The White Earth* and *Mullumbimby*.

The following chapter examines the various insecurities of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters in regard to their entitlement to a profound sense of belonging and investigates how these insecurities are symbolic for contemporary Australians.

4.3. The Insecurity of Belonging

As illustrated in the previous chapters, a meaningful sense of belonging depends on the synergy between intact family and kin relationships and a fulfilling connection to land and place. Therefore, an inharmonious balance of these aspects inevitably impedes the formation of a vital relation to land and people. Consequently, this chapter analyzes the insecurity Australians experience in regard to their sense of belonging. The first part of this chapter provides a general insight into the meaning of the absence of belonging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The second part illustrates the pain of unbelonging of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and its effects on the characters in the two novels. Finally, the last part of this chapter examines how this pain of unbelonging results in nationalism and racism of both – Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous characters – in the presented literature.

Aboriginal people in contemporary Australia still suffer severely from the dispossession of their land and their consequential social deracination. As a result of their profound connection to the country underlined in the earlier chapters of this thesis, their displacement from their ancestral homelands has left many of them in a state of constant despair. Collingwood-Whittick explains that the “major trauma” the Indigenous people experienced resulted partially from the fact that their “separation from the land” was inconceivable for them (xxix). Thus, the loss of their country was synonymous with “a brutal amputation” of a part of their identity (xxix). Similarly, Lucashenko compares the expulsion of the Indigenous people with a veritable disease, which pushed the traditional owners of the land to the margins of society (*Not Quite White* 27). She elaborates that the unfamiliarity with the new environment was particularly tragic, since it robbed the Aboriginal people of their connection to their land. She further explains that while “[w]estern culture lives in people, influenced by their environment, [...] Indigenous culture lives in [...] the relationships among humans, landscape, and animal life” (28). Consequently, she outlines that “[k]nown Indigenous country is the place of healing, nurture, sanctuary, responsibility, and safety. Unknown country is frightening, inhabited by dangerous spirits, liable to violent defence by its true people” (28). Moreover, Pat Dodson points out that taking Aboriginal people from their land equals taking their essence of life from them. He clarifies that this “spirit cannot be regenerated in some other place. So you end up with shells of human beings, living in other peoples’

countries [which] caused incalculable damage to the Aborigines' sense of belonging" (qtd. in Collingwood-Whittick xxxi). These factors elucidate the scope of the catastrophe which the repercussions of colonization have for the Indigenous population.

Notwithstanding the apocalyptic effects of colonization for the Aboriginal Australians, its consequences also prevented the development of a meaningful sense of belonging for the non-Indigenous population. Read poses the question how "non-Indigenous Australians justify [their] continuous presence and [their] love for [Australia] while the Indigenous people remain dispossessed and their history unacknowledged" (1). As a consequence, he asks himself several questions, which he further elaborates in his study on the perception of belonging in present-day Australia:

My discovery revived in me all the problems of wanting to belong in this breathtaking country of deepest personal and family memory [...]. Do I have the right to belong in this soul-country? Do Aboriginals belong in some deeper way than the rest of us, even though none as yet lays Native Title claim to it? Would such a pre-emptive claim of belonging – if that is what a Native Title claim is – reduce or disqualify my own sense? If so, must it always? (Read 9)

Read's reasonable doubts exemplify the identity crisis a whole generation of non-Indigenous Australians is confronted with. Germaine Greer answers Read's central question by stating that "[f]or a gubba⁹ in Australia there can be no belonging [...] In all our interactions with country we are reminded, not that it is not ours, which could be fixed, but that it belongs to other people, which can't" (xi). Here, Greer refers to the dispossession of the Aboriginal people as the main source of the non-Indigenous Australians' insecurity of belonging to the country. Collingwood-Whittick agrees with Greer that belonging will always remain a delicate subject in Australia, since the mere existence of the Aboriginal population challenges "the legitimacy of the non-indigenous community" (xxxix). The tragic condition of many Aboriginal communities all over the continent serves as a constant reminder of the colonial crimes and, thus, prevents the development of a non-Indigenous confidence to be able to construct a profound connection to the land. Recalling a conversation with a non-Aboriginal Australian, Lucashenko illustrates that many non-Indigenous people constantly experience an "illegitimate belonging", which prevents them from the establishment of a more

⁹ gubba - white person (used by Aboriginal people)

meaningful relationship to the country (*Country* 9). Collingwood-Whittick asserts that this insecurity of belonging is also apparent in non-Aboriginal Australian literature. When comparing them to Aboriginal authors, she perceives a prevalent lack in “confidence, greater ambiguity and, overall a more tortuous and sometimes more tortured quality in these white authorial imaginings of what belonging might actually signify” (xl). As a consequence, the differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal insecurities towards belonging in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* will be discussed in the following section, to give an insight into the Australian vision of belonging as it is presented in the two novels.

4.3.1. The Pain of Unbelonging

A primary strategy that indicates the insecurity of belonging in *The White Earth* is the denial of an Aboriginal presence in Australia prior to the colonization of the continent. This reinforcement of the doctrine of *terra nullius* is still identifiable in many non-Indigenous Australians today. Green elaborates that John’s only option to justify his claim of ownership to his land is by denying the validity of the Aboriginal people’s entitlement to their country (86). While John acknowledges that the Indigenous people once lived in the area, he argues that they are now “long gone” and, therefore, have lost any legitimacy of owning the land (163). In addition, he firmly believes that the Indigenous population did not cultivate the country, which is the prerequisite of a claim to ownership in colonial ideology (123). In this respect, Horakova outlines that John “epitomizes the national narrative pertaining to squatters, pioneers, pastoralists and farmers as well as their right to claim one’s own place” (114-115). When John tells William about the history of the Kuran Plains, he refers to the White family as “[t]he actual owners of the land”, since they were the ones who “took possession of the land” (23). Likewise, he continues that “the Whites were not the original owners” of the area but the squatter Heatherington, who took up “the entire Darling Downs” with the help of a few men (23). This fabricated historical settler narrative summarizes John’s distorted perception of the history of the country.

Furthermore, John constantly feels the need to stress the unique nature of his relationship to his land, which is based on the idea that he is one of the first explorers

of the station. His claim is built on the fact that he has known his property since he was a child and knows every corner of it. He even believes that “there are still places where [no] foot has ever set down apart from [his] own”, further reinforcing the notion of *terra nullius* (60). In William’s schooling of the land, John highlights that “there’s only ever been grass out there [...] And because of that grass, people came. With sheep” (81). Yet at the same time he refers to the squatter Cunningham as “the first European to lay eyes on the place”, hinting a prior Aboriginal occupancy (81). However, such moments of acknowledgement are immediately shattered by the ignorance of the cultivation of the land by Indigenous people before colonization. In his delusion, he claims that the white settlers and pastoralists were the ones who “got there first and did all the hard work” (130). Moreover, John claims to be the only traditional owner left on Kuran Station, disregarding the fact that this is only due to the fact that his own father killed the original owners of the land in cold blood (294). At the end of the narration, John insists that their murder was justified because “they had no right to be here” (347). Despite his profound knowledge of the Indigenous history of the country and their presence on the original Kuran Station, his only option to maintain his own sense to belonging is by denying the affiliation of the Aboriginal people to his land.

John’s denial of the Aboriginal presence on his land is closely related to his fear of the imminent native title legislation. As a result of his perpetual lease on Kuran Station, native title threatens his possession of his beloved country. In his frustration, John repeatedly turns to William to seek approval of the legitimacy of his right to ownership (128). Similarly to many Australians in the aftermath of the Mabo decision, the challenge of his claim of ownership of the country provokes a sensation in John that Potter has identified as a “cultural anxiety” (178). Consequently, John’s newsletter for his nationalist league is a vehicle for him to share his resentment of native title with like-minded people. The formulation in his newsletter that “Native Title [...] will *alienate* [emphasis added] land to the black minority” stresses his use of the ideology of *terra nullius* to invalidate the real purpose of native title as a compensation of the crimes of colonization (132). John’s attempts to explain his view on native title to William demonstrate his inability to maintain his claim of being the rightful owner of the land in the light of the recent legal and political developments. He describes the Native Title Act as a “disaster” that is merely a “question of property rights”, thus neglecting its

primary motivation to acknowledge the rights of the Indigenous owners of the land (135). The fear of the impending legislation as well as the denial of the Aboriginal presence on the country before colonization indicate the immense insecurity John experiences in regard to his sense of belonging.

Throughout the narration, John demonstrates insecurity, doubt, uncertainty and even traces of guilt towards his right to belong to the country. Lattas argues that this insecurity has been haunting “non-indigenous Australians eight generations down the line” (55). John reaffirms this notion when he contemplates that “it [takes] a lifetime to get a piece of country into your bones; and maybe other lifetimes as well” (McGahan 100). Therefore, as a result of his family’s European descent, John doubts whether he might ever be able to become a part of his country. The heritage of his family and his father’s crimes against the Indigenous people in particular prevent John from developing a deeper spiritual connection to his land. Dolin asserts that this “inheritance of guilt and obsession, founded on an act of violence against the original custodians” represents the burden of colonization for non-Indigenous Australians (9). Indeed, John’s very first memory as a child is the smell of the burning bodies of the Aboriginal people killed by his father (McGahan 22). Therefore, representative for colonial Australia, his own sense of belonging is founded on the murder of the original owners of the country. Even though he has buried these memories deep in his subconscious, the horrific crimes against the Aboriginal people anchored the insecurity of his connection to the land.

Comparatively, William serves as the epitome of the inheritance of the colonizer’s crimes against the Aboriginal Australians. When he breaks into his great-uncle’s locked room, he finds an old gun and a hat of the Queensland Mounted Police, which was a special unit to track down and kill Indigenous people with the help of native scouts in the early 20th century. The power he experiences “with the hat on his head, and the gun in his hand” help him to ignore that “[h]e was still somewhere where he didn’t belong” (155). William’s sensation in this scene stands metaphoric for the settler’s approach towards their feeling of unbelonging and their violent actions to ease the insecurity they experienced on the foreign continent. In the course of the narration, even nine-year-old William begins to recognize his inheritance as “a burden” (327).

This burden symbolizes the weight on the shoulders of non-Aboriginal Australians, who feel accountable for their ancestors' crimes.

One aspect how the non-Indigenous insecurity towards a feeling of belonging to the country is expressed in *The White Earth* is the attempt to construct a relation to the land around the Aboriginal sense of belonging. In numerous situations, John tries to establish a meaningful bond with his country. However, his attempts are always doomed from the start, since his idea of belonging is built on the foundation of possession. Growing up, John tries to get to know the whole station but his enthusiasm and curiosity stem from his belief "that Kuran Station would one day be his" (27). When Elizabeth White announces to sell the station, his world shatters because his connection to the land is dependent on ownership (53). Nevertheless, he experiences some profound moments where he begins to feel and understand the essence of the land. As John describes to William what his country really means to him, his deep understanding of the living soul of the place comes to light. He elaborates that William's old "farm was a machine, a factory to grow wheat. But this isn't anything like that. This is a piece of country. It's not just about heads of cattle per acre. This place is alive in its own right. It has a history. It's growing and changing all the time. It breathes [...] It even talks, to the right person" (85). However, he instantly gets lost in his obsession with ownership again, claiming that "land has to belong to someone to really come to life [...] Otherwise it's just a piece of ground" (85). Such revelations epitomize that John's sense of belonging is limited by his inability to perceive the soul of the country without Western concepts of control and possession.

As a consequence of his insecurity to belong to the land, John thirsts for the recognition and acceptance of his entitlement to his country by others. One way how he seeks acknowledgement is in publishing his monthly newsletter (130). The feeling of betrayal by his own government encourages John to find acceptance in his league among people who feel like him. He further claims that he feels betrayed by politicians because he believes that they do not care about the "normal Australian" and are only concerned with the matters of Aboriginal people (138). This sentiment is symbolic for many white Australians, who experienced a veritable "panic" in the aftermath of the Mabo judgement (Gelder 24).

It is crucial to point out that the pain of unbelonging illustrated in this section is also referring to Indigenous Australians. In *Mullumbimby*, Jo's self-confidence is severely undermined by her disconnection to her geographical and cultural roots. In the beginning of the novel, she stresses that she has had "enough of being Trailer Trash" and longs for the return to her ancestral land (7). However, as soon as she is back *home*, she still questions her identity and her purpose on the land: "[W]ho the hell are you? And what exactly do you think you're doing here?" (10). Once she has regained her country, she is still incapable to reconnect with the soul of the place. When she is greeted by an eagle upon her arrival on her new farm, she mistakes the sign of the land for coincidence and refers to the messenger of her country as "just one of those things, one of those odd and striking visitations of nature" (23). Her lack of confidence in the legitimacy of her sense of belonging is further illustrated when she longs for the respect and acknowledgement of Granny Nurrung, who is one of the oldest remaining natives on Bundjalung land. When she cycles past Jo without returning her greeting, Jo wonders if "the old lady [had] failed, despite the [Aboriginal] flag hanging right there in front of her, to realise that Jo was a blackfella" (28).

In this regard, Jo constantly experiences self-doubts about her Aboriginal status. For example, her social deracination leads her to conclude that "you have to be a fucked up blackfella to know what it's like, not being able to prove who you are or where you belong" (50). Apart from the desperation of this realization, Jo is also well aware that – unlike Twoboy – she has no chance to obtain redress by means of native title, as a result of her incapability to prove her family's origins (79). Thus, she is devastated by the fact that she is disconnected from her ancestors and considers herself a "*washed-up* blackfella" (82). Likewise, the absence of connections to her Bundjalung community has also resulted in the loss of Aboriginal heritage such as the competence to speak her native Bundjalung language fluently or navigate by the stars. When her whole family gets lost on the way home from their trip to Lake Majestic, her sister Kym mentions sarcastically that they are "[r]eal good blackfellas" for not being able to retrieve such elementary Aboriginal knowledge (242). Similarly, Jo's self-doubts towards her heritage surface when she has to defend her right to belong in front of Twoboy. Being unable to comprehend his obsession with native title, she stresses that she knows more Bundjalung words than he does and that she actually lives on her

ancestral homeland and knows it like a part of her own body (164). Twoboy, on the other hand, hopes that native title might not only bring him back his land, but also reconnect him with his country (165). This hope highlights the pain of unbelonging generations of Indigenous Australians experience to this day.

Analogous to John McIvor in *The White Earth*, the Aboriginal characters in *Mullumbimby* try to find a meaningful sense of belonging by imitating Western approaches to land. Particularly, the attempt to establish a meaningful connection to the country through ownership is outlined throughout the novel. For example, Jo requires the legal security of ownership of her land to experience a sense of belonging to it (30). This need of security in ownership is underlined when she emphasizes her content about having “her twenty acres and her version of culture safely tucked in her back pocket” (42). Similarly, Twoboy’s need of the approval through a white Australian Native Title Tribunal epitomizes his desperation to do whatever it takes to regain his country (33). For him, native title is the only way to restore his family’s honor and to be “recognised as a traditional owner [would make him] a warrior who’s finally made things better for his family” (172). Twoboy represents a whole generation of Aboriginal people, who “wanted the culture back [and] were trawling in dugai libraries and dugai archives retrieving little bits of songs, stories, dances” to have a chance to regain their ancestral lands by means of native title (101). In their attempt to belong in a way that is so different from the traditional Aboriginal way of life, the Indigenous characters Jo and Twoboy are gradually forced to sacrifice their spiritual connection to the land for the security of owning it. At the same time, the tendency of Aboriginal people to find validity in white structures points out that modern aboriginal identity is closely intertwined with Western approaches towards land, country and possession. In this regard, native title is one feature which connects these two worlds. However, *Mullumbimby* highlights the various problematic aspects of native title and its destructive effects on Indigenous societies.

In the novel, native title is presented as the absurdity of having to be acknowledged by a white tribunal while dividing Indigenous communities. Consequently, Jo refers to native title as the “bullshit saga of proving who they were and where they belonged, to the satisfaction of the dugai judge” (113). The tragedy native title imposes on Aboriginal people is illustrated by Twoboy’s lawyers, who explain to him “that he had to piece

together the cultural jigsaw that had been exploded of his family's diaspora, or else accept defeat" (161). In the process, Twoboy's misery and the subsequent native title war lead him to suggest to "sort native title out" by physically fighting over the land. This is particularly disturbing for Jo since she stresses that "[s]urvival of the fittest was dugai law, not hers" (191). However, Twoboy is well aware of the real nature of native title, namely an "[Aboriginal] war over the scraps off a white man's table" (222). At the end of the novel, Granny Nurrung reveals that native title is no more than "a bitta paper from the government" that offers no reconciliation for Aboriginal communities (275). Therefore, her character presents an alternative form of belonging that is rooted in "knowledge of place [and] taking responsibility for country" (Rodoreda 229). However, since she is an Indigenous elder, the type of knowledge that she embodies is only accessible for a minority of Aboriginal people.

Jo's deeply rooted insecurity towards her connection to her culture peaks in acute anxiety when she is confronted with ancient Aboriginal forms of belonging. As soon as Jo experiences Indigenous ancestral spirits in the form of songs in the hills, she is afraid, wishes she had never ridden up the mountain and wants to "stop the terror" (Lucashenko, *Mullumbimby* 97). After she is eventually able to appreciate the *talga*, she tries to record it with her mobile phone, demonstrating her distorted Western approach of how Aboriginal spirits work (98). In her reflection of the incident, she confirms her insecurity towards her ancestral roots and stresses that "[i]f there were secrets in the hills, *mooki*, ancestors holding sacred knowledge and secrets, well then let them stay where they bloody well were. Life was hard enough without inviting that kind of trouble in" (211). This denial of her ancestral stories epitomizes the severe trauma she has to overcome. Instead of facing her insecurities, Jo believes hearing ancestral voices is insane and prefers to stay within the safety of her own house, "right at home where she belonged" rather than going to the national park with Twoboy to hear the *talga* again (231). In the same way, her daughter Ellen is so terrified of her metaphysical connection to the land, that she burns her hands in an attempt to erase the evidence of her belonging (264). Consequently, Jo is completely overwhelmed by this multitude of spiritual signs (268). It is only after Granny Nurrung reveals the truth about Sam Nurrung and Rob Starr to her, that Jo realizes that there are "some things", like the *talga*, that "would always remain unknowable unless she figured them out for

herself" (276). Thus, she understands that not all Aboriginal wisdom can be told in the form of stories or found in books but has to be learnt from personal experience. Therefore, Jo finally overcomes her insecurities and develops a nurturing connection to her country. This happy ending is Lucashenko's way to give hope to Indigenous Australians and underline the possibility to reconcile with the past and establish a healthy sense of belonging.

4.3.2. Nationalism and Racism

Nationalism and racism are reoccurring themes in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*. Multiple characters represent various forms of racism, which are expressed throughout the narrations. In the two novels, the insecurity towards an entitlement of belonging is presented as the primary reason for racist and nationalist tendencies. Sonn *et al.* explain that in the Australian context, "narratives of history, politics and national belonging are deeply inscribed with racialised knowledges and assumptions that both reflect and efface white race privilege and power" (552). They further elaborate that "[t]hese narratives continue to shape social representations and understandings of self, other, national identity and belonging" (552). In this regard, Hage believes that "white nationalism" in Australia is predominantly expressed in the idea of "white entitlement" (par. 2). He explains that many Australians believe that "if you are white and you are not doing well, economically or in whatever way you imagine you are not doing well, you have every right to expect better precisely because you are white" (par. 2). Combined with the pain of unbelonging illustrated in the previous chapter, the sentiment of white entitlement can nurture racist ideologies and ultimately result in the formation of nationalist movements such as John McIvor's *Australian Independence League*.

In John's perception, his movement is "a league of concerned citizens" that aims at the protection of Australian people and values (131). He further describes its members as "[p]eople who are worried about what's happening to this country" (131). However, the real nature of the league's political position is illustrated in its charter written by McIvor. It states that the league rejects all aspects of Australia that are not in line with their vision of the country, such as the political system, "*excessive immigration and the*

dilution of traditional Australian culture” or the “*special and preferential treatment of elite minorities*” (133). Particularly, the rejection of “*the alienation of Australian soil to elite minorities*” underscores the league’s racist ideology and its position towards Aboriginal rights and native title (133). In this regard, the league shows numerous parallels to Pauline Hanson’s “One Nation Party”. In her maiden speech to the Australian Parliament, she stated that she was “fed up with being told ‘This is our land’” by Indigenous people and Aboriginal activists and emphasized that she “was born here” and “like most Australians [...] worked for [her] land” (qtd. in Miller 216). Thus, Miller analyzes that Hanson rejects “Indigenous claims of ownership [and] veils a desperate fear of illegitimacy and alienation from the ‘home’” (216). Similarly, John McIvor’s charter expresses a profound insecurity of non-Aboriginal people’s entitlement to belonging.

The members of John’s league are presented as a cross-section of the non-Indigenous Australian population. This approach points towards the variety of personal insecurities and fears that emerged in the aftermath of the Mabo decision. Among the chairmen of the league are an accountant, a doctor, an entrepreneur and a farmer. Likewise, the people at the rally on John’s property are men, women and children of all ages and social backgrounds (199). They express their concerns regarding native title openly, ranging from the existential fear to lose their property and, therefore, their source of income, to the resentment of having to work for their country while it is being “handed over” to Aboriginal people (210). These fears and insecurities eventually peak in blind rage and lead to the idea of the formation of a militia. Some members suggest to take up arms and kill the Aboriginal people if they tried to exercise their native title rights. In the crowd, William hears anonymous people say things such as “the old settlers [...] did what had to be done, and if it took a gun” or “pity of it is, they didn’t finish them off when they had the chance” (212). McGahan skillfully uses the insecurity of his white characters to demonstrate how easily fear can culminate in racism and nationalism and how nationalist parties instrumentalize these sentiments to attract potential voters.

In *Mullumbimby*, Jo epitomizes how the experience of being a person of Aboriginal descent in Australia can result in racist positions towards non-Aboriginal Australians. Despite her affection and care for all living beings on her land, the hardships she had to face in her life have led her to despise most white Australians. For example, she

describes her aversion of having been dragged “into [her ex-husband’s] tight white world” (4) or refers to the dead white population of the Mullumbimby cemetery as “Mullumbimbos” (86). She further mocks “the anal tendencies of the dugai world” (115) and asserts that Australia had been “[c]olonised by wankers” (181). In her first conversation with Twoboy and his brother, Jo depicts her vision of non-Indigenous Australia as follows: “Dead Heart. Meat Pies. Holden Cars. Racists” (43). Using strategies such as Jo’s underlying racism towards the non-Aboriginal population of Australia serves in part to present a vision of the country that is largely unacknowledged, since racism is often misunderstood as an exclusively non-Aboriginal ideology. Furthermore, such writing techniques present a possibility to illustrate a different version of Australia than it is presented in mainstream literature. Similarly to the illustration of Jo’s racism, *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* both deconstruct several typical Australian stereotypes. The deconstruction of some of these common stereotypes will be discussed in the following section.

4.4. Deconstruction of the Stereotypes of Belonging

Some of the numerous Australian stereotypes in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* such as the inability of non-Aboriginal people to construct a meaningful relationship to their land or nationalism and racism have already been outlined in the previous chapters of this thesis. However, at the same time, the presented literature also deconstructs some of these clichés. Therefore, this chapter summarizes some of the most dominant stereotypes in the two novels and depicts how they are deconstructed, thus, providing an alternative vision of Australian belonging.

4.4.1. Deconstructing the Stereotypes of Racist Whites and Uneducated Aboriginals

In line with the previous chapter on racism and nationalism in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*, this section serves to deconstruct the stereotypes of “racist whites” in the two novels. The first character presented in this chapter is John McIvor in *The White Earth*. Even though he does not necessarily dismantle the image of the racist white Australian, he is listed in this section since he portrays an alternative to the typical depiction of a racist individual. While this may seem surprising in light of his previously outlined character, John deeply respects and admires the Aboriginal people and their culture. He shares these beliefs with William and explains to him that he does not “hate Aborigines [...] Personally, I have a great deal of respect for Aborigines and the way they used to live. They were here before us, after all, and they survived for thousands of years. They understood a lot of things” (179).

Throughout the narration, John’s admiration for the Indigenous Australians is emphasized on several accounts. Despite his insecurity towards the legitimacy of his entitlement to own the land, he admits that “there were caves, and certain rock outcrops and waterfalls that spoke to [him] of a long human presence” (100). Thus, he recognizes Aboriginal landmarks and a prior Indigenous presence on the country. In his belief that the stone circle on one of the hills of his station is a sacred Aboriginal site, he even holds the rally of his nationalist league in this very spot to honor the Indigenous culture. Although he eventually loses control over his league, he attempts to push it into a more moderate direction and openly protests against racist ideologies.

When several people at the rally begin to express racist ideas, he stresses that “[w]e are not now and have never been, a racist organisation. This is not about Aborigines”, adding that he “will not have racist talk here!” (212). Nevertheless, he proves to be incapable to redirect his organization into a less hostile direction. A further indication of white recognition of Aboriginal tradition in the novel is the fact that the first white owner of the station named the Kuran Plains after the Indigenous population that lived in the area and not after the first white explorer (163). However, the most significant demonstration of white acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture in *The White Earth* is John’s daughter Ruth.

Ruth is a liberal lawyer who promotes Indigenous rights and represents a white protector of Aboriginality in the novel. She strives for the reconciliation of the Australian people and is a proponent of the imminent native title legislation. Therefore, she can be regarded as “the voice of white conscience” in the story (Green 91). As a consequence of her traumatic upbringing and her broken relationship to her father, she is presented as an antagonist to John and the traditional non-Indigenous pastoralist view in general. Similarly to the Australian continent, Ruth was raped by a white farmer, who symbolizes the European colonizers. Consequently, her character’s development into a human rights lawyer points towards the possibility of the reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Ruth lectures William on the real history of the country and deconstructs the white settler narrative his great uncle had told him. Furthermore, she seeks out the traditional owners of Kuran station and wants to help them to regain their country by means of native title. Yet, even Ruth has moments of doubt where she is tempted to forget about her fight for Aboriginal rights and considers keeping the land for herself. After John’s death, she reflects that the station “was fifteen thousand acres of prime grazing country. In this world, something like that wasn’t just given back. It had to be fought for” (375). However, she immediately realizes that she is mimicking her father’s obsession with ownership and finds her purpose again. Therefore, Ruth represents a new generation of non-Indigenous Australians, who try to make amends for the crimes committed against the traditional owners of the land and, thus, she gives hope for the reconciliation of the nation.

Similarly to Ruth, Rob Starr epitomizes a non-Indigenous protector of Aboriginality in *Mullumbimby*. In the beginning of the story, Jo mistakes him for an ignorant white

intruder, who embodies everything she hates about white Australia (24). She blames him for Comet's death and even accuses him of child abuse when she sees him performing a sacred Aboriginal ritual with Sam Nurrung, asking herself "what sort of middle-aged farmer wanted to take a young boy out into remote bush paddocks in the late afternoon where there was nobody else around to see or hear?" (215). Eventually, she finds out that Rob Starr is the anonymous saint who gave her the horse *Gift* after Comet's death (273). When Granny Nurrung reveals to her that he had overwritten his farm to Sam Nurrung to guarantee the Aboriginal ownership of the sacred waterhole, she begins to understand that he is "protecting Goorie Law" (274). Thus, Rob Starr "has committed himself to the restitution of Bundjalung lands" (Vincent par. 6). Consequently, he deconstructs Jo's stereotype of the ignorance of white men and demonstrates that he is a true guardian of Aboriginal culture. However, the lack of voice of Rob Starr's character in the narrative hints towards Lucashenko's tendency to present white supporters of Aboriginality as humble bystanders.

Another stereotype that is deconstructed in *Mullumbimby* is the image of uneducated Aboriginal people. Early in the novel, Jo dismantles this stereotype when her brother's non-Aboriginal girlfriend Caroline tries to lecture her in history. Upon Jo's disclosure that she has a degree in Australian history, Caroline is surprised that "someone who mows grass in a cemetery would have a university degree" (48-49). However, Jo herself reinforces the stereotype of uneducated Aboriginal people when she is equally impressed as surprised when she sees Twoboy coming out of the library carrying a book in his hand (13). The well-educated Twoboy wants to regain his ancestral land and has learned to fight his battles at court and, thereby, represents a whole new generation of Aboriginal warriors (43). He explains to Jo that he is a threat to the white Australian vision of Aboriginal people since he is "a big, powerful, educated black man" and, therefore, he threatens the white power hierarchy (201). Hence, Twoboy's character serves as the ultimate deconstruction of the stereotype of the uneducated Aboriginal male.

4.4.2. Romanticizing the Aboriginal Sense of Belonging

Both *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth* tend to romanticize the Aboriginal sense of belonging in numerous ways. While the singularity of the Aboriginal connection to land and nature is undisputed, the presented literary works are inclined to idealize the Indigenous affiliation to the country. The Aboriginal approach towards land, country and community is frequently presented as the purest form of belonging in literature. However, the two novels highlight that this perception is often exaggerated and regularly depict Indigenous relationships to place and people as highly problematic.

One of these techniques is the presentation of the image of the unique spiritual connection of Aboriginal people in *Mullumbimby*. It can be argued that Jo's character constructs this stereotype by using exclusively Bundjalung terms for the English words 'eye' and 'ear' to express Ellen's special connection to the spirit of the world and her ability to observe the country. Jo stresses that her daughter only "spoke around half as much as a white child her age. Learn by watching and listening, using *mil and binung* [emphasis added]" (17). While the use of these words would not be particularly conspicuous, it has to be noted that Jo merely uses relatively few Bundjalung expressions, partly due to her limited vocabulary. However, their utilization in this context can be interpreted as an underlying feeling of superiority Jo experiences over non-Indigenous people and their connection to the land. At the same time, Jo makes fun of Twoboy's obsession to reconnect with his ancestors in his attempts to hear the sacred *talga* on the hill. She sarcastically mentions to her sister Kym that she expects that all his ancestors are going to tell him is that he should "get a haircut and get a real job" (233). Jo's attitude in this scene underlines that she is not as serious about Indigenous belonging as she usually claims to be. Therefore, her demeanor partially deconstructs the image of the extraordinary meaning of Indigenous belonging.

Another deconstruction of the exceptional Aboriginal sense of belonging is the representation of the relationships among Indigenous Australians in *Mullumbimby*. The ongoing native title war in the novel demonstrates the deep trenches between Aboriginal families all over the country. Jo illustrates this tragedy by explaining to her non-Indigenous friend Therese that "she had no idea what went down between blackfellas when land was at stake. Think Gaza" (33-34). This comparison between native title wars and the atrocities of the Gaza conflict outlines the great divisions within

Indigenous communities. Throughout the narration, the repercussions of native title wars are emphasized in various situations. Jo arrives at the conclusion that native title is nothing but a lot of work that eventually leaves “a community in ruins” (171, see 222). Her sister Kym summarizes the madness of native title by identifying it as “Colonisation 4.0 [in which] [t]he dugai don’t have to lift a finger anymore – they’ve outsourced it to us” (233). These illustrations represent the vision of native title promoted in the novel as a non-Indigenous Australian tool to divide Aboriginal communities while simultaneously preaching reconciliation. Twoboy further underlines the division of Indigenous people when he claims to care for the Aboriginal people while ignoring the possible legitimacy of an entitlement to the land by other Bundjalung people who are not involved in the ongoing native title war (224). Rodoreda asserts that Twoboy’s constant dilemma to prove his belonging by means of native title prevents him from developing a more meaningful connection to his land (227). Consequently, he embodies the struggle of countless Indigenous Australians who desperately attempt to prove their belonging to their ancestral homelands.

In *The White Earth*, the connection young William develops to the country represents a white boy’s Aboriginal experience. In the course of the narration, the nine-year-old child learns to appreciate the land in a way that is typical for Indigenous Australians. Therefore, the fact that he grows into an Aboriginal sense of belonging is romanticized as the ultimate goal (Ashcroft, *Sublime* 150). Early in the novel, his great uncle asks him about his experiences on the station after having lived there for some time. John wants to know if William understands the country in the same way he does. William thinks of “dust devils dancing across the paddocks” and “[f]lights of crows”, thus, demonstrating that he has an eye for country (McGahan 58). His understanding of the Aboriginal connection to the land is best illustrated by his encounter with the mystical bunyip. The legendary creature from the Aboriginal Dreamtime is known to scarcely ever reveal itself, let alone before a non-Indigenous person (317). Thus, William’s ability to see and even talk to the bunyip illustrates his sacred connection to “the Aboriginal spirit world” (Ashcroft, *Sublime* 150.) Consequently, he comes to understand that true belonging and the real essence of the land are innate and cannot be learned (326). However, William’s romanticized Aboriginal experience suggests an inferiority of non-Aboriginal belonging.

The inferior relationship of non-Indigenous Australians to the land is one of the main stereotypes in *The White Earth*. As outlined in a previous chapter on the pain of unbelonging of Australians of European descent, they are deeply insecure in regard of their entitlement to belong to the country as a result of the violent dispossession of its traditional owners. Therefore, Ronald McKie argues that non-Aboriginal Australians “still have no inherent attachment to the land like Aborigines” (qtd. in Lattas 55). While this perceived inferiority is illustrated throughout the narrative, the novel simultaneously deconstructs this stereotype by highlighting John’s profound relationship to the country. John explains his vision of non-Indigenous belonging to William as follows:

There are folk out there who believe that the Aborigines are the only ones who understand the land [...] They think that the blacks have some magical connection that whites can never have [...] But that’s not true. We can have connections with the land too, our own kind of magic. This land talks to me. It doesn’t care what color I am [...].” (McGahan 181)

John understands the living nature of the country and that it is not restricted to a person’s origins. Despite his longing for ownership, he understands the true essence of the land and can actually experience the living soul of the place. He shares his ideas with William, claiming that the reason he bought the station is that he belongs to the land and, therefore, wants to take “responsibility for it” (109). Ashcroft argues that “[t]he achievement of the novel is to see the Aboriginal spirit of place as [...] communicable” (*Sublime* 150). However, in one scene, John explains that true belonging is not exclusive and not an Aboriginal experience but instead a human experience. He points out that “[t]he blacks say [the country] flows into you through your feet, and they’re right. But it’s not an Aboriginal thing. It’s not a white thing either. It’s a human thing” (295). Therefore, Horakova argues that John McIvor’s character epitomizes the view that non-Indigenous people can develop a meaningful, spiritual connection to the land (115). McGahan’s novel suggests that non-Aboriginal Australians can establish a profound relationship with the land *if* they can overcome their obsession with ownership and reconcile with their violent history. Consequently, the novel deconstructs the widespread belief that a spiritual form of belonging to the country can solely be experienced by Aboriginal people.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has examined the representation of the Australian vision of belonging in post-colonial fiction. The foundation of this analysis was built on Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* and Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*. The two novels were analyzed in regard of their positions to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perceptions of belonging. Therefore, the central topics of analysis were the distinctive approaches towards belonging to land and people as well as the examination of the insecurity of belonging and the deconstruction of various stereotypes in the presented literature. The thorough investigation of these two literary works has illustrated how the authors transmit their notions of belonging to the audience and what visions of belonging they promote.

After introducing several attempts for definitions of the abstract concept of belonging, an overview of the most relevant historical and political background for an in-depth analysis was provided. This included some of the most important aspects of settler colonialism, the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the Mabo judgement and the following Native Title Act, as well as the notion of belonging in Australian literature. Subsequently, the two novels were summarized concisely to familiarize the reader with the most significant information of the basis of the subsequent analysis.

The sense of belonging to land was identified as the central theme in the two novels. Particularly, the unique nature of the significance of land in Aboriginal culture has been discussed at length. While all the characters in the set texts were shown to experience a profound connection to the country, a clear distinction between ownership and actual belonging to the land was highlighted. One of the crucial factors in the establishment of a meaningful relationship to the country was revealed to be a substantial knowledge of its history, nature and stories. Additionally, the metaphysical experiences of the Indigenous as well as of the non-Indigenous characters in the set texts served to epitomize the perception of the country as a living entity that is a part of the person and vice versa.

Since land and people were depicted as strongly interrelated in the analysis of the novels, mere ownership or connection to country proved to be unfulfilling in the absence of human relationships. The significance of belonging to a community was presented as the foundation of a nurturing relation between country and people. In this

respect, the contrasting positions of the Aboriginal longing for close kinship relationships and the individualism of Western cultures were juxtaposed. Likewise, the absence of guidance by elders in Indigenous communities was presented as one of the major challenges in the establishment of a vital sense of belonging, thus, symbolizing the crisis of Aboriginal people all over Australia.

Numerous factors have been identified to construct a feeling of insecurity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians regarding their sense of belonging. The dispossession of their country and their subsequent social deracination proved to be the greatest tragedy in the history of Aboriginal people. The repercussions of this catastrophe are among the primary reasons for the difficulties of Indigenous Australians to establish and maintain nurturing relationships to their native land. At the same time, the revelations of the crimes of colonization in the late 20th century also led to the identity crisis of a whole generation of non-Indigenous Australians. The fact that the non-Aboriginal sense of belonging is founded on the murder of the original owners of the country has been described as one of the principal reasons for the non-Indigenous insecurity towards their sense of belonging to the country.

The final chapter of this thesis has presented the deconstruction of some of the most striking stereotypes in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*. While reinforcing some of the most dominant Australian stereotypes, the novels were shown to simultaneously deconstruct clichés of white racists or uneducated Aboriginal people by presenting white protectors of Aboriginality and well-educated Aboriginal lawyers. Therefore, the novels provide alternative visions of contemporary Australia. Another stereotype which this thesis has pointed out is the depiction of the superiority of the Aboriginal sense of belonging. The desperate attempts of Aboriginal people to prove their affiliation to the land by means of native title and the related native title wars within Indigenous communities indicate the bitter conflict Indigenous Australians are facing to regain their beloved lands.

Naturally, this thesis could merely investigate the presented aspects of belonging in the two literary works and, thus, disregards several other identificatory markers that constitute belonging. In addition, this paper cannot propose an accurate picture of the general Australian vision of belonging. However, it provides an insight into the attempts

of these two Australian authors to illustrate their perceptions of belonging on the continent and reveals the immense complexity of the subject matter. Obviously, the implications addressed in this paragraph underscore the importance of further extensive research in the field. Additional literature analyses of contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous fiction are urgently needed to elucidate the puzzle of Australian belonging by highlighting the respective approaches of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, discussing the restrictions and limitations and deconstructing the stereotypes involved.

In conclusion, this thesis has aimed to present the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives on belonging to facilitate an insight into the Australian vision on the subject. While the quest of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for a meaningful sense of belonging is an extremely complex topic, their attempt to construct a more fulfilling relationship to the land is pivotal to constitute a more positive self-perception of their identity. McGahan's *The White Earth* emphasizes that non-Aboriginal Australians can establish a meaningful sense of belonging to the land if they can reconcile with their violent history and cultivate a more spiritual approach to their country. Similarly, Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* epitomizes that "there is a living breathing Aboriginal culture in Australia" (Lucashenko, Q&A) and, thus, gives hope to a future in which Aboriginal people can overcome their trauma of their social deracination and the dispossession of their ancestral lands.

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Abstract

Since the first days of the British colonization of Australia, Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Australians have shared a very violent and troublesome history. The concept of belonging is one of the most dominant and controversial themes in the construction of Australian identity. While the common theme of the struggling European settlers and their inability to adapt to the new world has been explored at length in Australian literature, a lot of research has been conducted on the Indigenous Australian perspective over the last few decades as well. However, previous work on fiction writing has predominantly addressed the positions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal belonging individually. Particularly, the novels presented in this thesis and their portrayal of belonging have primarily been investigated either in isolation or in comparison to similar works. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is an examination of the Australian vision of belonging and its representation in Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* and Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*. As a result of the absence of an apparatus that can provide valid data on the sense of belonging of an individual, comparative literature analyses such as the one conducted in this thesis are amongst the few instruments to investigate the complex subject matter. As a first step, the general meaning of belonging is elaborated, followed by an overview of the most relevant historical background for the analysis, including settler colonialism, the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the Mabo judgement, the Native Title Act, as well as the notion of belonging in Australian literature. The subsequent analysis outlines the different approaches of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters in the novels towards belonging and illustrates the vision of Australian belonging they promote. The results presented in this thesis indicate that the establishment of a meaningful sense of belonging depends on the combination of a profound connection to the country as well as vital community relationships. Furthermore, the investigation of the two literary works introduces numerous factors that impede the formation of a significant relationship to the land and deconstructs some of the most dominant stereotypes of Australian belonging in the novels. Obviously, this thesis can merely provide a brief insight into the realm of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal belonging in post-colonial Australian literature. However, it can serve as a representative sample of the distinctive positions on the subject as they are presented in *Mullumbimby* and *The White Earth*.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Seit Beginn der britischen Kolonisation Australiens verbindet die indigene und die nicht-indigene Bevölkerung des Kontinents eine gewalttätige und grausame Geschichte. Die Zugehörigkeit und Verbundenheit zu Land und Menschen ist dabei seit jeher eines der prägendsten Themen in der Konstruktion der australischen Identität. Sowohl Thematiken wie das beschwerliche Leben der europäischen Siedler und ihre Unfähigkeit sich an die neue Welt anzupassen, als auch die einzigartige Lebenswelt der indigenen Australier wurden in der australischen Literatur umfassend behandelt. Vorangegangene Studien zu den in dieser Arbeit präsentierten Werken beschäftigten sich oftmals mit der einseitigen Darstellung der indigenen oder nicht-indigenen Perspektive. Daher ist das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit die verschiedenen australischen Sichtweisen zum Thema Zugehörigkeit und Verbundenheit zu Land, Nation und Menschen, wie sie in Melissa Lucashenkos *Mullumbimby* und Andrew McGahans *The White Earth* präsentiert werden, darzustellen. Aufgrund der Tatsache, dass die Zugehörigkeit einer Person bis dato nicht wissenschaftlich messbar ist, sind vergleichende Literaturanalysen eine der wenigen Möglichkeiten die komplexe Materie zu analysieren. Zu Beginn der Arbeit wird der Begriff „belonging“ beleuchtet und ein Überblick über die relevantesten historischen Hintergründe zur Thematik im australischen Kontext präsentiert. Dazu gehören unter anderem die Kolonisation des Kontinents, *terra nullius*, der Fall „Mabo“, der Native Title Act, sowie das Thema Zugehörigkeit in der australischen Literatur. Die anschließende Analyse vergleicht die verschiedenen Perspektiven der indigenen und nicht-indigenen Charaktere in den beiden literarischen Werken und erörtert die verschiedenen Zugänge zum Thema Zugehörigkeit und Verbundenheit zu Land, Nation und Menschen. Die Ergebnisse dieser Untersuchungen deuten darauf hin, dass die Bildung eines sinnstiftenden Zugehörigkeitsgefühls von der Kombination einer bedeutsamen Verbindung zu Land und Örtlichkeit sowie intakten menschlichen Beziehungen abhängig ist. Des Weiteren illustriert die Analyse der vorgestellten Literatur die diversen Faktoren, welche die Bildung eines ausgeprägten Zugehörigkeits- und Verbundenheitsgefühls im australischen Kontext erschweren und dekonstruiert einige der weitverbreitetsten Vorurteile im Zusammenhang mit der Materie.

Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work except where otherwise indicated. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged and identified. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this thesis at any other institution in order to obtain a degree.

Vienna, 12 August 2019