

Role of Space in Shaping Emotions and Identity in Melissa Lucashenko's Mullumbimby

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Abstract—The Bundjalung people, original custodians of land extending from the Clarence River to the Logan River and west to the Great Dividing Range, belong to one of the world's oldest continuous living cultures in Australia. In *Mullumbimby* (2013), Melissa Lucashenko depicts contemporary Bundjalung life within this ancestral terrain, foregrounding land as a constitutive force in the creation of identity and sense of belonging. Though the novel has been widely examined through the lenses of resistance, survival, and Indigenous ontopoetics, its spatial dynamics and emotional implications on the inhabitants have received limited critical attention. This paper argues that lived, contested, and remembered spaces in *Mullumbimby* actively shape the psyche of its characters and their perception of life. Drawing on spatial theory, particularly concepts of lived space, place-making, and spatial affect, the paper undertakes a close analysis of the domestic, communal, and ancestral landscapes in the novel. By foregrounding spatial theory, this paper offers a new critical lens for Lucashenko's work and highlights the ways in which human emotions are impacted by relational engagement with place.

Index Terms—Ancestral Landscapes, Bundjalung, Human emotions, Identity, Spatial theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human identity is deeply connected to the landscapes that people inhabit. Land becomes a space where memory, culture and history are formed rather than a mere geographical location. The places where individuals live help them to understand themselves, their relationship with others and their connection with their past. Land holds stories and evidence of people that become a part of their collective identity. Through living and remembering, people interact with their

land, which develops a sense of belonging that eventually ties their identity to a particular place.

According to the International Labour Organization, indigenous people have descended from communities that lived in a place before it was conquered, colonised, or before modern national borders were created. For Indigenous communities, the relationship with land goes far beyond ownership or economic value. Land is considered to be an ancestral, cultural and spiritual space. It contains memories of ancestors, sacred sites, and traditional knowledge about their identity that has been passed down through generations.

Initially, space or land was seen as a mere geographical area to live on. However, this perspective was changed. Land became a social tool that held pride and identity, projecting an impact on people's emotions. According to Irwin Altman and Setha Low (1992), landscapes can create attachment, where people develop emotional connections to specific locations, leading to feelings of nostalgia, home, cultural identity, and community belonging.

While the common man associates land with memories prominently, it was more than just memories for indigenous communities. Indigenous communities maintain a deep emotional and cultural relationship with their land, as the rhythms of the environment shape their practices, beliefs, and ways of life (Gabora, 2022). Ashlee Cunsolo et al. (2023) note that Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural traditions develop through long-term relationships with ancestral lands. One such Indigenous community that values land and their traditional space is the Bundjalung people.

The Bundjalung people are the original custodians of a large area of land stretching from Grafton in northern

New South Wales to towns in southern Queensland such as Beaudesert and Beenleigh, and westwards toward Tenterfield. Their country includes important natural and cultural sites such as Bundjalung National Park and Mount Warning, which the Bundjalung people call Wollumbin, meaning 'rainmaker.' The Bundjalung nation is not a single tribe but a large federation of clans and dialect groups, each with its own identity. More than twenty dialect groups existed within the Bundjalung nation, including Wahlubal, Yugambeh, Birrihn, Barryugil, Wiyabal, Minyangbal, Gidhabal, and Ngarrahngbal.

According to oral traditions, the history of Bundjalung people started with the Three Brothers, who arrived by sea and settled in the surrounding land. One important place is Goanna Headland, located south of Evans Head, which is regarded as a mythological place of origin for the Bundjalung nation and is believed to have been visited and inhabited for at least 12,000 years. The deep historical and cultural connections of the Bundjalung people to this landscape is revealed by the archaeological sites located on the headland and nearby areas.

For the Bundjalung people, land is the foundation of their identity and survival. Tina Williams, a Bundjalung woman and North Coast regional councillor, reflects on the significance of land for her community in her testimony, *My Journey Through Land Rights* (2014). She explains that land is deeply connected to identity and hopes that younger generations would understand that they belong to a particular place. She remembers her grandfather speaking about the Country and singing in Bundjalung language. This illustrates how land, language and cultural traditions are passed down through generations, especially in the Indigenous communities. Williams represents land as a living source of cultural identity, continuity and responsibility for the Bundjalung people (Williams, 2014).

Apart from the oral stories and testimonies, literary works on the Bundjalung community, their history and survival play an important role to understand their connection to the land. *Bundjalung Nghari Indigenise* (2022) is a theatre production created by the company Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA). The performance presents stories, poems, and essays written by Bundjalung writers such as Steven Oliver, Melissa Lucashenko, Daniel Browning, Kylie

Caldwell, and Ella Noah Bancroft. Curated by Rhoda Roberts, the production shares Indigenous perspectives on returning to Country, truth about history, and healing. It highlights Bundjalung voices and their cultural connection to land and community (NORPA, 2022).

Historical narratives about the region are also recorded in *Sagas of the Early Days* (1946), a series of articles written by Windsor Lang. These articles describe the early development of the district from the time the first ship crossed the dangerous river bar to explore the Richmond River. Lang presents historical events while also including local references and stories about the lives of early pioneers in the region (Lang, n.d.).

Melissa Lucashenko is an Indigenous Australian writer from the Bundjalung nation. She is known for writing novels and essays that talk about the lives, culture, and experiences of Indigenous people in Australia. Her writing often explores themes such as identity, family, land, and social justice. Lucashenko has written several well-known novels, including *Too Much Lip* (2018), which won the Miles Franklin Award in 2019. She is also a journalist and essayist and has received many awards for her work. Through her writing, she aims to give a strong voice to Indigenous stories and perspectives.

In *Too Much Lip* (2018) by Melissa Lucashenko, Kerry Salter returns to her hometown in northern New South Wales. She comes back because her grandfather is dying, even though she planned to stay away from home and trouble. When she arrives, she becomes involved again with her complicated family and the problems in their community. The Salter family faces many conflicts, including old family secrets, violence, and painful memories from the past. At the same time, they try to protect their ancestral land from a development project that threatens an important place connected to their family history. Through these events, Kerry begins to think about her identity, her family, and her connection to her community and land. Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* (2013), plays a major role in depicting the importance of land and Bundjalung identity associated with it. This novel stands as an important work in contemporary Australian literature, specifically within the rich tradition of First Nations storytelling. Set against the lush but contested backdrop of Bundjalung country in northern New South Wales, the novel follows Jo Breen, a 'coffee-coloured' Bundjalung woman who

scrapes together her savings to purchase a twenty-acre block of land. This act of property ownership is not merely a financial investment but a profound and complicated reclamation of her traditional estate. Through Jo's journey, Lucashenko explores the intersections of Native Title law, internal community conflicts, and the resilient, adaptive nature of modern Aboriginal identity.

Melissa Lucashenko uses the town of Mullumbimby in Mullumbimby (2013), not just as a setting, but as a character in itself. It becomes a 'fragment' of country that has been dismembered by fences but remains vitally alive in the spirits of its traditional owners. The novel arrived at a time when Australian literature was increasingly engaging with the 'truth-telling' required to address the legacy of colonialism. Unlike many works that focus solely on the concept of stolen generations or historical violence, Mullumbimby (2013) is firmly rooted in the present, dealing with the fallout of the 1992 Mabo decision and the complexities of the Native Title Act. It is a story of survival, not just of people, but of language, culture, and the land itself.

The novel, Mullumbimby (2013), has been examined in several critical studies that focus on Indigenous identity, resistance, and survival. Researchers often read the novel through the lens of Indigenous resistance, highlighting how the protagonist's struggle for land rights reflects broader political and historical struggles faced by Aboriginal communities in Australia. These readings emphasize the ways the narrative challenges colonial power structures, its system and asserts Indigenous sovereignty and cultural continuity. Other analyses focus on themes of survival, particularly how the characters maintain cultural knowledge, family connections, and relationships with Country despite the long history of marginalization.

The novel has also been explored through Feminist Theory, particularly in relation to the representation of Indigenous womanhood and female agency. Critics note how the protagonist's journey reflects the strength, resilience, and independence of Indigenous women as they navigate social pressures, family responsibilities, and cultural expectations. Through this perspective, the novel is seen as portraying women not merely as victims of colonial and patriarchal structures but as active agents who assert their voice.

In addition, some researchers approach the novel through the concept of Indigenous ontopoetics, which examines how Indigenous beings and poetic expression are inseparable. Through this lens, the narrative is understood as demonstrating how Indigenous ways of knowing and being are deeply tied to Country and community. However, despite these important perspectives, Mullumbimby has not been analyzed in terms of its spatial dynamics and the emotional impact of landscape on its inhabitants. A closer examination of how the physical environment shapes the characters' emotional experiences and sense of belonging could therefore offer a new and valuable approach to understanding the novel.

Addressing this gap, this paper argues that the lived, contested, and remembered spaces in Mullumbimby (2013) actively shape the psyche of its characters and influence how they understand their lives, identities, and relationships with others. In the novel, places are not merely passive settings but meaningful environments that interact with the characters' memories, conflicts, and emotional states. The landscapes represented in the narrative, whether domestic spaces, community environments, or ancestral lands, play an important role in shaping how characters experience belonging, displacement, and connection to Country.

To examine the relationships between space and emotion in the novel, this paper draws on concepts from Spatial Theory, particularly the ideas of lived space, place-making, and spatial affect. Through a close reading of the domestic, communal, and ancestral landscapes depicted in the novel, the paper explores how everyday environments influence the emotional lives of the characters and contribute to their sense of identity and memory. By foregrounding spatial theory, this paper aims to provide a new critical perspective on Lucashenko's work, thereby demonstrating how human emotions and psychological experiences are deeply shaped through relational engagement with place.

Henri Lefebvre, in his work *The Production of Space* (1991), presents a spatial theory that offers an important framework for understanding how space and landscape influence human experience. He argues that space is not simply a neutral physical setting but a social product shaped by cultural practices, political structures, and human interactions. In this sense, spaces such as homes, cities, and landscapes carry

meanings, memories, and ideologies that affect people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Due to this dynamic relationship, spatial theory becomes a useful tool in literary studies for examining how the environments represented in a narrative shape the emotional and psychological experiences of characters.

A central concept in Lefebvre's theory is the 'spatial triad,' which explains how space is produced and experienced through three interconnected dimensions. They are perceived space, conceived space, and lived space. Perceived space, also called spatial practice, refers to the physical environment and the everyday routines through which individuals interact with it, such as movement, daily activities, and sensory experiences. Conceived space refers to the planned or imagined space shaped by social institutions, authority, or cultural structures, including maps, architectural designs, and social norms. Lived space, or representational space, represents the subjective dimension of space where individuals attach emotions, memories, and symbolic meanings to places. Through this triadic model, Lefebvre demonstrates that space is experienced both materially and emotionally, allowing scholars to explore how landscapes influence the inner lives of individuals (Lefebvre, 1991).

In literary analysis, Henri Lefebvre further suggests that spatial environments shape how individuals perceive and experience their social world. Landscapes in literature are therefore not merely passive settings but active forces that structure experience and perception. The tension between conceived space and lived space, for instance, can produce feelings of alienation, resistance, or belonging when characters struggle between imposed spatial structures and their personal experiences of place. By applying spatial theory, critics can show that emotional responses within a narrative are closely connected to spatial environments, demonstrating how human feelings and social relationships are deeply influenced by the spaces people inhabit and imagine.

In *Mullumbimby* (2013), Melissa Lucashenko portrays the life of Jo Breen, a Bundjalung woman, groundskeeper at the local Mullumbimby cemetery, who purchases a small section of land and moves in with her daughter, Ellen. As a single mother dealing with her teenage daughter, Jo Breen wishes to own a piece of their traditional land, which was partly taken by white settlers after colonization. Before owning the

land, she used to live in a Donga, a metal hut, along with her daughter. She became tired of living in a small, temporary space that lacked comfort and did not allow her to pursue her passion for gardening, which deepened her desire for a place she could truly call her own.

Throughout the novel, Jo Breen associates every place she visits with her Bundjalung pride. She reflects on how colonisation caused the Bundjalung people to lose ownership of their land and live as outsiders in their own country. At the cemetery where she works, she also observes that most of those buried there are white colonisers and their descendants. The cemetery evokes a lot of emotions in her, "And there was something about the cemetery that put things into another perspective altogether" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 13). For Jo Breen, cemetery is not just a scenery, it is a physical reminder of colonial history, forgotten lives, and a status of who gets memorialised (white protestants and catholics) and who does not.

The cemetery provides Jo with perspective, relief from social pressures, and a sense of equality. Once buried, everyone loses status, choice, and narrative. Through this, Jo Breen believes that the difference between the status of the whites and the Bundjalung people is erased in the cemetery. She jokes about ghosts at the cemetery but this act of Jo shows how death is casually portrayed and not romanticised. She says, "Once you were in the ground, that was it: no more rent or eviction notices, but no freedom of association either" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 14). For Jo, space feels grounding, quietly philosophical and slightly haunted but mostly forgiving. It allows her to exist without ambition and that feels like mercy, not failure.

Jo Breen's relationship with land and space is both historical and ethical. Jo's imagining of land rejects colonial spatial logic. While she works at the cemetery, she keeps thinking about how the land would have been if it was not invaded by the colonizers. Jo Breen does not imagine who owned the land in 1866, she imagines how it was. While cleaning the headstones of the dead, she thinks of how the land would have been grown with fig trees if it had belonged completely to the Bundjalungs. In the novel, colonial space is measured, named, and owned like roads, plots, headstones and dates. Jo mentally removes those markers and reimagines them with forests, animals and Bundjalung mud. This act mirrors an Indigenous perception of land as continuous, living,

and a space that existed prior to human inscription rather than controlled.

Jo Breen does not position herself at the center of this landscape or insert her own body into the past. Instead, she witnesses it. This decentering of the self aligns with Indigenous and tribal relationships to Country, where identity is formed through relationship to place, not dominance over it. The novel is explicit that the land originally belonged to the Bundjalungs and that it is Bundjalung Country. By naming it as 'Bundjalung mud,' the narrative anchors the space in Indigenous presence rather than abstract presence. This reinforces the idea that settler occupation was layered over on older, ongoing relationships between people and Country.

While looking at the headstone of William John Collins, a white settler, Jo wonders how the Bundjalung watched his funeral when he died years ago. White settlers were buried in Bundjalung land, while the natives were denied burial in their own land by the white settlers. It shows the link between Indigenous people and land by questioning settler ownership. When Jo asks what was on land before the first white grave, the novel reminds the readers that the Bundjalung people had firsthand knowledge of the land before the colonization itself. Imagining them watching the funeral portrays them as marginalized subjects, witnessing changes in their own land. When it comes to land, the settlers focused on practical details like distance and convenience, which shows a calculative view of the land. This contrasts with Indigenous understanding of land as ancestral and meaningful.

Eventually, Jo thinks of elders like Uncle Freddy Humbug and Aunt Sally Watt, and wonders how they navigated these changes. By thinking of these elders, the novel values Indigenous memory and oral knowledge as important ways of understanding the land's history. She also contemplates "what the elders might have secreted in their memories about the history of the cemetery" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 16). This evokes Jo's emotions through quiet reflection rather than strong reaction.

As Jo imagines what existed before the settlers' graves, she feels a sense of unease and curiosity about the land's past. Her questions suggest doubt and discomfort with the idea that white settlement is land's true beginning. Thinking about the Bundjalung people watching the funeral creates a feeling of great respect

mixed with guilt, as she becomes aware of their exclusion from their own land. Jo is emotionally torn between everyday work and a deeper awareness of loss and displacement tied to the land. Along with this, her thoughts on the land in the past make her frustrated and weary. Jo calls her Donga, a metal hut, which she describes as an eighteen foot metal box. Living in a Donga and the idea of owning land urges her to get her own place.

Jo travels through the town in a car for work and observes her surroundings, "Jo swung into Burringbar Street... She liked to drive slow Just to drive slow was relaxing in itself... no need to hurry everybloodywhere" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 22), which reflects the idea of perceived space, where everyday routines shape emotional experience. Jo's slow driving through the town represents her regular interaction with the physical environment of Mullumbimby. According to Henri Lefebvre, perceived space is formed through daily practices and movement within a landscape (Lefebvre, 1991). At this moment, the town's streets are not experienced as spaces of urgency or pressure but as spaces of ease and familiarity. The act of driving slowly allows Jo to observe the people around her and engage with the environment at her own pace, which produces a sense of calm and control. Emotionally, the landscape supports relaxation and belonging, showing how even ordinary spatial practices can shape a character's psychological state. Jo describes this as Muttika Therapy.

As Jo travels for her work, she comes across mountains as she drives by. "The Mullum hills were full of mental health stories" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 23). Through this line, Lucashenko tries to make the readers understand the emotional depth of the land and how it directly affects the mental health of the Bundjalung people. Jo has two horses and whenever she feels confused, she rides them in the hills. She says, "So we'll just ride these hills and, once Ellen leaves home, we'll hit the National Trail and really have us a time" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 27). Jo's movement through the hills on horseback reflects her physical interaction with the landscape, where everyday engagement with space shapes emotional experience. In this case, the open, natural landscape provides Jo with a sense of freedom and relief, contrasting with the pressures of her domestic and social life. The hills become a space where physical

activity translates into emotional release, demonstrating how spatial practice can influence psychological well-being.

Jo describes the land and the space surrounding her with utmost attention. She describes the land through its light, mist, texture, and openness. It creates a powerful emotional atmosphere that directly shapes Jo's inner state. The moment where she feels that "anything might be possible now" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 31) shows how the landscape produces a sense of renewal, hope, and emotional release. According to Henri Lefebvre, space is not neutral but actively influences how individuals feel and experience the world (Lefebvre, 1991).

Additionally, this scene reflects embodiment in space, as Jo physically connects with the land by standing barefoot on the grass and feeling the warmth of the sun on her body. This sensory engagement transforms the landscape into an intimate and almost sacred space. Her gesture towards the 'Black Old Sun' suggests a spiritual relationship with the land, where identity, memory, and belonging are experienced through the body. The environment thus becomes a source of emotional healing and empowerment, reinforcing the idea that landscape shapes not only external actions but also internal psychological and cultural identity.

While she admires the land, she feels a sense of belonging to the land. This moment can be analysed through place-making and identity formation, where space becomes meaningful through personal and cultural assertion. Jo's declaration that she is "still standing up alive here on Bundjalung land" and her repeated affirmation "Here I am... know me for who I am" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 32) transforms the landscape into a site of self-recognition and identity. Rather than being a neutral setting, the land becomes something that she actively claims and redefines through language, memory, and presence. As Henri Lefebvre suggests, space is socially produced and gains meaning through human interaction and cultural expression (Lefebvre, 1991).

Jo's use of Bundjalung words and her bodily gesture of turning in a circle reinforce her connection to Country, making the land a lived symbol of cultural continuity and belonging. She says, "Circles protect you if you let them, girl. But you gotta let em. Gotta not get in their way" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 32). This is not just pride in ownership, but a reclamation of identity within a historically dispossessed space. The

emotional intensity of gratitude and pride shows how place-making operates as both a personal and political act, where asserting presence on ancestral land becomes a way of resisting erasure and affirming Indigenous identity.

Jo identifies the greatness of her ancestors as she describes the land. She thinks, "It was at moments like this that she understood the old Goories refusing to walk behind the dugais when they travelled together in the forests" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 34). In the Bundjalung tradition, Goories is used to refer to the natives and Dugai is used to refer to the white settlers. When a Dugai came to complain to Jo about Ellen trespassing on his land, Jo reflected on the deeper irony of the accusation. She understood that the land did not truly belong to those who claimed ownership through fences, documents, and colonial authority, but to the Bundjalung people who had lived in relationship with it for generations. In her view, it was not Ellen who was trespassing, but the Dugai who occupied and claimed land that had been taken and renamed under colonial systems. This made Jo realize how ownership had been changed, making the natives feel like outsiders on their own land, while the white settlers claimed it as their own. "The word trespassing out of a dugai mouth didn't sit happily with her" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 36).

There is a clear contrast in Jo's view about the cemetery before she owned a land of her own and after owning it. This can be analysed through spatial contrast and emotional reorientation, where different environments shape Jo's sense of stability and belonging. Her reflection that life in the cemetery was "a very simple place to live" where "you knew where you stood" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 38) reveals how the cemetery provided emotional clarity and predictability before moving to her own place. The cemetery, though associated with death, offered a controlled and unchanging environment, which made her relationship with her daughter pleasant. However, she had the longing to identify as a Bundjalung, which was not fulfilled by the cemetery or the Donga. On the other hand, after moving to her own land, though she felt a sense of belonging to her identity as Bundjalung, her relationship with her daughter became complex. According to Henri Lefebvre, spaces are socially produced and influence how individuals experience order, security, and meaning (Lefebvre, 1991). However, this reflection occurs after Jo has moved

onto her own land, which introduces a more complex and emotionally demanding relationship with space.

Unlike the fixed and predictable nature of the cemetery, her land is dynamic, open, and tied to identity, responsibility, and history. This contrast highlights a shift from emotional simplicity to a deeper, more meaningful engagement with place. While the cemetery offered stability through detachment, her land demands involvement and self-definition, showing how different spatial environments produce different emotional responses and contribute to the development of identity and belonging.

Jo comes across a Dugai named Rob Star, who initially seemed like a good man but as time goes by he reveals his white stereotypical perspectives which disappoints Jo. When he said he would kill her dogs if he saw them trespassing in his land, Jo is angered by his arrogance which was a result of his white supremacy mindset. This encounter makes her question the sincerity of his earlier kindness, and see it as conditional and superficial. It also reinforces her understanding of how deeply ingrained these attitudes are, shaping everyday interactions and claims over land.

Jo's satisfaction after moving to the land she owned can be analysed through spatial affect and Indigenous belonging, where the landscape produces deep emotional and cultural responses. Jo's feeling that owning the land is "so much more than fun" and her repeated assertion "My country, right or wrong" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 41) show that the space is experienced as a source of profound emotional fulfilment rather than simple ownership. The land generates intense affective responses, she "catches her breath" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 41) at dawn and feels moved to tears in the evening, demonstrating how the environment actively shapes her emotional life. According to Henri Lefebvre, space is not passive but produces meanings and emotions through lived interaction (Lefebvre, 1991).

At the same time, this moment reflects spatial politics and reclamation, as Jo recognises the land as a "fragment of their country" that has been taken and is now symbolically recovered. Her use of possessive language, "Her paddocks. Her trees. Her mountain." (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 41), signals not just personal attachment but a reclaiming of Indigenous identity and history within a colonised landscape. The emotional intensity here is therefore both personal and collective,

showing how land becomes a site where identity, memory, and resistance are intertwined.

When the events and life aligned with Jo's expectation, she was faced with another crisis with the arrival of Twoboy and Lazarus. They had come to claim the native title over Tin Wagon Road and the surrounding area. This would cause another huge crisis for the Bundjalung people along with the land already lost to the white settlers, "Yeah, and there could be a huge war between all the blackfellas around here for the next fifty years, too, while they work the native title out" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 45).

While Jo was happy with the new land that she owned, it affected her daughter, Ellen, differently. The same landscape produces conflicting emotions for different individuals. Jo's emphasis on "being owners again of some Bundjalung land" and "to take back even a tiny fraction of what had been lost" (Lucashenko, 2014, p. 48) reflects her understanding of land as a site of historical recovery and cultural restoration. For her, the space carries political and ancestral significance, shaped by the legacy of dispossession. As Henri Lefebvre argues, space is produced through social and historical forces, including power and ownership (Lefebvre, 1991). However, Ellen's resistance introduces a tension that reveals how space is not experienced uniformly. While Jo constructs the land as meaningful and necessary for identity and belonging, Ellen does not share the same emotional attachment, highlighting a generational or personal disconnect. This contrast shows that belonging is not inherent in the land itself but is shaped by individual perception and experience. Space can become contested, producing both attachment and discomfort, and reinforcing the idea that emotional relationships to land are complex and not universally shared.

The trial of Twoboy takes a significant turn through Ellen, whose connection to the land becomes central to the claim. The markings on her palm are recognised as resembling the patterns of the land itself, suggesting a deep and almost inseparable bond between the individual and Country. This moment can be understood through the idea of land as a communicative and cultural force, where space is not silent but actively interacts with those who belong to it. Ellen's body becomes a site through which the land expresses itself, reflecting memory, ancestry, and identity. As Henri Lefebvre explains, space is socially produced and carries meanings shaped by human

relationships and cultural practices (Lefebvre, 1991). Here, the land is not merely owned or observed; it is lived, remembered, and embodied. This connection ultimately strengthens the claim, as the recognition of these patterns affirms the enduring relationship between the Bundjalung people and their ancestral land, leading to its acknowledgement as Bundjalung country.

In conclusion, the novel clearly demonstrates that landscapes are not passive settings but active forces that shape human emotions, identity, and relationships. Through Jo's experiences and the events surrounding Ellen and the struggle for the claim of the Bundjalung land, it becomes evident that space influences how characters understand themselves and their place in the world. By applying spatial theory, particularly the idea that space is socially and emotionally produced, the analysis proves that the environments in the novel, whether domestic, communal, or ancestral, deeply affect the psychological lives of the characters. The land in the narrative is shown to generate belonging, conflict, healing, and identity, thereby supporting the aim of this paper that human emotions and experiences are profoundly shaped through their relationship with place.

A further extension of this concept can be developed through Feminist Theory, particularly by examining how gender shapes the experience of space and belonging. Jo's relationship with the land is not only cultural but also deeply gendered, as she navigates ownership, responsibility, and identity as an Indigenous woman. Feminist critics argue that women's experiences of space are often shaped by systems of patriarchy, where access, control, and authority over land are historically restricted. In this context, Jo's act of owning and working the land challenges both colonial and patriarchal structures, asserting her agency within spaces that have traditionally excluded Indigenous women. Her emotional and physical engagement with the land reflects a form of resistance, where identity is constructed not only through cultural belonging but also through gendered experience.

An alternative analysis can also be extended through Postcolonial Theory, which focuses on the impact of colonisation on land, identity, and power. The struggle to reclaim Bundjalung land reflects broader histories of dispossession, where space became a site of conflict

between Indigenous presence and colonial authority. Through this lens, the land is not neutral but politically charged, carrying the legacy of loss and resistance. Additionally, Ecocriticism offers another perspective by examining the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Jo's sensory and emotional connection to the land highlights how nature is intertwined with identity and well-being, suggesting that the environment plays an active role in shaping human experience.

Together, these theoretical approaches deepen the analysis by showing that space is not only socially produced but also influenced by gender, history, and ecology. They reinforce the idea that landscapes in the novel function as complex, multidimensional forces that shape emotional, cultural, and political identities.

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