



THE PERSISTENCE OF COLONIAL MEMORY AND THE POWER OF STORYTELLING: A STUDY ON MELISSA LUCASHENKO'S *EDENGLASSIE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the enduring effects of colonialism on Indigenous identity, cultural memory, and storytelling in Melissa Lucashenko's *Edenglassie*. Set across two timelines, one in 1840s colonial Brisbane and the other in the present day, the novel exposes how the violence of colonization continues to shape Aboriginal experience and self-understanding. Through the intersecting stories of Mulanyin, Nita, Eddie, and Winona, Lucashenko portrays how Indigenous knowledge, land, and kinship are continually disrupted yet, remembered, preserved and disseminated through storytelling. The paper explores how *Edenglassie* reimagines history from an Aboriginal perspective, reclaiming erased narratives and foregrounding the voices silenced by colonial discourse. By analyzing themes such as historical memory, storytelling, and resistance, this study reveals how Lucashenko transforms narrative into an ethical space of survival, continuity, and reclamation. The novel asserts that remembering is both an act of resistance and a form of healing, where Indigenous communities confront the colonial past and reassert sovereignty through cultural endurance and narrative renewal.

KEYWORDS : Colonialism, Indigenous Memory, Storytelling, Resistance, Aboriginal Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism has left an indelible mark on the landscapes of Indigenous history, culture, and identity. Melissa Lucashenko's *Edenglassie* offers a profound exploration of how colonial encounters continue to reverberate through time, shaping the personal and collective forms of memory. As an award-winning Australian writer, Lucashenko crafts narratives that challenge dominant historical myths and foreground Indigenous perspectives of survival and resistance. *Edenglassie* unfolds two parallel narratives, one set in the 1840s, depicting the early colonial invasion, and another set in contemporary Australia, where Aboriginal identity and activism persist in the shadow of ongoing colonial structures. Lucashenko's dual timeline not only collapses the boundaries between past and present but also exposes the cyclical nature of dispossession and reclamation. The historical narrative, centered on Mulanyin and Nita, dramatizes the violent disruptions brought by British settlers, while the contemporary strand featuring Granny Eddie Blanket and a young activist, Winona, examines how these historical wounds continue to shape Indigenous existence. Through this intergenerational lens, Lucashenko employs Indigenous storytelling as a vital site to reclaim cultural identity and ensure cultural survival.

This paper explores three central themes in *Edenglassie*: the persistence of colonial memory, storytelling as a tool of cultural reclamation, and the resilience of Indigenous identity as resistance. Together, these elements illuminate Lucashenko's project of rewriting Australia's colonial history through Aboriginal voices, bridging the gaps between trauma and renewal.

Colonialism and Historical Memory in *Edenglassie*

Colonialism in Australia was not only a system of political domination and territorial expansion but also a systematic reordering of history and memory. "It imposed a Eurocentric worldview that silenced Indigenous voices and replaced them with narratives of discovery, progress, and civilization." (Atwood). By doing so, colonial power sought to erase Indigenous histories, languages, and knowledge systems, turning Aboriginal people into objects of history rather than its narrators. Historical memory becomes crucial in this context because it documents how the past is remembered, transmitted, and reclaimed by those whose histories have been denied or distorted. In Indigenous studies, historical

memory is a form of counter-history, an act of reclaiming the right to tell one's own story. It functions as a resistance to colonial amnesia and as a recovery of cultural truth.

In *Edenglassie*, Melissa Lucashenko portrays colonialism not as a historical event but as a continuing condition that shapes the lives, memories, and landscapes of Indigenous people. The novel exposes how the legacies of dispossession, erasure, and displacement persist across time, revealing colonialism as an enduring force embedded in everyday existence. Through its interwoven timelines, *Edenglassie* traces the cyclical nature of trauma and survival, demonstrating that the colonial past continues to shape Indigenous identity and collective memory in the present.

The historical narrative set in the 1840s captures the early stages of British settlement in the Brisbane region, then called Edenglassie. This period marks the violent transformation of the Country through invasion, renaming, and exploitation. In this context, Lucashenko introduces Mulanyin, an Aboriginal man torn between resistance and adaptation, and Nita, the woman he loves. Their relationship becomes a site of survival, as they navigate the loss of sovereignty, the imposition of foreign laws, and the encroachment upon sacred land. Mulanyin embodies the struggle of Indigenous people to preserve cultural continuity amid overwhelming colonial aggression, highlighting the deeply personal costs of dispossession.

Lucashenko situates this historical trauma within the landscape itself. The country is depicted as a living archive that bears witness to violence and endurance. Each hill, river, and settlement renamed by colonists becomes a marker of erasure, reflecting the deliberate colonial effort to overwrite Indigenous presence. The dispossession of land thus parallels the dispossession of memory. "The valley in front of him already had an English name – Whiteside Station." (Lucashenko 62). To rename a Country is to suppress its stories and spiritual meanings. Yet, the land resists silence; it remembers the histories that official narratives attempt to bury.

The persistence of colonial violence is further revealed through the contemporary storyline, which centers on Granny Eddie Blanket, her granddaughter Winona, and her doctor Johnny. Their lives represent the intergenerational

consequences of colonization, showing how historical wounds manifest within families and communities long after the initial invasion. Granny Eddie, a proud elder rooted in cultural strength, carries within her the inherited pain of loss and displacement. Winona, a young activist, embodies the struggle to reconcile modern life with ancestral knowledge. Johnny, shaped by systemic neglect and personal turmoil, reflects the enduring social inequalities that colonization set in motion. Together, their experiences illustrate that colonialism's effects are not confined to history but remain embedded in the structures and consciousness of Indigenous life.

A powerful example of this continuity appears in the story of Mulanyin, also known as Saltwater Toby. Granny Eddie's great-grandfather. Wrongfully accused of rape, Toby is brutalized by police, killed while attempting to escape, and later decapitated so his skull could be displayed for scientific study. This horrific act epitomizes the dehumanization and objectification of the colonial people. Toby's fate reveals how the violence of colonization extended beyond death, transforming Indigenous bodies into symbols of domination and control. Lucashenko exposes the intersection of racism and imperial power that sought to erase Indigenous humanity while asserting white authority.

The novel also links historical memory with geography and sacred space. Places such as the Brisbane River and the fig trees at South Bank serve as living testaments to Indigenous presence. For Granny Eddie and Winona, these sites are not mere landmarks but repositories of ancestral memory spaces where the past remains palpable. The woggai, or burial cords of children, stand as a powerful metaphor for continuity, binding generations to the land even amid displacement. These connections reveal that while colonial forces may alter landscapes and impose new structures, they cannot break the spiritual and cultural ties that define Indigenous belonging.

By presenting colonialism as both a historical and ongoing reality, *Edenglassie* underscores the inseparability of memory, land, and identity. Lucashenko demonstrates that the violence of colonization is not confined to the past but continues to echo through families and landscapes. The persistence of memory resists the neglect of the colonial past, ensuring that the past remains visible within the present. Through its portrayal of dispossession, endurance, and remembrance, the novel transforms historical memory into an act of survival, asserting that Indigenous history, though scarred by violence, endures as a living force that colonialism could never extinguish.

Storytelling as Cultural Reclamation and Survival

For Indigenous communities, storytelling functions as both a cultural inheritance and a political act of survival. It is through stories, oral, written, and performative, that Aboriginal people preserve their histories, worldviews, and relationships with the land. Storytelling is not merely a mode of expression but a continuation of ancestral knowledge systems, connecting the past with the present and the individual with the collective. "Under colonial rule, Indigenous voices were systematically silenced, and traditional forms of knowledge transmission were disrupted. The written histories of colonizers often distorted or erased Indigenous experiences, reducing them to passive subjects of conquest." (Atwood) Against this backdrop, storytelling becomes a form of cultural reclamation, a way to restore agency, reassert identity, and reclaim narrative ownership. Through stories, Aboriginal people resist colonial forgetting by preserving memory, language, and spirituality.

Indigenous storytelling also transforms the act of narration into an ethical and communal practice. Stories are deeply connected to Country, kinship, and collective responsibility, reflecting a worldview that values interdependence between

human, non-human, and spiritual realms. By returning to oral forms, songlines, and mythic retellings, Indigenous authors rewrite colonial spaces into sites of belonging and remembrance. Cultural reclamation through storytelling is thus both restorative and transformative. It heals the ruptures caused by colonization by reaffirming cultural continuity, while also adapting tradition to contemporary realities.

In *Edenglassie*, storytelling emerges as a powerful means of cultural survival and reclamation, portraying narratives as living entities that preserve memory, transmit knowledge, and resist colonial erasure. Lucashenko emphasizes that stories are not merely entertainment but sacred practices that anchor identity, history, and belonging. A primary custodian of this knowledge is Gaja Iris, who deliberately recounts the story of Saltwater Toby to Granny Eddie and Winona. She ensures that narratives are shared with purpose and intention, reflecting Indigenous epistemologies where knowledge is mediated with care, respect, and ethical responsibility. Iris's storytelling, often performed in private and ceremonial contexts, reinforces that recounting history is both protective and restorative.

Through this process, storytelling becomes a form of reclamation. By narrating Toby's experiences of arrest, abuse, and posthumous desecration, Iris restores visibility to histories that colonial institutions sought to erase. "Your great-grandfather, this young fisherman with his life in front of him, and his wife he loved and his two babies to raise, put in prison for a crime I'm pretty sure he didn't commit – well, he was mutilated." (Lucashenko 152). Granny Eddie's emotional response to her grief, followed by understanding, demonstrates how storytelling allows intergenerational trauma to be acknowledged and processed, transforming memory into a source of strength and continuity.

Storytelling in the novel also functions as spatial reclamation, linking narratives to place. The fig trees by South Bank and the sacred woggai burial cords symbolize the deep connections between memory, land, and ancestry. Through these stories, Indigenous presence is reaffirmed, and the ongoing relationship with Country is maintained despite the disruptions of colonization. Moreover, storytelling bridges the living and the dead, past and present. The ghost of Mulanyin, whose recollections are shared through Iris and internalized by Winona and Johnny, illustrates how ancestral guidance supports cultural continuity. Storytelling thus becomes a dynamic act of reclamation, enabling Indigenous people to assert identity and agency against the erasures of colonial history.

Storytelling empowers contemporary action. By understanding the significance of sacred sites and ancestral histories, Winona and Johnny are guided toward ethical decisions and cultural stewardship. *Edenglassie* demonstrates that storytelling is not passive remembrance but an active, transformative practice—asserting Indigenous sovereignty over memory, land, and identity.

Resistance and Resilience

The intertwined concepts of resistance and resilience lie at the heart of Indigenous survival and storytelling. "Within the context of colonization, Aboriginal people faced systematic attempts to erase their culture, dispossess them of land, and suppress their identities. Yet, through everyday acts of endurance, adaptation, and memory, they transformed oppression into strength. Resistance in Indigenous narratives is not confined to overt political struggle; it also manifests through subtle, intimate gestures in the preservation of stories, the reclaiming of language, and the continuation of cultural practices that defy colonial erasure." (Heiss).

Resilience, on the other hand, reflects the inner strength and

adaptability that sustain Indigenous communities across generations. It is the emotional, cultural, and spiritual endurance that enables survival despite trauma. Resilience is visible in the persistence of kinship networks, connection to Country, and communal healing through shared narratives. It is through resilience that Aboriginal people have transformed grief into creativity and marginalization into self-determination. In literature, this is often conveyed through characters who rebuild meaning from loss and reconnect with ancestral knowledge to heal the fractures of colonization.

Together, resistance and resilience form a continuum — resistance keeps alive the spirit of defiance, while resilience ensures continuity and regeneration. They represent not only a rejection of colonial domination but also an affirmation of life, dignity, and cultural sovereignty. Through these intertwined forces, Indigenous storytelling becomes a site of empowerment and transformation, revealing that survival itself is an act of resistance and that resilience is the enduring legacy of Indigenous endurance.

In Edenglassie, resistance operates not only through political activism but also through the intimate, everyday acts of survival, memory, and connection. Lucashenko foregrounds Indigenous women as bearers of resilience and custodians of cultural knowledge. Granny Eddie, despite her age and frailty, embodies the continuity of Indigenous memory, while Winona represents the younger generation's determination to confront systemic racism and reclaim Aboriginal pride.

Resilience in the novel goes beyond endurance; it signifies the deliberate assertion of cultural vitality in the face of historical devastation. Lucashenko emphasizes that Indigenous survival is intentionally a collective act of resistance that reclaims both land and story. Through laughter, community, and ceremony, characters transform pain into healing, asserting agency and continuity despite colonial oppression. In the 1840s timeline, Mulanyin and Nita's love itself becomes an act of defiance. Their determination to maintain kinship and care in a world collapsing under colonial violence embodies the spiritual core of resistance. Even when physical freedom is denied, their emotional and cultural bonds endure, showing that colonial domination cannot fully extinguish Indigenous identity.

Lucashenko ultimately portrays resilience as deeply relational, grounded in care, community, and connection to Country. Survival becomes sacred, and resistance emerges as the persistent practice of remembering, loving, and maintaining culture in defiance of colonial silencing. Edenglassie situates resistance not only in confrontation but in the everyday persistence of Aboriginal life, language, and identity, a politics of survival that is as tender as it is enduring.

CONCLUSION

Melissa Lucashenko's Edenglassie stands as a powerful reimagining of colonial history from an Indigenous perspective. By intertwining memory, storytelling, and resilience, Lucashenko constructs a narrative that refuses erasure and reclaims power over the Aboriginal past and present. The novel demonstrates that colonialism's legacy persists not only in historical records but also in the inherited trauma of Indigenous lives. Yet, through storytelling, memory becomes an act of resistance and renewal, reconnecting people to their land, ancestors, and culture.

Lucashenko's characters embody the spirit of survival and continuity, revealing that the act of remembering is itself an act of resistance. Edenglassie transforms the colonial wound into a site of narrative power, asserting that history, when retold through Indigenous voices, becomes a space for healing and reclamation. Through its politically charged storytelling, the novel not only exposes the enduring scars of

colonization but also celebrates the invincible strength of Indigenous identity and community.

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