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***Terra Nullius: The Effects of Australia's Colonial History on Sense of Place***

Beyette, Anna

Academic Director: Brennan, Peter

Project Advisor: Bragg, Eshana

Wellesley College

Environmental Studies; Peace & Justice Studies

Australia, Northern Rivers, Hobart and Melbourne

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Australia: Sustainability and  
Environmental Action, SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2019

## **ABSTRACT**

Australia's history of colonization of Aboriginal communities continues to affect not only the indigenous population of Australia, but also non-Aboriginal Australians. This study focuses on how Australia's complex history of colonization and its lasting effects influence the ability of Non-Aboriginal Australians to connect to place. One potential effect of colonization is "settler-guilt" or the complex feelings of guilt, remorse, and shame felt by "settlers" at their privilege derived from the racist, violent, and genocidal treatment of indigenous people and communities due to the colonization of indigenous lands and the legacy of colonization. This study asks whether settler-guilt exists in Australia, and if it does, how it might impact connection to place and the environment. The ultimate goal of this study is to better understand the ways in which colonization affects non-Aboriginal sense of place in order to create a post-colonial environmental and nature connection movement.

I collected 69 online survey responses via distribution in environmental and sense of place Facebook groups as well as conducted 13 in-depth interviews from participants who had already completed the survey. No participants were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent as this study focused on the effects of colonization on Non-Aboriginal Australians. Additionally, as invasion occurred differently in different locations of Australia this study compares how effects of colonization differ across three locations as surveys were collected in Northern Rivers, New South Wales, Hobart, Tasmania, and Melbourne, Victoria.

A strong majority of participants reported feeling complex emotions such as guilt, shame, anger, and grief (emotions which we categorize as "settler-guilt") when thinking about colonization. Additionally, a majority of participants agreed that, although they felt a strong connection to place, they felt that colonization affected, and in some cases presented a barrier to, their connection to place. Participants noted that in order to decolonize the environmental and nature connection movements they hoped to learn more about local indigenous communities and form personal connections with Aboriginal people. Additionally, participants placed a strong emphasis on hoping to create space for Aboriginal leadership within the environmental and nature connection movements. Although there does appear to be a connection between differing colonial effects and location in Australia, more data is needed to fully understand why differences occur. Overall, this data suggests that settler-guilt among non-Aboriginal Australians is not only present but also influences the connection to place of non-Aboriginal Australians. Looking forward, the environmental movement needs to integrate more Aboriginal leadership and create spaces and support for non-Aboriginal Australians to question their own role in the settler-colonial framework.

## **KEYWORDS**

Aboriginal Studies, Sense of Place, Nature Connection, Settler-Guilt, Cultural Awareness

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In my time here I have fallen in love with this beautiful, sun-burnt country. I have also seen her endangered by climate change first hand as fires threaten lives and ecosystems across NSW. To the communities affected, indigenous and not, human and not: we hear you, we see you. We will never stop listening to your voices and raising them up, and we will not stop fighting for justice and equality for all people and for the land until reconciliation is reached and Country is cared for again.

**Figures:** Figure 1 (p. 13), Figure 2 (p. 13), Figure 3 (p. 14), Figure 4 (p. 16), Figure 5 (p. 17,) Figure 6 (p. 18)

**Tables:** Table 1 (p. 20), Table 2 (p. 24), Table 3 (p. 26)

**Abbreviations:**

New South Wales – NSW

National Park and Wildlife Service – NPWS

International Panel on Climate Change – IPCC

## 1 – INTRODUCTION

### *Bunjalung Jagun*

*Ngali na jugun*

*Ngali Garima mala jugun*

*Wana Janjuma mala gun gala jugun*

*Ngali wana janji mala jugun*

*Ngali na mala jugun*

### *Bunjalun Country*

*We belong to this county*

*We look after this country*

*Don't do wrong around here this  
country*

*We don't harm this country here*

*We belong to it this country*

### *~ Bunjalung Elders*

#### 1.1 – Locating Myself

In order to dive deeply into the complexity of this research I believe that it is important for me to place myself within the context of colonization and its impacts. I write from a white, American, settler, perspective. Although I attempted to gather a diversity of viewpoints from Aboriginal authors to inform my research, one weakness of my study is the lack of Aboriginal voices within it. Due to ethical limitations I was unable to work with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities to ask specifically about how indigenous communities see the future of a decolonized environmental and nature connection movement. Due to these constraints the extent of Aboriginal perspective in my study is limited to the integration of concepts formed by Aboriginal authors. This is certainly an area for future research to build upon.

Additionally, you will notice throughout my paper that I will use the term “unsettling” rather than “decolonizing.” The term “unsettling,” used by Jones and Segal in their paper *Unsettling Ecopsychology*, refers to the practice of individuals who are either descendent from settlers or benefit from the privileges afforded within colonial culture turning a critical gaze to the ways in which they uphold or profit from the system which dominates and exploits indigenous people and culture (2018, p. 127). Within the context of this paper “unsettling” is used as an important process in understanding the ways in which colonialism affects Australian society currently and must include an element of consideration for the targeted disenfranchisement of systems which enforce colonialism today. The concept of unsettling, although necessarily interrelated with the concept of decolonization is inherently different (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127). Where unsettling is a process carried out by settler people, decolonization is rooted in Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127). Furthermore, “[decolonization] fundamentally challenges systems of power... [and] while decolonization is political, multifaceted, and dynamic, it is also a material

process and in terms of outcomes must involve the repatriation of land” (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127).

The distinction between unsettling versus decolonizing is important in contextualizing this study because, as an individual who personally benefits from the lasting effects of colonization, I cannot decolonize the environmental movement. Instead I can focus on the effort of unsettling the environmental movement as a parallel process to the decolonization of the movement. In order to begin the process of unsettling, I hope this contextualization helps to clarify my own privilege within this research and I urge readers to be critical of where my perspectives and interpretations of various manifestations of power structures and data may be limited and necessitate further research in the future.

## **1.2 – Building the Framework and Defining Terms**

In 1770, on a voyage around the Australian coast Lieutenant James Cook declared Australia *terra nullius*: land belonging to no one (Aboriginal Heritage Office, n.d., para. 1). This conceptualization of Australia’s land as empty and unused allowed for the colonization of what is estimated to be over 750,000 Aboriginal people beginning in the 1770’s (Aboriginal Heritage Office, n.d., para. 1). Colonization, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Although this definition is generally acceptable, within my research I also acknowledge the ongoing effects of colonization as a process not just as a singular event. Additionally, it is important to understand the violence and dispossession associated with colonization, which is not fully included in the Oxford English Dictionary definition.

In their 2006 paper Buchan and Heath argue that the imagery of “the savage” around Aboriginal culture and existence not only allowed for the inception of colonization but also continues to perpetuate colonial thinking in Australian society (Buchan and Heath, 2006, p. 6). This paper looks critically at colonization and its lasting effects on society as a whole and, more specifically, the environmental and nature connection movements. Within the framework of this paper I will explore the concept of “settler-colonialism” which is defined by Jones and Segal in their paper *Unsettling Ecopsychology* as “a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home”. It is distinct from other kinds of colonialism because it focuses on land instead of labor” (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 128). It is important to note that settler-colonialism is one of many types of colonialism that is present in today’s society, however due to the scope of my

study and my emphasis on sense of place and connection to nature I have chosen to focus on settler-colonialism as it intersects with these topics.

Furthermore, throughout this paper I will use the term “settler.” Although this term can have many definitions, I use it here based off of the framework established in Jones and Segal’s paper *Unsettling Ecopsychology* where “settler” is used to describe “people who occupy land co-opted from the original inhabitants” (2018, p. 128). They go on to explain that using the term settler does not imply any sort of ethical determination, but rather factually classifies a certain experience (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 128). Finally, it is important to note that the term settler as it is used here does not only apply to individuals who physically carried out the act of settling Australian country or are directly descendant from those who did. Rather the term “settler” describes the experience of individuals who continue to benefit from the “unjust and ongoing phenomenon of settler-colonialism” (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 128). I acknowledge that those who are included within the settler context have not necessarily chosen to have these privileges and are not at fault for the fact that they are the recipients of this privilege. For this reason, I want to explicitly state that the terminology “settler” does not imply any ethical judgement, but rather an unintended experience of privilege within the existing structures of society. However, my study also acknowledges that the societal privilege afforded to settlers is due to structural power imbalances of ongoing settler-colonialism at the expense of Aboriginal communities. The reason for including many people so broadly in this terminology is articulated by Aboriginal activist Shirley Smith (commonly known as Mum Shirl) : “[the violent dispossession and colonization of Aboriginal lands and communities]... is part of the history ... of every white person in Australia whether they are descended from the first whites who came and killed us or whether they have just arrived on a boat yesterday, because if the killing had not been done then they would not be able to land here today” (Smith & Sykes, 1983, p.10).

Although Australia’s colonial history and the violent dispossession of Aboriginal lands has predominantly affected Australia’s first inhabitants, the psychological effects of colonization can affect settlers as well. My research will explore the extent to which non-Aboriginal Australians experience feelings of guilt or shame at their privilege derived from the racist, violent, and genocidal treatment of indigenous people and communities due to the colonization of indigenous lands and the legacy of colonization. Within this paper we will call these complex feelings of guilt, remorse, anger, and shame “settler-guilt.” In other papers similar emotions have been described as “white-guilt” however I have made the decision to

move away from the use of skin color in determining identity here, as skin color does not necessarily define an individual's identity within the settler framework.

As the environmental movement progresses, it is important to understand how settler-guilt may serve to detach individuals from their sense of place and potentially their broader connection to nature as well. Sense of place is defined here as connection to location and surrounding environment which promotes empathy and sense of responsibility for the place with which and individual feels connection. This concept is integral to the sustainability movement. As Rogers and Bragg cite in their study *The Power of Connection*, having a strong sense of place can motivate individuals to participate in sustainable actions (Rogers & Bragg, 2018, p. 307). So, something like settler-guilt which might inhibit sense of place and nature connection is potentially detrimental to creating a successful environmental and sustainability movement. (See Appendix A for list of definitions).

### **1.3 – Colonization in Three Locations**

Across Australia different Aboriginal communities and people experienced colonization in many different ways. Within my project I am focusing on the regions in and around Hobart, Tasmania, Melbourne, Victoria, and Byron Bay, New South Wales. Each of these three locations has very different histories of colonization, though the dispossession of lands and resulting marginalization and discrimination against Aboriginal people is the same. One thing this study hopes to understand better is whether the diversity of these different narratives has led to differences in how reconciliation has proceeded, or failed to proceed, moving forward.

#### **1.3.1 – Hobart, Tasmania**

Hobart is located within Nipaluna Country which was originally inhabited by the Muwinina people (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, n.d., para. 2). Between 1772-1802 French and English settlers first made landfall on several voyages to Tasmania, engaging in interactions both hostile and friendly with the Aboriginal communities living there (Breen, 2015, para. 1). Through the early 1800s, Aboriginal communities were injured, murdered, and abducted in an island-wide genocide to clear the area for European settlement (Breen, 2015, para. 1). Finally, Lieutenant Governor George Augustus Robinson, a settler in Tasmania with some established relationship with Aboriginal communities, tricked the remaining Aboriginal communities onto his boat, taking them to Flinders Island where they were kept in camps and forced to “learn” European culture (Breen, 2015, para. 1). Many

Aboriginal people died in the camps due to introduction of European diseases (Breen, 2015, para. 1).

The genocide against Aboriginal Tasmanians was so horrific and complete that it led to the long-accepted myth that the people indigenous to Tasmania were extinct following the death of Truganini (an Aboriginal woman, credited with being the last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian) in 1876 (Ryan, 1996, pg. 1). This convenient myth perpetuated (and continues to perpetuate) the colonial idea that Tasmania belongs to the settlers there, and that there is no need for reconciliation or repatriation of land. However, despite the weight given to the “Last Aboriginal Tasmanian” myth, there are more than two thousand people of Aboriginal descent living in Tasmania and other places who continue to retain their history and culture (Ryan, 1996, pg.1). Due to this falsified story of their extinction, Tasmanian Aboriginal communities have had to face a very different struggle from those on the mainland of Australia (Ryan, 1996, pg. 1). The common settler-colonial idea that Aboriginal Tasmanians were erased from history means that current Aboriginal communities in Tasmania are fighting not only for reconciliation and repatriation, but also simply for their existence to be recognized (Ryan, 1996, pg. 1). I chose Hobart as one location in my study due to this long-perpetuated myth of the extinction of Aboriginal Tasmanians. Aboriginal populations in both the Northern Rivers Territory and Melbourne are recognized as existing in a way that Aboriginal communities in Hobart struggle to be, leading to a change in the challenges that Aboriginal Tasmanians struggle against.

### **1.3.2 – Northern Rivers Region, New South Wales**

The area that is now known as the Northern Rivers region, extending from the Logan River to the Clarence River inland to the mountains east of Tenterfield are Bundjalung Jagun, or Bundjalung Country (Hoff, 2006, pg. 1). This land is under the traditional care of the Arakwal people (Arakwal People of Byron Bay, n.d., para.5). In the 1770s, on his famous exploratory journey sailing past the area, Captain James Cook named part of the region Cape Byron, and hence Byron Bay (Arakwal People of Byron Bay, n.d., para.5). With the European invasion in 1788, increasing numbers of ships carrying convicts, and eventually loggers, farmers, and developers arrived to Bundjalung country (Hoff, 2006, pg. 1). As Jennifer Hoff writes in her book *Bundjalung Jagun*, initially Aboriginal communities believed some runaway convicts to be re-incarnated ghosts due to their white skin, scars from past floggings, and lack of language and cultural recollection (Hoff, 2006, pg. 7). Hoff goes on to describe how Aboriginal communities embraced these convicts into their tribes, even

initiating them with men's ceremonies to be warriors with strict codes of conduct (Hoff, 2006, pg. 9). However, relationships between new settlers and the indigenous communities were not the norm. Skirmishes and massacres were frequent (Medclaf, 1989, pg. 2). Additionally, settlers killed large numbers of Aboriginal people by giving them flour laced with arsenic and other poisons (Hoff, 2006, pg. 10). As Medclaf stated in his document entitled *Rivers of Blood*, by the 1850s the slaughter of the Aboriginal communities living around the Clarence river was nearly complete (1989, pg. 12).

Even throughout this period of invasion, the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal communities was condemned by some settlers, emphasizing that the Aboriginal people had only fought back in self-defense not provocation (Medclaf, 1989, pg. 17). Historian of the massacres Norman Hewitt articulated this sentiment along with the "doomed race" theory, insinuating that Aboriginal people had been slaughtered to a point of no return where they would eventually die out taking their history and culture with them (Medclaf, 1989, pg. 17). Although this myth was prevalent, similar to the "last Aboriginal Tasmanian" myth, Aboriginal communities and cultures continued to survive despite the violence and racism structurally compounded against them.

The existence of the Arakwal people in Bundgalung country is recognized today, unlike the Muwinina people of Tasmania, which potentially changes the ways colonization affects both the aboriginal people of an area as well as the settlers in that region. Today, one way that colonization is being combatted in New South Wales is the creation of the Aboriginal Joint Management Program in partnership with the NSW National Parks Service (NPWS, n.d., para.5). This program allows for Aboriginal people to collaborate with the parks service to make decisions regarding the management of land, as well as helps provide opportunities for Aboriginal rangers to educate non-Aboriginal Australians and tourists about their history and culture (NPWS, n.d., para.5). I chose to study colonization in the Northern Rivers Region in part due to these active attempts and repatriation and decolonization through the Parks Service which are not present in Hobart or Melbourne.

### **1.3.3 – Melbourne, Victoria**

The city of Melbourne was developed on land now known as the City of Yarra belonging to the Wurundjeri-willam people of the Kulin Nation (Yarra City Council, 2019a, para. 1). The dispossession of Wurundjeri land occurred not only through displacement of indigenous communities, but also disconnection to the land through sales and development of

sacred places (Yarra City Council, 2019b, para. 1). Despite being illegal under British law, settlers began moving to the City of Yarra in 1830, and by 1836 the British government realized they could not stop the flow of settlers to the region, officially naming it Melbourne in 1837 (Yarra City Council, 2019b, para. 2). With the increasing development of the region and the growing settler population Aboriginal people were pushed further and further from their traditional lands, further disconnecting Aboriginal communities from their freedom of movement and way of life (Yarra City Council, 2019b, para. 4). The forcible pushing of Wurundjeri people from their lands sometimes resulted in tension and war between different clans as they crossed over onto the others' land (Yarra City Council, 2019b, para. 4).

Additionally, indigenous people in the area were devastated by the introduction of European diseases as well as suffered the effects of changes in diet and lifestyle (Yarra City Council, 2019c, para. 1-5). However, disease was not the only thing that threatened Aboriginal communities. Violence in many forms including executions, massacres, and the rape of Aboriginal women was a common frontier occurrence (Yarra City Council, 2019d, para. 1-5). To add to this narrative of genocide, it is difficult to know the exact casualties to Aboriginal populations, as European officials attempted to downplay and obscure high rates of Aboriginal deaths (Yarra City Council, 2019d, para. 7).

Today, despite the lasting effects of colonization, the Wurundjeri people remain active in their cultural practices, building a strong community and passing on knowledge to the next generation (Yarra City Council, 2019e, para. 1). I chose to look at colonization in Melbourne as it is a city landscape, compared to the less developed regions of Hobart and Northern Rivers Territory.

#### **1.4 – Colonization in the Environmental and Nature Connection Movements**

Looking at many of today's environmental movements, racism and colonialist thinking are deeply entrenched in the structural makeup of the movements. As Pearl, Porter, and Laurens write in their essay on racism in environmental movements where they particularly critique the Extinction Rebellion movement, once we have created structures that do not account for diversity within the environmental movement, it is difficult to un-create them (Pearl, Porter & Laurens, 2019, para. 13). In the 1987 United Nations' Brundtland Commission 'sustainable development' is defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (International Panel on Climate Change, 1987). I would add that based on the IPCC definition of sustainable development, movements that do not account for the needs of

current and future generations are inherently unsustainable (International Panel on Climate Change, 1987). Although the IPCC definition of sustainability does not explicitly include an aspect of social justice, my research expands upon this to define sustainability as: meeting the needs of all groups, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or any other identity, in the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same while at the same time acknowledging the inherent value and rights of the ecological world. Environmental movements that fail to integrate diversity – and, within the context of my paper, specifically who fail to integrate Aboriginal communities - in their actions and goals are inherently unsustainable as they do not account for the present or future needs of all people.

### **1.5 – Research Question and Importance**

Despite the initial invasion of indigenous lands beginning in the 1770s, it wasn't until 1992 with the historic Mabo versus Queensland (No. 2) court case in the High Court of Australia that native title to their historic lands was recognized (Mabo v. Queensland, 1992, p. 1). It was within the Mabo Case that *terra nullius* was finally rejected from Australian Law and Australia's history of colonization was described as a “national legacy of unutterable shame” (Mabo v. Queensland, 1992, p. 62). My research asks the questions: Does conscious or unconscious guilt about the colonization of Aboriginal communities influence Non-Aboriginal Australians' connection to the environment? Furthermore, how does education about the history and culture of Aboriginal communities and their land influence sense of place in Non-Aboriginal communities? I will be focusing my research within communities of people engaged in the nature connection and environmental movements. The environmental movement in Australia needs Aboriginal thought (Fernyhough, 2019). As we move towards the goal of a post-colonial environmental movement, we must acknowledge colonization in order to heal, integrate Aboriginal history and worldviews, and reconnect with sense of place.

## **2 – METHODS AND ETHICS**

### **2.1 – Location of Data Collection**

This study was predominantly focused in three locations in Australia: Hobart, Tasmania; Melbourne, Victoria; and Northern Rivers region, New South Wales. Although data collection was focused in all three areas a majority of the data I collected came from individuals in the Northern Rivers, New South Wales region. Additionally, my primary

method for distributing surveys for data collection was via Facebook and electronic distribution, so although I attempted to focus my data collection in those three areas there were some responses from other places in Australia (for example, Brisbane). As explained in my introduction, I chose to focus my data collection in three locations due to the diversity of experience in regard to the history of colonization and invasion of Aboriginal lands by European settlers. I felt that by only concentrating my research in one location I would not be depicting an accurate representation of the effects of colonization since those effects are potentially very different based on how the histories of colonization vary in different locations.

## **2.2 – Ethics Approval**

Prior to beginning my research, I received conditional ethics approval from the Local Review Board. Initially in my proposal to the review board I hoped to be able to interview a few Aboriginal people who have connections with my advisor who might be interested in this project. My ethics application was approved with the condition that I do not interview Aboriginal individuals since my project was not developed in conjunction with any Aboriginal community and did not show any direct need to include interviews with Aboriginal people. This conditional approval changed the process of my research, since I wanted to make sure to include as much Aboriginal thought as possible, as well as ensure that my project did not leave out or mis-interpret any critical pieces of the experience of colonization (since I am also complicit in the culture of settler-colonialism). Since I could not interview any Aboriginal people I tried to include as much background as possible to help contextualize what Australia's history of Colonization was like from all perspectives. In particular, I tried to include sources from Aboriginal authors to help include Aboriginal voices as much as possible. Additionally, I attempted to contextualize the bias with which this study has been conducted, since I cannot ever fully understand the Aboriginal perspective as a researcher of European descent. I fulfilled all conditions proposed by the Local Review Board. I collected written informed consent for both my survey and my interview (see Appendix B). For surveys individuals were required to read a paragraph about the use of collected data and initial their consent prior to taking the survey. For the interview, participants were sent an informed consent form (Appendix B) that they completed before the interview. No additional ethical concerns arose during the duration of my study.

## **2.3 – Participants**

Due to the ethics restrictions on my project I decided to focus my project purely on Non-Aboriginal individuals who are current Australian residents. Additionally, the population I chose to study was predominantly individuals who are already involved with environmentalism or the sense of place movement in some way. I wanted to study this group because by focusing on people who are already involved in these movements, I hoped to find results about how the environmental and sense of place movements have been affected by colonialism as well as look to the future for how to begin unsettling the deep structure of settler-colonialism. Furthermore, I hoped that people who were involved in environmentalism and sense of place might have already established some connection to the environment. I hoped that having a pre-established sense of connection to the environment would help clarify how that connection might be experiencing effects of colonialism, if at all. Additionally, it was important that my study population did not include people traveling through Australia since I wanted to look at how Australians are affected by their country's history, a question which does not apply (in the context of Australia's history, at least) if you are visiting Australia and not a resident.

#### **2.4 – Data Collection Techniques**

I decided to use survey and interview techniques for collecting my data. I wanted to use a survey since I was attempting to collect a broad collection of data from a lot of people. Also, using an online survey was ideal for my research since I was collecting data in three locations despite only being physically located in one. In developing both my survey and interview questions I used Beth Hill's framework of questions about systems of power from *The Work that Reconnects* (Hill, 2019, para. 6-end). Additionally, my advisor, Dr. Eshana Bragg, helped me to frame my questions in the most effective way.

I distributed my survey via Facebook groups, as well as directly emailed my survey to two colleagues that my advisor thought would be interested in this work, both of whom completed the survey. In order to target my focus population, I only posted the survey to environmentally-engaged Facebook groups in the three locations I was conducting my research within. Additionally, my advisor posted the survey in several groups that she is involved with. I reached out to several SIT students in Melbourne and Hobart and attempted to work out a way for them to collect survey responses in their respective cities, however due to their own busy schedules it did not work out for other SIT students to help collect any survey responses. I received consent to include these survey responses in my project by requiring that individuals taking the survey read a short paragraph on how I was planning to

use the data and initial their consent for me to do so. From the time my survey was active (14 days) I collected a total of 69 survey responses. (For a list of Facebook groups and pages where the survey was posted, see Appendix C)

I decided to use interviews as another method of data collection because it allowed me to dive more deeply into the questions that were briefly mentioned in the survey. This allowed me to collect qualitative data in addition to the more quantitative data I collected via the survey. All of the people I interviewed took the survey first and left their contact information to show interest in being interviewed on this topic. I conducted 13 interviews in total, 12 over phone and 1 in person. On average the interviews lasted 30-45 minutes. Prior to each interview I received written informed consent on an informed consent form that I emailed and answered questions about in advance of the interviews. I attempted to use the snowballing technique to find more people to interview by asking interviewees to introduce me to any friends or colleagues who might be interested in this work, however this was not a successful method in this case and resulted in no additional interviews. Throughout the process of my interviews I took notes by consensually recording the interviews as well as taking notes by hand to come back to in the analysis process. In designing both my survey and interview questions I attempted the process of “strategic questioning,” where the actual process of participating in the survey or interview asks participants to question their own viewpoints and role in (in this case) the settler-colonial structure. The results of this emphasis on strategic questioning are outlined more deeply in the General Discussion section of Results and Discussion. (For a list of interviewees, see Appendix D).

## **2.5 – Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data from my survey in Microsoft excel by doing quantitative analysis based on demographics as well as scaled answers to questions. Additionally, I looked at various demographics to see if there were any themes in the answer to the more qualitative questions in my survey. Finally, I also looked for any themes across the whole of the study group in terms of both qualitative and quantitative questions. To analyze the data from the interviews, I re-listened to the recorded audio from my interviews and pulled out any salient quotes. Additionally, I searched for themes across all interviews for certain questions which I noticed to have the clearest answers. I attempted to group quotes from the interviews by themes and keywords to more clearly display the qualitative patterns discovered. Finally, I analyzed any outliers and took quotes that stood out due to their difference from the themes. These I viewed as area for potential further research or questioning.

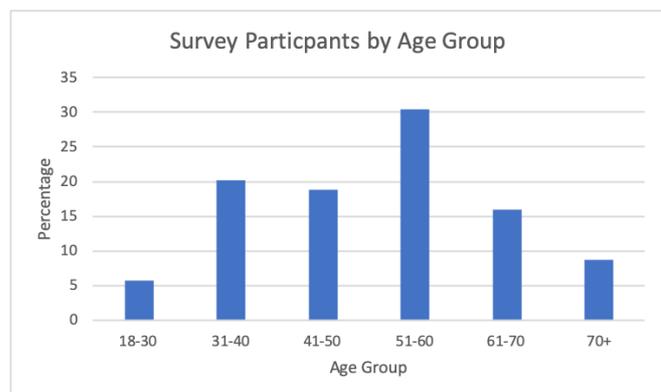
## 2.6 – Potential Errors and Biases

This research may have error due to small sample size of the populations studied. Particularly in terms of comparing data from the three different locations, I expect a high margin of error because far more surveys and interviews were collected from the Northern Rivers region than either Melbourne or Hobart. Additionally, it is important to note that my results and conclusions do not include any indigenous voices as no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people participated in either the survey or the interview. I attempted to alleviate this shortcoming of my data by including extensive background research in my study, however lack of current voices from the Aboriginal community still impacts the data I collected. Thus, my recommendations for how to alleviate the effects of colonization on the environmental and sense of place movements are lacking the diversity of thought and opinion required to fully formulate inclusive next steps for decolonization. This idea of conducting research in conjunction with Aboriginal communities on how they view the future of a de-colonized environmental and sense of place movement is an area for future research.

## 3 – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 – Survey

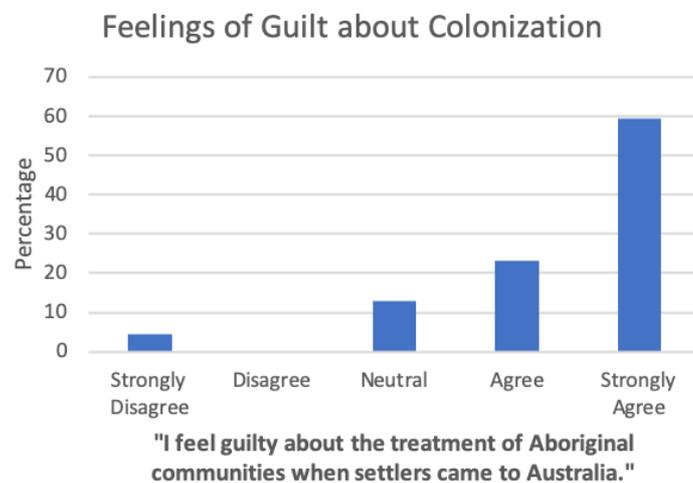
I collected a total of 69 surveys distributed electronically via Facebook. Seventy-two percent of the respondents were female, twenty-three percent were male, and five percent were another gender. Respondents fell into 6 different



age groups (see Figure 1). For my survey format and questions, see Appendix E. *Figure 1. Survey participants categorized by age group.*

### 3.1.1 – Presence of Settler-Guilt

This graph suggests that feelings of guilt about colonization, or, settler-guilt, do exist in many Non-Aboriginal Australians. With fifty-nine percent of the survey participants strongly agreeing to feeling guilty about colonization and another twenty-three percent agreeing, well over half of the participants self-described themselves as having settler-guilt. Establishing the existence of settler-guilt is important in the context of my study since if Non-Aboriginal Australians notice feelings of guilt about colonization in themselves then there is potential for that settler-guilt to be affecting sense of place.



*Figure 2. Level of agreement with the statement “I feel guilty about the treatment of Aboriginal communities when settlers came to Australia.”*

### 3.1.2 – Comparison of Different Locations

In this survey I attempted to gather data from Hobart, the Northern Rivers region, and Melbourne. However, since I was located in the Northern Rivers Region and a majority of my contacts were from the same area, it was more difficult to get survey responses in Hobart and Melbourne than in the Northern Rivers region. In total I received thirty-seven responses from New South Wales (NSW), two from Tasmania, and sixteen from Victoria, as well as eleven from Queensland and three from South Australia (see Figure 3). I didn’t plan for data collection in Queensland and South Australia, however due to my survey distribution via Facebook it was difficult to ensure that only individuals from the three locations I was hoping to study took the survey. I have included data from all of the locations I received responses from in the graphs, although I am focusing my analysis on the results from Tasmania, NSW, and Victoria. Additionally, although I have found it interesting to look at the data across these

locations, it is important to note that future data collection is needed to draw conclusions about the comparisons between these locations as small and inconsistent sample sizes from each respective state is likely a source of error.

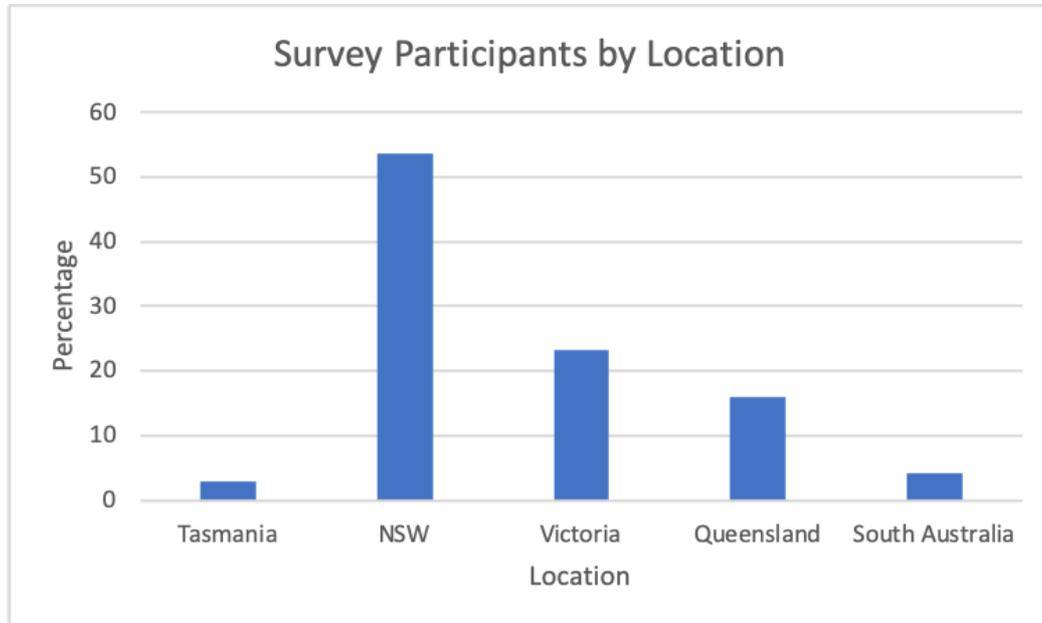


Figure 3. Survey participants categorized by location.

### 3.1.2.1 – Feelings of Guilt Compared by Location

Across all locations the predominant response was “strongly agree” to the statement “I feel guilty about the treatment of Aboriginal People when settlers came to Australia.” Within Tasmania, all of the respondents rated themselves as either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement. This suggests that settler-guilt is more prominent in Tasmanian than in either NSW or Victoria since all participants from Tasmania expressed feelings of settler-guilt where some participants from NSW and Victoria did not. One reason this difference in feelings of guilt might be accounted for is the narrative of complete eradication of Aboriginal communities in Tasmania compared to narratives of violence against but not complete extinction of Aboriginal communities in NSW and Victoria. Although this history of Aboriginal extinction in Tasmania is not factually accurate and fails to recognize the surviving Aboriginal culture in the area, the power of this myth over time has left a strong impact on how the narrative of colonization is perceived in Tasmania.

In NSW and Victoria there are still a majority of respondents who self-reported feelings of guilt, a majority of which strongly agree to having feelings of guilt. However, there are also individuals who strongly disagree with the statement, suggesting that in NSW

and Victoria feelings of guilt are slightly less prominent than in Tasmania. In Victoria especially, since slightly more than twelve percent of respondents report no feelings of settler-guilt. One possible reason for this difference between Victoria and the lower rate of “no-guilt” responses from NSW is the increased education about Aboriginal issues and history in NSW due to the Aboriginal Joint Management Program through the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (NSW NPWS, n.d., para.5). For future research I would hypothesize that increased awareness of Aboriginal issues, culture, and history via education on these topics would (at least initially) lead to increased levels of settler-guilt. Additionally, NSW has one of the highest response rates for “strongly agreeing” to feeling settler-guilt at slightly more than sixty two percent of respondents compared with fifty percent in Tasmania and fifty-six percent in Victoria. This could potentially also be explained by the increased prevalence of education on this topic and the history of the traditional custodians of the land from the NPWS Joint Management Program (NPWS, n.d., para.5).

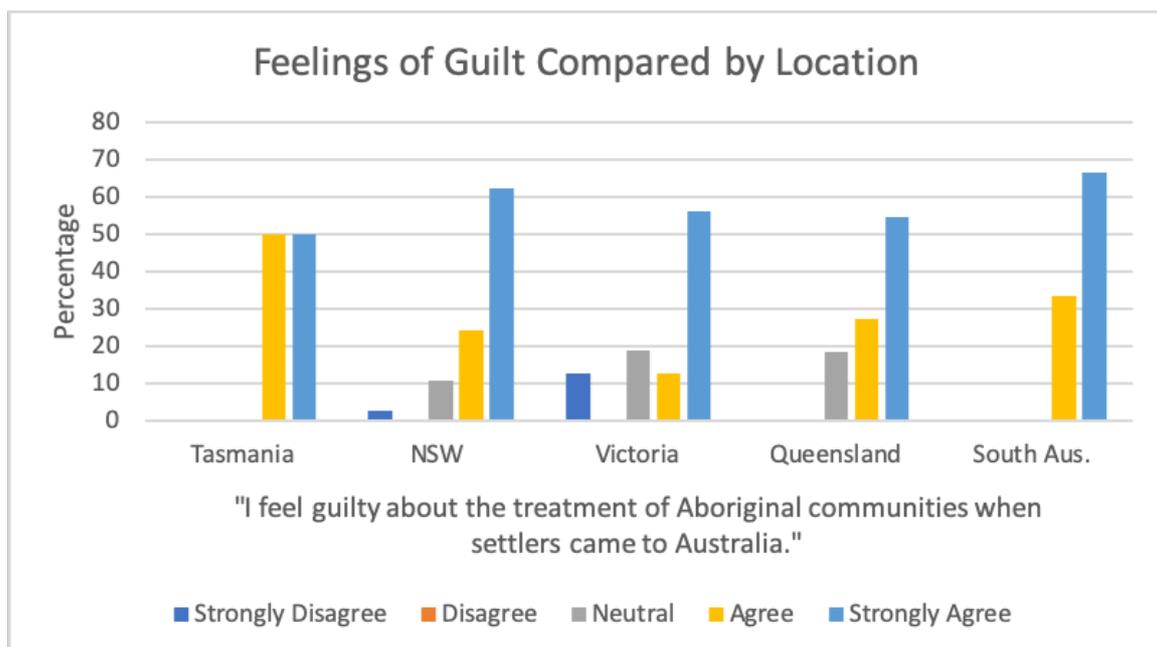


Figure 4. The relationship between “settler-guilt” and location. Survey question: “I feel guilty about the treatment of Aboriginal communities when settlers came to Australia.”

### 3.1.2.2 – Connection to Place Compared by Location

Figure 5 suggest that there is some connection between location and how strongly individuals feel a connection to place. In Tasmania respondents were split evenly over strongly agreeing to having a connection with place and disagreeing to having a connection to place. This suggests that there is likely something which impedes that connection to place

in half the participants. In NSW there is more variety in the responses received compared to Tasmania. When combining the responses of those who “agree” and “strongly agree” with the statement, there are slightly over 68 percent of responses, from both NSW and Victoria respectively, who feel a strong connection to place. However, in NSW no individuals strongly disagree with having a strong sense of place compared to about 6 percent of respondents from Victoria who report no connection to place. Although my data did not necessarily measure this, one possible reason for this difference might be living in a cityscape with less greenspace compared to living in a place like the Northern Rivers region where there are many places to engage in connection to the outdoors.

Furthermore, when looking at the percentages of individuals who strongly agreed with the statement, NSW has more than double the percentage as Victoria does. One hypothesis for this trend of stronger connection to place in NSW than in Victoria is the presence of land repatriation and education through the Aboriginal Joint Management program with the NSW Parks Service (NPWS, n.d., para.5). Although my research did not specifically examine the connection between education on Aboriginal issues and feeling more connected to a place, a follow-up hypothesis from this study is the increased potential for non-Aboriginal Australians to connect to place after learning the history of the land and its traditional custodians.

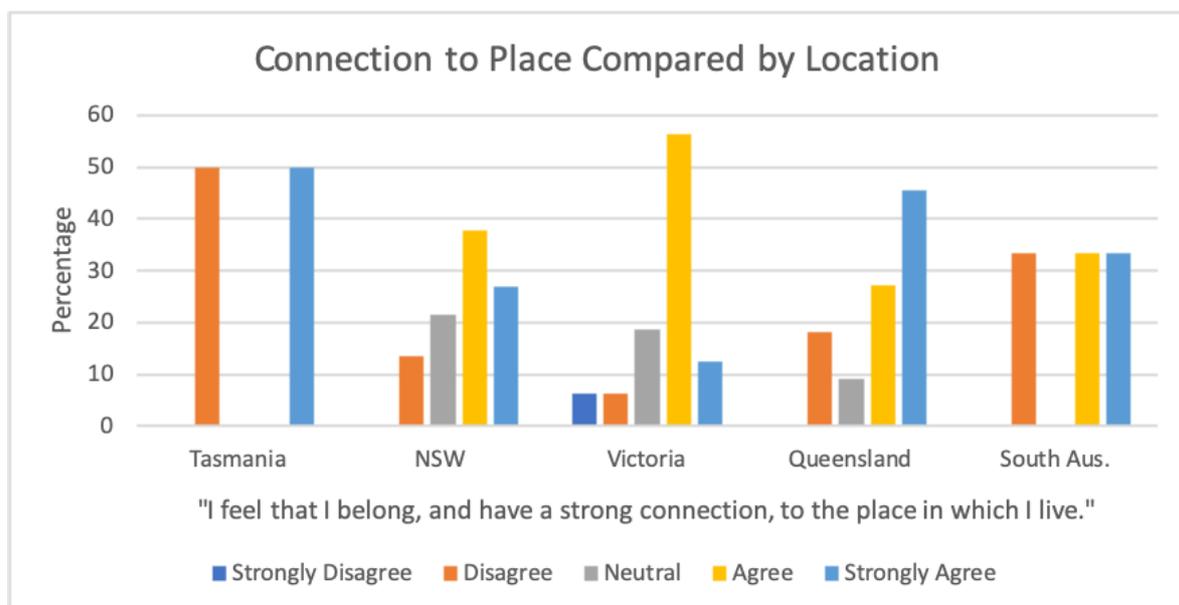


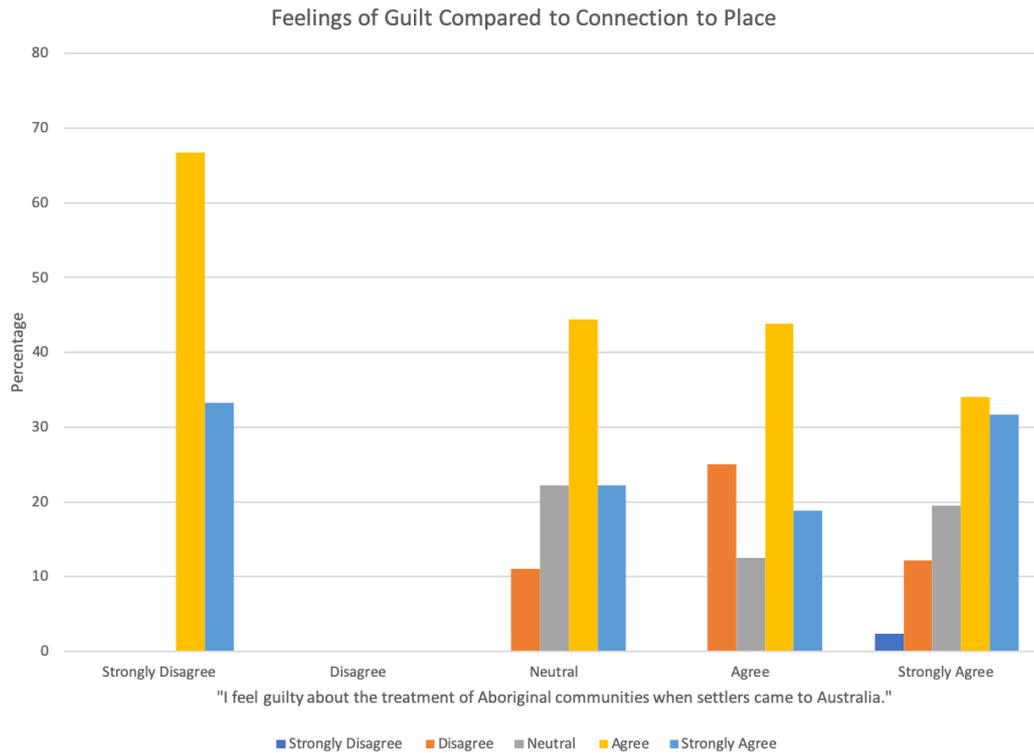
Figure 5. The relationship between “connection to place” and location. Survey question: “I feel that I belong, and have a strong connection, to the place in which I live.”

### 3.1.3 – Comparison between Feelings of Guilt and Sense of Place

Figure 6 shows the relationship between feelings of guilt at the colonization of Aboriginal communities and sense of place in Non-Aboriginal Australians. This graph shows some relationship between feelings of guilt and sense of place, although it is a complex connection. One trend is that people who have very low levels of settler-guilt also rate themselves as having strong connection to place, whereas people with high or very high levels of settler-guilt are more likely to have varied responses to their connection to place. This suggests that ability to connect to place is influenced by settler-guilt, or guilt at the colonization of Aboriginal communities.

Within this figure it is important to note that there were far fewer responses of individuals who reported no feelings of settler-guilt than of those who strongly agree or agree with having feelings settler-guilt. This means that although I am comparing various responses in this figure, my analysis is likely to have some error based on small and incongruous data size. Additionally, for the analysis of this graph I am looking at the relationship between the two variables without knowing for certain which is the independent and which is the dependent variable, which may be a source of error in my analysis.

Given the potential sources of error in my analysis, it is still relevant that the few individuals who reported no feelings of settler-guilt all felt a connection, and even a very strong connection, to place. One explanation for this group of respondents might be that some individuals who have a very strong connection to place do not want to dilute their connection to place with comparison to Aboriginal connection to place or experience. Although this sentiment was not noted explicitly in my qualitative data through interviews, there was a general theme of difficult emotions associated with understanding the Aboriginal history of a location. Awareness of these difficult emotions for Non-Aboriginal Australians might encourage some individuals who have a strong connection to place to avoid considering feelings of guilt so as not to risk their connection to place.



*Figure 6. The relationship between “settler-guilt” and “sense of place”. Survey questions: “I feel guilty about the treatment of Aboriginal communities when settlers came to Australia.” and “I feel that I belong, and have a strong connection, to the place in which I live.”*

### 3.2 – Interviews

Over the course of two weeks I conducted thirteen interviews. All the interviews I conducted were with people who responded to the survey prior to the interview. Of the people I interviewed eleven were women and two were men. Five of the interviewees were from the Northern Rivers Region, five were from the Melbourne area, two were from Tasmania, and one was from Adelaide. Additionally, one of the individuals I interviewed was currently living in the Northern Rivers Region (and is included in the five from that region) but had also lived in Tasmania for a significant period of time and also considers that to be home, allowing her to comment of both places. For the exact format of my interviews, see Appendix F.

#### 3.2.1 – Feelings about Colonization

When asked the question “When you think about the colonization of Aboriginal people how does it make you feel?” nearly every interviewee responded with a variation of deep feelings of sadness, anger, or some form of guilt or responsibility. In the table below I have categorized themes from the responses to that question, although there was frequent overlap of the themes within many interviewee’s answers. One thing I found very interesting was that many people mentioned feelings of guilt or responsibility at their complicity within a settler-colonial framework. These interviews suggest that feelings of settler-guilt amongst non-Aboriginal Australians are relatively common. However, within the context of this question as well as the larger context of the interviews, many interviewees mentioned wanting to ensure that Aboriginal needs and wants were being fulfilled within the process of reconciliation and decolonization. For example, Sandra Kellett mentioned that she “[doesn’t] want to presume that [she] know[s] what the first inhabitants want for their future” (Kellett, 2019). This sentiment reflects the feelings of uncertainty that many people expressed. One possible area that this uncertainty may stem from is that although participants articulated feelings of settler-guilt, grief, and anger, the path for working through these feelings is often unclear since there is a lack of Aboriginal voices in leadership leading to confusion in the role of non-Aboriginal Australians in decolonizing and allyship.

Additionally, in terms of feelings of settler-guilt, several people throughout the broader interviews mentioned that although they may not currently feel “guilt” exactly, they certainly felt guilt at one point in their learning process about colonization. The people who agreed to be interviewed seemed to be individuals who had already been thinking about this topic for many years and thus had already begun coming to terms with their internalized colonialism as well as their role of privilege in the settler-colonial framework. For example, Participant #1 mentioned that her awareness of this issue has been “growing over time, over the last 15 years, but almost like an exponential growth of discomfort and awareness” (participant #1, 2019). This suggests that the emotions that are related to the effects of colonization on non-Aboriginal Australians are not static at all but fluctuate and change over time with recognition and processing. For some participants, this process is “enormous” (Nourse, 2019), or “overwhelming” (participant #13, 2019), but for others it “feels exciting to notice that [possibility of unsettling]” (Young, 2019).

Table 1. Themes across feelings about colonization. Interview question: “When you think about the colonization of Aboriginal people how does it make you feel?”

<p><b>Guilt or Responsibility</b></p>	<p>“I don’t know if guilty is exactly what I would say, anymore. I would have in the past but, I don’t know what that accomplishes, feeling guilty. Like I feel a sense of sort of responsibility.” (Participant #3, 2019)</p>	<p>“I know that my family is complicit in [colonization] and I would expect recognizing that, that brutality and that badness, I would take that as an impetus to be better, to act better.” (Lou, 2019)</p>	<p>“[I feel] guilty for my own activity and inaction.” (Participant #13, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Anger, grief, sickness</b></p>	<p>“I can feel it in my body right now, when you ask the question, its right in my solar plexus, so I actually, like I feel gutted, I feel disgusted, I feel horrified” (Participant #1, 2019)</p>	<p>“Sick. And angry and sad... it makes me furious.” (King, 2019)</p>	<p>“I sometimes feel very sad and, as I said, despairing.” (Young, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Supportive of Aboriginal Leadership</b></p>	<p>“I want to stand side by side with people of First Nations to say I support you in the direction you want to go without me imposing my ideals on how it should be done. I don’t want to be somebody that thinks I know best for another people.” (Kellett, 2019)</p>	<p>“I just think that there needs to be a greater focus and emphasis given to listening to what Aboriginal people actually want and trying to reconcile that in our current situation.” (Nourse, 2019)</p>	<p>“I sometimes question whether solutions need to be more driven by Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities themselves rather than by programs that have be instigated by white Australians.” (Nourse, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Uncertainty/Overwhelmed</b></p>		<p>“I suppose that it all accumulates</p>	

	I feel an enormous sense of helplessness and inability to make a significant change into the effects of colonization.” (Nourse, 2019)	in a kind of heaviness that feels overwhelming at times.” (Participant #13, 2019)	“I also feel trapped in the system.” (Participant #1, 2019)
<b>Hopefulness and other positive emotions</b>	“I accept the history of what occurred. I think of it very positively I think is the best way to say it, because the other aspect is, I’ve observed with great interest the degree to which aboriginal people are actually imbuing themselves in the legal and political fabric of this country to the extent of being able to negotiate with it for in pursuit of reconciliation.” (Franklin, 2019)	“I can feel very excited about the possibility and also kind of pleased at the noticing something that I think is important.” (Young, 2019)	“Bad, angry, but also, like, compassionate” (Rachel, 2019)

### 3.2.2 – Influence of Knowledge of Colonization on Connection to Place

Table 2 examines different themes within the question: “Do you think knowing about the history of colonization and its ongoing effects influences your sense of place or connection to Country?” A majority of individuals began their responses by unequivocally stating “yes” that they felt some impact, however two individuals stated that knowledge of colonization did not, or at least did not fully, impact their connection to place. Additionally, two participants mentioned that they felt society had moved away from connection to nature due to colonization, since Aboriginal culture is so strongly connected to nature and colonization has distanced that culture from society.

In terms of those who felt that their connection to place was impacted by the effects of colonization and knowledge about those effects, my interviews suggest that although many people agreed that there was impact, nearly everyone felt the impacts of colonization on sense of place in different ways. For example, Jill Woodlands mentioned that she felt the real effects to her sense of place resulted from lack of connections with aboriginal people and that

when she pursued those relationships she “got a little more legitimacy in trying to unpack [her] own sense of place” (Woodlands, 2019). Amanda King noted that “when Aboriginal people talk about their connection to country it’s on a much deeper level than [her] own [connection]” (King, 2019). This suggests that the comparison between how non-Aboriginal Australians view Aboriginal connection to place and their own connection to place might create a barrier for some individuals in connecting with place.

A particularly interesting result that is not noted in the table was that two people that I interviewed were born in countries other than Australia, although both interviewees have spent substantial time in Australia and are aware of Australia’s colonial history. Both of these participants mentioned feeling a stark difference between their connection to place in their birth country versus in Australia. As Participant #1 noted, “[she] realized over there [she] was not the colonizer... [she] was of the place” (Participant #1, 2019). She described coming back to Australia as a difference she felt “viscerally.” It is a feeling that “[she’s] not only not of this land, but [she’s] of the group of people who dispossessed the original inhabitants of this land who have been here for well over 60000 years” (Participant #1, 2019). This suggests that knowledge of ancestral history as a being a part of a colonizing culture can have deep impacts on how individuals feel centuries in the future about their connection and even right to the land. Furthermore, it poses interesting questions about the differences between sense of place in the context of colonization for immigrants to Australia versus individuals who were born in Australia and perhaps even come from a history of forced immigration via the European convict history. As Sandra Kellett, who did not feel her connection to place was influenced, noted “[she] might feel differently if [she] knew of instances where [her] ancestors inflicted cruelty on another person and removed them from their homeland” (Kellett, 2019). The importance of an individual’s family history and knowledge as to whether their ancestors came to Australia due to convict status or for personal settler gain, or even whether an individual immigrated to Australia in their own lifetime, may also impact how colonization affects sense of place.

Table 2. Themes across how knowledge of colonization influences “connection to place.” Interview question: “Do you think knowing about the history of colonization and its ongoing effects influences your sense of place or connection to Country?”

<p><b>No influence on Connection to Place</b></p>	<p>“No, it doesn’t actually. I am involved with some aspects of aboriginal culture and have aboriginal friends I am very close to, but I don’t feel that lessens my sense of place of makes me feel at all unworthy to be here.” (Kellett, 2019)</p>	<p>“There’s no point in flagellating myself... we are here, we can’t reverse time.” (Rolfe, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Connection between Aboriginal Culture and the Environment</b></p>	<p>“Well I think it does in the sense that with colonization there was massive disruption to a culture that was for the most part intrinsically connected to the land so that the information available and the you know connection to that culture was severed”</p>	<p>“I feel an enormously deep and overwhelming sadness about the trauma that has happened. Not just to the people but also to the land as well because I feel really strongly that aboriginal people and the land are kind of like, it’s one package.” (Nourse, 2019)</p>

	(Young, 2019)	
<b>Yes, Connection to Place is influenced</b>	“it does affect our connection because we’ve become very conscious of the reality of the history.” (Franklin 2019)	“It makes me feel really sad and sick, so just knowing that [colonial history], that makes it hard for me to wholeheartedly put my roots down here.” (Participant #1, 2019)
“Oh yeah, absolutely... For me I can’t be in the bush and not have an awareness of that. It’s sort of part of it. It’s part of that landscape. Because it’s part of what shaped the landscape. Thousands of years it’s been cared for and then the degradation of it has happened in the last couple hundred years since the invasion.” (Participant #13, 2019)	“I think the barrier really is that if you don’t know any indigenous people. The challenge is if we don’t know any indigenous people or we deliberately don’t find out more it becomes a lot more difficult to consider that layer.” (Woodlands, 2019)	“Yeah. Recognizing that sense of alienation. Like there’s a brutal thing that comes between the history that we live in and the history that was there before so I think that would affect my understanding of everything. The social context that we live in.” (Lou, 2019)

### 3.2.3 – Education/Connection to Aboriginal People and Culture

Over the course of the interviews, although it was not always explicitly stated, one theme I noticed was the emphasis on education and connection to Aboriginal people as a potential aid in learning to connect to country. When asked “How has the traditional culture and your relationship with the people influenced your relationship with this Country, if at all?” Nitya Rolfe mentioned that “seeking out those connections [with Aboriginal people], totally helps the connection to country” (Rolfe, 2019). Additionally, many individuals emphasized the importance of listening to what Aboriginal communities want and need moving forward. This suggests that fostering connections between cultures and education on Aboriginal history can help non-Aboriginal individuals feel a greater connection to country as they become more aware of how to reach towards reconciliation. As Jill Woodlands stated, having an experience where she was able to talk with an Aboriginal woman about Aboriginal history and connection to land allowed for Woodlands to feel “more bonded” to her own sense of place (Woodlands, 2019). Although more research needs to be done in this area, the overall theme from my interviews suggests that improving education and knowledge about Aboriginal history and worldviews as well as creating channels for Aboriginal and Non-

Aboriginal Australians to form connections might lead to a positive influence on connection to place for Non-Aboriginal Australians.

### **3.2.4 – Thoughts on Unsettling the Environmental Movement**

The biggest question of my interview was asking individuals to reflect on what they had said both in the survey and the interview and think about ways to move forward in terms of alleviating the lasting effects of colonization within the environmental movement. The most common theme across all responses was some element of education about the history of colonization combined with finding ways to deepen personal connections with local Aboriginal communities. This is not an easy task, as Participant #13 said “building that connection takes time,” (Participant #13, 2019). Additionally, there are challenges to this education, as Amanda King stated “sometimes [she’ll] get caught up in the white shame of it and so [she] think[s] that can be a barrier.” This suggests that although participants are generally aware of the difficulties associated with fostering cross-cultural relationships, they also recognize this challenge as one of the most important steps in moving towards a post-colonial environmental movement.

Additionally, many individuals expressed concern about placing any additional onus on Aboriginal communities. One respondent mentioned that she felt “that there’s so much burden on the remaining indigenous people to know what to do” (Young, 2019). This suggests that although non-Aboriginal Australians want to provide space for Aboriginal leadership within the environmental movement, they are also aware of the pressure of placing that responsibility on indigenous communities. Given this uncertainty of how to be a supportive ally who listens to the needs of the First Nation community, I continue to revisit the importance of education to better understand what Aboriginal people and communities actually want.

Another extremely interesting finding in the responses to this question was the emphasis on finding ways to help non-Aboriginal Australians process their own role in the settler-colonial framework, including the privilege and implicit (if unintentional) biases that come with that role. This directly mirrors the work my study is trying to do in “unsettling” the environmental movement. Participant #13 expressed interest in working specifically within the environmental movement to support activists as they “process what is often a lot of really unexplored and unexamined bias and assumption and prejudice, even though consciously it would be kind of horrifying to them to see that” (Participant #13, 2019). This idea of continuing to confront internalized systems of power, even though the process is painful,

suggest the need for development of tools and support as well as further research as the most effective ways of unsettling colonization.

*Table 3. Themes across responses to the question: “Given what you’ve said today are there next steps you would like to take personally to alleviate the lasting effects of colonization within the environmental movement?”*

<p><b>Deepen connections with Aboriginal communities and learn more about these issues.</b></p>	<p>“I’d like to deepen and strengthen my connection with my local indigenous community.” (King, 2019)</p>	<p>“Learning about it is essential. And becoming more aware of the issues.” (Participant #3)</p>	<p>“I’d like to build healing and trusting relationships with Aboriginal People. I’d like to learn and speak with Aboriginal people to understand their perspective and to be able to prove the solidarity and support to Aboriginal people.” (Rachel, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Support Aboriginal rights</b></p>	<p>“Support to Aboriginal people who are doing work in the space of environmental work and cultural caretaking and cultural work. Kind of advocating for Aboriginal rights stuff as well.” (Rachel, 2019)</p>	<p>“I would love to advocate for ranger programs where Aboriginal people are able to work on the land, trying to get local knowledge back in.” (Woodlands, 2019)</p>	<p>“Totally support formal recognition, truth-telling, and treaty for our first nations people in whatever way we can.” (Franklin, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Learn how to be a good ally</b></p>	<p>“Having conversations more with people to learn to be a good ally.” (Participant #3, 2019)</p>	<p>“Being connected with people who are on a similar journey and seeing what comes out of that.” (Young, 2019)</p>	<p>“Show that I care to be a good ally.” (King, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Process the role of “Settler” Australians in colonization</b></p>	<p>“I just really believe in that personal work around understanding white identity and also what has been lost in the creation of white identity for everybody, indigenous people as well as people who are</p>	<p>“Sometimes I’ll get caught up in the white shame of it and so I don’t know how to [move forward]</p>	<p>“Yeah, I think it’s continuing to deconstruct what a culture is as well as build the</p>

<p><b>and de-colonization</b></p>	<p>classified as white. I think there's a much deeper story there that a lot of people haven't interrogated in their own life. I think that deeper work needs to happen for meaningful decolonization to actually even have a chance" (Participant #13, 2019)</p>	<p>and I worry about being culturally insensitive in some way and so I think that can be a barrier. And that's something I would like to be able to let it go of." (King, 2019)</p>	<p>connections to place, country, without the extra burden on local indigenous people." (Young, 2019)</p>
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### 3.3 – General Discussion (Effects of Strategic Questioning)

Throughout the course of both collecting survey responses as well as conducting interviews I received several comments from participants expressing gratitude for having a space to think about these issues. Many participants left comments at the end of the survey remarking that the topic was “food for thought” or that this topic is “something they have been thinking a lot about.” This indicates to me that there is very much a need for further research in this area that allows individuals to question their own place and privilege in a settler-colonial framework.

I designed my interview in particular with the intent of “strategic questioning,” or asking questions that allow participants to examine their privilege and place within the settler-colonial framework. This kind of self-questioning in and of itself can start the process of unsettling within the environmental movement. At the end of several interviews, participants thanked me, expressing that this topic and questions had allowed them to further delve into their own process of understanding how colonization affect them and society. One participant asked me to send the recording we had taken of the interview so that she could listen back to her answers and process the topics even further. Additionally, several individuals asked me to send them the question referred to in section 3.2.4 to ponder it more deeply following the interview.

This outpouring of gratitude for the space to think about and process the last effects of colonization on connection to place suggests that the actual act of engaging in this study allowed individuals to begin unsettling settler-colonialism within themselves. Regardless of the data collected in the study, I think it is important to acknowledge the positive result of simply choosing to ask the questions that this research focuses on. However, follow through in continuing to ask these questions is needed in order to continue unsettling the environmental movement.

## **4 – Conclusion**

### **4.1 – Research as a Method of Activism**

Although I was able to collect a fair amount of data via both my survey and interviews, by biggest takeaway was from the response participants articulated to having the space to think about these topics. Research is often not regarded as a method of activism, but rather as a method of collecting more information on a topic. However, research offers an opportunity not just in finding results, but also in the process of engaging with individuals and asking questions that provide space to understand oneself better. This study actively asked participants to think deeply and question the ways in which colonization affects them, both negatively and positively (in the sense of the privileges received by colonization). Furthermore, it allowed participants to think through how connection to the environment might also be related to the land's history, a topic that, although it affects individuals, is not always intuitive to understanding nature connection. When we ask individuals to question how the system they live in affects their perceptions and life, unsettling occurs naturally and completely of their own willingness. Based on this conclusion, that research itself is a form of activism with carefully formed questions to evoke thought-provoking answers, I think future research on the effects of colonization connection to place and the environment is one of the most important ways we can work towards a post-colonial movement.

### **4.2 – Future Research**

This study serves as a platform for future research in many ways. First and foremost, this study does not include any indigenous voices in the form of survey responses or interviews. We cannot possibly hope to decolonize the environmental movement without hearing Aboriginal ideas, needs, and hopes. Additionally, in terms of moving forward with processing settler-guilt, one of the biggest things non-Aboriginal Australians wanted to know was what Aboriginal people want to happen. This suggests that the most important future research is in understanding Aboriginal connection to place as well as understanding how Aboriginal people want to participate in the environmental and nature connection movement.

Another area of study branching off from this research is studying further the effects of education about colonization on sense of place. In the Australian education system colonial history is often taught from the settler perspective and in some cases continues to teach myths such as the “Last Aboriginal Tasmanian” myth. My research suggested that there is a connection between education about Aboriginal issues, feelings of guilt, and connection to place, however there is still a lot to learn about how education can play a role in (re)-connecting non-Aboriginal Australians to country. Additionally, it is worth noting that this process of education about the settler-colonial framework may frequently come with intense emotional processing of one’s own privilege and complicity in a violent system of power. Future research should include this element of understanding the necessary support networks for individuals who are coming to terms with these difficult emotions.

Finally, my study attempted to find how location may influence experiences and effects of colonization. I was not able to collect satisfactory amounts of data in each location to truly make comparisons across locations. However, there is certainly potential for more research into the connection between varying histories of colonization with the effects of the settler-colonial framework in different locations. Furthermore, colonization is a tragic piece of many countries’ histories. This research might apply not only to Australia, but also to the United States, South America, many parts of Africa, and beyond. As the environmental movement becomes increasingly internationally connected, it is also increasingly relevant to understand how different narratives of colonialism from different countries affect how those countries approach environmentalism. In fostering this global environmental movement, it is important to incorporate indigenous knowledge from every area of the world.

#### **4.3 – The Future of the Environmental Movement**

The goal of this paper was ultimately to better understand how colonization continues to impact non-Aboriginal Australians’ sense of place and connection to the environment in

order to work towards creating a post-colonial environmental and nature connection movement. Through this research I have established that there is a connection between the two, although it is a complex one. My research suggests that the colonial history of Australia can evoke deep emotions of guilt, anger, and grief in non-Aboriginal Australians which potentially inhibit the ability to deeply connect with the environment, in turn affecting how motivated an individual is to protect the environment. In order to create a more unsettled environmental movement we need to create space for individuals to question their own role in the colonial system. That can be through many different methods from conversation with other similarly situated individuals, to education about the diverse histories of colonization in different places, to forming connections with Aboriginal communities. However, as I said in the introduction to my paper, striving to unsettle the environmental movement is not enough if the goal is to reach a post-colonial movement. In order to decolonize the environmental movement colonial history needs to be fully recognized by everyone and Aboriginal leadership and traditional knowledge need to be integrated into the movement.

We cannot undo the fact that beginning in the 1770s a horrific invasion of Australia by European settlers occurred, and we cannot change the fact that countless lives and histories were lost. But the environmental movement has a choice moving forward. Now is the time to acknowledge that a movement based on what benefits one group of people at the expense of others will never truly be sustainable. For the environmental movement to continue forward without recognizing the ways in which colonization continues to be woven into its structure perpetuates the myth of an empty land, ripe for conquering. So, in order to move forward to a world and a movement we can be proud to pass on to our children, we need to recognize the past. It is time for the environmental movement in Australia to listen to the wisdom of the Aboriginal people who belong to this land as they re-write the story of *terra nullius*.

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## 6 – APPENDIX

### 6.1 – Appendix A: Definitions

**Colonization** – “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area” (Oxford English Dictionary). Within my research I also acknowledge the ongoing effects of colonization as a process not just as a singular event. Additionally, it is important to understand the violence and dispossession associated with colonization, which is not fully included in the Oxford English Dictionary definition.

**Decolonization** – Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty, the process of challenging systems of power, which is political, multifaceted, and dynamic. Additionally, it is a material process and in terms of outcomes must involve the repatriation of land. (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127)

**Sense of Place** – connection to location and surrounding environment which promotes empathy and sense of responsibility for the place with which and individual feels connection.

**Settler** – “people who occupy land co-opted from the original inhabitants; rather than implying an ethical judgment, the term settler is a descriptive, a “statement of situation”: To name oneself as a settler is to be situated within the unjust and ongoing phenomenon of settler colonialism.” (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127)

**Settler Colonialism** – “a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home”. It is distinct from other kinds of colonialism because it focuses on land instead of labor. (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127)

**Settler-Guilt** – complex feelings of guilt, remorse, and shame felt by “settlers” at their privilege derived from the racist, violent, and genocidal treatment of indigenous people and communities due to the colonization of indigenous lands and the legacy of colonization.

**Sustainability** – meeting the needs of all groups, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or any other identity, in the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same while at the same time acknowledging the inherent value and rights of the ecological world.

**Terra Nullius** – A legal term meaning “land belonging to no one”.

**Unsettling** – the practice of individuals who are either decedent from settlers or benefit from the privileges afforded within colonial culture of turning a critical gaze to the ways in which they uphold or profit from the system which dominates and exploits indigenous people and culture. (Jones & Segal, 2018, p. 127) Within the context of this paper “unsettling” is used as an important process in understanding the ways in which colonialism affects Australian society currently and must include an element of consideration for the targeted disenfranchisement of systems which enforce colonialism today.

## 6.2 – Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms

### 6.2.1 – Survey Consent Form:

The information gained from this survey will be used in research examining the impacts of Australia's history of colonisation on the environmental movement for an undergraduate university course <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/programs/semester/fall-2019/asm/>. My academic supervisor is ecopsychologist Dr Eshana Bragg. The written report will be included in the program library and may potentially be published in a peer-reviewed journal or online. The information you provide will remain completely anonymous. Sincerely, Anna Beyette

(Please initial): \_\_\_\_\_

### 6.2.2 – Interview Consent Form:

#### SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

#### *Terra Nullius: The Effects of Australia's Colonial History on Sense of Place*

**Qualified Investigator:** Anna Beyette, [abeyette@wellesley.edu](mailto:abeyette@wellesley.edu); 0478926990

#### **Information:**

My name is Anna Beyette and I am an American university student from Wellesley College. I am in Australia for a semester with the School for International Training studying sustainability and environmental action. I am doing an independent research project on the effects of Australia's history of colonization on sense of place and connection to the environment. Participation in the study will involve the following: completion of a brief 5-10-minute survey and/or a 20-30-minute interview. The information gained from this survey/interview will be incorporated into a written report that will be submitted for an undergraduate class and will be included in the program library and may possibly be published on the internet. It will also form part of a short oral presentation that I will make to my class. This data may potentially be used in a senior research thesis or publication in the United States.

#### **Risks:**

Within the interview process there is potential for stress or discomfort to occur when answering questions. Participants are free to terminate the interview or survey at any time or skip questions which they do not wish to answer. Additionally, due to the nature of the interview process there is potential that participants might share details that could result in embarrassment, etc. In order to ensure that participants' identities remain secret I will keep all notes on my computer and all recordings on my phone which are both password-protected. After completion of the project I will make sure that all notes and recordings are deleted/destroyed. Each participant can choose how they wish to be identified in my report and I will create code words to identify individuals who wish to remain anonymous. Finally, prior to submitting my final report participants will be sent applicable sections of my report to confirm the accuracy of their statements and representation within the paper.

#### **Benefits:**

The goal of this project is to create a more intersectional sustainability movement which incorporates respect for Aboriginal history, culture, and knowledge, and fulfills the needs of current and future Aboriginal people. Participation in this study may not benefit you directly. However, the knowledge that we obtain from your participation, and the participation of other volunteers, may help us to better understand the views, needs, and goals of Aboriginal individuals pertaining to the environmental movement in Australia. This information will help us to spread awareness of Aboriginal history and present needs as well as craft recommendations for building a more intersectional environmental movement going forward.

#### **Confidentiality:**

You have the option of either remaining anonymous or of having your contribution to the study be acknowledged. If you choose to remain anonymous, the information in the study records will be kept

strictly confidential and will be available only to myself. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Please list below how you would like to be referred to in the study, whether it be anonymous or by a preferred name.

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**Participation:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You may also decline to answer any specific question. If you withdraw from the study at any time, the information already obtained from you will be destroyed.

**Written Consent:**

**Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research study. In doing so you are agreeing to allow me to use the information from our interviews as well as any future emails, phone calls, voicemails, or other communication on the subject of my research topic in my final report and any resulting publications.**

**Subject's Signature:**

**Date:**

**Researcher's Signature:**

**Date:**

**Legally Authorized Representative's Signature (if applicable):**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**6.3 – Appendix C: List of Facebook Groups Survey Was Posted In**

- Triple Ecology Community
- Triple Ecology Tribe
- Newkind Network Australia
- Ngara Institute
- Native Philosophy
- Native Connections Meeting Australia
- Ecopsychology Australia
- Foresthaven
- The Joyality Program
- Sustainable Future Australia
- Bragg + 78 Friends
- Extinction Rebellion Mullumbimby
- Extinction Rebellion Clarence
- Extinction Rebellion Northern Rivers
- Melbourne Educators for Social and Environmental Justice
- Lismore Vegie and Herb Gardeners Network
- Northern River's Guardians
- Northern Rivers Environmental Student Homestay
- Byron Bay Community
- Climate Action Hobart
- Extinction Rebellion Melbourne
- Extinction Rebellion Hobart
- Lismore Environment Collective
- Knitting Nannas Against Gas Lismore
- Lismore Environment Center
- Environment Tasmania
- Extinction Rebellion Tweed Valley

**6.4 – Appendix D: List of Interview Participants**

- Participant #1
- Dr. Wally Franklin
- Participant #3
- Rachel Clark
- Sandra Kellett
- Rachel
- Lucy Young
- Amanda King
- Nitya Rolfe
- Sonya Nourse
- Lou
- Jill Woodlands
- Participant #13

**6.5 – Appendix E: Survey Questions**

**Nature Connection in Australia**

Connection to place and nature is good for mental health and can be a strong motivator within the environmental movement. This survey attempts to understand sense of place in the context of Australia's colonial history. The end goal of this research is to find ways to overcome potential roadblocks to nature connection and ultimately strengthen and diversify the environmental movement.

This short survey will take about 5-10 minutes of your time.

1. How many hours per week do you spend in nature? (That is time you spend outside in natural environments, whether in urban, rural or wilderness settings - eg.,, bushwalking, meditating outside, gardening, walking your dog, surfing, etc.)
2. Please describe your activities and experiences when you spend time in nature.
3. What does the phrase "sense of place" mean to you? (This phrase may not mean anything to you, or it may be meaningful, we are interested in your own personal definition and what your experience of it is.)
4. What does the word "colonisation" mean to you? (This word may not mean anything to you, or it may be meaningful, we are interested in your own personal definition and what your experience of it is.)
5. How much did you learn about Aboriginal history in your primary or high school experience? (multiple choice)
  - a. Nothing
  - b. A Little
  - c. A Moderate Amount
  - d. A Lot
6. What do you remember being taught about Aboriginal history in primary or high school?

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

7. I feel that I belong, and have a strong connection, to the place in which I live.
8. I feel guilty about the treatment of Aboriginal communities when settlers came to Australia.
9. I think about Australia's colonial history and its ongoing impacts on Aboriginal people frequently.
10. I feel strongly connected to the natural environment.
11. I regularly participate in environmental action or sustainable behaviours to protect the environment.
12. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
13. Were you born in Australia?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Yes, I was born in Australia.

14. How many generations have your ancestors lived in Australia?
  - a. 0, I am the first generation from my family to be born in Australia.
  - b. 1, (at least one of my parents was born in Australia).
  - c. 2, (at least one of my grandparents was born in Australia).
  - d. 3, (at least one of my great - grandparents was born in Australia).
  - e. 4, (at least one of my great - great - grandparents was born in Australia).
  - f. 5+ generations.

I was born in another country.

15. In what country were you born?

16. How many years have you lived in Australia?

Demographic Information: (We are comparing responses between different groups of participants in this survey)

17. In which state do you live?

- a. New South Wales
- b. Western Australia
- c. Queensland
- d. South Australia
- e. Victoria
- f. Tasmania

18. Your City or Town?

19. Age

- a. 18-30
- b. 31-40
- c. 41-50
- d. 51-60
- e. 61-70
- f. 70+

20. Gender (if you prefer not to answer, leave blank):

21. Any additional comments?

22. Would you like to talk more about these topics? If you are interested in a brief interview to talk more about these topics PLEASE LEAVE YOUR EMAIL OR PHONE NUMBER BELOW, and I (Anna) will give you a call back.

Thank you so much for your participation in this survey! Your contribution to this research will help create a stronger and more impactful environmental movement by helping us to discover how Australia's history continues to affect nature connection today. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions by emailing [abeyette@wellesley.edu](mailto:abeyette@wellesley.edu) or calling me at +61 047 892 6990 Sincerely, Anna Beyette.

## 6.6 – Appendix F: Interview Questions

1. How was your experience filling out the survey? What sorts of things did it make you feel, or did it open anything up for you to think about? what motivated you to want to talk more about this topic of colonization and nature connection?
2. How do you feel when you're doing activities in nature? Could you describe that experience for me? I would love to hear any personal anecdotes or stories about how you feel in nature.
3. In the survey one question talked about how connected you feel the place you inhabit. You \_\_\_ with the statement that you feel you belong and have a strong connection with the place you live.
  - a. In what ways do you feel connected to the environment where you live? Do you have any anecdotes or stories that you would feel comfortable sharing relating to your connection to the environment you inhabit?
  - b. In what ways do you not feel connected to the environment where you live?
4. Do you feel that there are any barriers preventing you from connecting to the country you live in?
  - a. Physical/Structural Barriers?
  - b. Emotional/Psychological Barriers?

- c. Do you think the history of colonization of Aboriginal people in this area affects your sense of place/connection to country?
    - i. If Yes: How is that? In what ways? Do you have any examples?
  - d. Do you know much about the Aboriginal people and culture who are the traditional owners of the country you live in?
    - i. What is the name of the people?
    - ii. How did you learn what you know about the culture?
  - e. How has the traditional culture and your relationship with the people influenced your relationship with this Country, if at all?
5. Do you participate in any environmental actions personally or more largescale (composting, short showers, writing to politicians, involvement in groups such as extinction rebellion, etc.)?
    - a. What sorts of things do you do to participate? Are you involved with personal actions like composting, or taking shorter showers?
    - b. What about actions to involve your community like engaging in community tool shares?
    - c. Do you participate in any political actions like writing letters to your representatives or engaging in climate marches/strikes?
    - d. Specific groups?
  6. Do you feel that there are any barriers that prevent you from participating in the environmental movement?
    - a. Physical/Structural Barriers?
    - b. Psychological Barriers?

In the context of my research I'm thinking of colonization as "the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area".

7. Many people are quite unaware of the details here, but could you tell me what you know about Australia's history of colonization of Aboriginal People?
8. When you think about the colonization of Aboriginal people how does it make you feel? Does this feeling affect your relationship with the land you live on, knowing that its traditional owners have faced this history?
9. Do you feel any responsibility to your environment/land to protect it?

DEPENDANT ON BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW:

10. To what extent have Aboriginal People been involved in your organization that you mentioned earlier? Have you been involved with any specific environmental projects within your organization that included Aboriginal individuals or emphasized Aboriginal culture?
  - a. Tell me about the structure of the project? What were you trying to accomplish? How were Aboriginal individuals and communities involved? Were Aboriginal people looked to for leadership?
11. Do you know if Aboriginal people and communities benefited from your project? How did the benefit?
  - a. How do you know that they benefitted?
12. Would you say Aboriginal involvement in your organization's projects occurs never, hardly ever, sometimes, or frequently? Is this engagement with Aboriginal communities typical for your organization or was it specific to this project?

FINAL Q Sequence:

13. Given what you've said today are there next steps you would like to take personally to alleviate the lasting effects of colonization within the environmental movement?
14. Are there any broader ways that we as a community of people interested in environmentalism can work to alleviate the effects of colonization?
  - a. Have you had any positive experiences weaving Aboriginal power, leadership, culture or worldviews into your connection to nature?
15. This question is a big one and it's the ultimate goal of my research. As we wrap up this interview, I want to invite you to hold this question in particular. Often when we hold questions within us it can help us to create great and creative answers without the pressure to create an effective response immediately. I ask that as you ponder this question if you come across any insights you send me an email or give me a call to follow up as I would love to hear your thoughts!

Thank you so much for your participation! Do you have any questions for me or any other comments you would like to make?