



**Run for Native, Run for Aboriginality in Doris Pilkington's**

*Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*

**Dr Hari Prasad**, Assistant Professor

Department of English

Zakir Husain Delhi College Evening

University of Delhi, Delhi 110002

**Abstract:**

The history of civilising missions and their embedded ideologies have been interrogated and interpreted in academia and social science studies with multiple contents and discontents. However, the quantum of justice and remedy is still imperative in the democratic culture of civilised society. A bond with one's culture, land, rituals and social practices is ideologically branded as superior or inferior, followed by a contested ideological imposition in the name of civilising, which has warranted a discourse in various genres. The idea of civility has been portrayed in multiple contexts in which the colonial authorities believed that European culture and values represented a higher level of civilisation and progress. They viewed Indigenous cultures as primitive and uncivilised. As a result, they targeted to mix indigenous children with European living trends by stealing them from their cultural roots and habitations. The idea of civility imposed by the colonial authorities clashed with the cultural norms and values of Indigenous communities. For the girls' families, their way of life, connection to the land, and cultural practices were deeply rooted in their identity and sense of belonging. The authorities' attempt to impose their version of civility was seen as an attack on the girls' cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *Native, civilisation, genetic, colonialism, Aborigine, tracker, settlement, culture, escape, language, indigenous, protector*



An Australian indigenous novel titled *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington looks into the tale of resistance against the colonial notion of civility. The three characters in the novel, Molly, Gracie and Daisy's escape from the settlement made for the stolen kids and their journey to return home represent their rejection of the forced assimilation process. The story prompts a reflection on what it truly means to be civilised. The colonial authorities defined civility based on Western values and practices. Still, the Indigenous communities had rich traditions, knowledge systems, and social structures that had sustained them for generations. The story challenges the notion that one culture's concept of civility is universally superior.

Doris Pilkington meticulously observed and developed a narrative titled *Rabbit Proof Fencedealing* in the predicaments of stolen generations. Aborigines were tracked and confined to the settlements forcibly to be trained as skilled gentry. Film as a cultural apparatus puts the socio-political and cultural predicaments on display with various cinematic liberties and constraints: The Rabbit-proof Fencetiescountry and family through a unique and extraordinary journey of three girls. Indigenous people and their interconnectedness leading different political and sociological discourses compel the state to make policies for Aborigine communities' welfare.

It was also believed that protecting the Aborigines connected with preserving their culture at Moore River Native Settlement would enable them to become a better race and serve as the skilled workforce in white community settlements. The Moore River camp was established in 1916, and since then, the Aboriginal children of mixed parents were brought here and trained to become domestic servants. They were forced to accept the targeted religious practices to civilise the uncivilised.

The implicit ideology of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* against colonialism and racism portrays the Australian government's brutal action against Aboriginal people and highlights their systemic discrimination. The film also shows how the government compulsorily removed Aboriginal children from their families as part of its integration policy, intending to erase Aboriginal culture and identity. The ideological motif behind this policy was to establish an ideal community to be

---



considered as the supreme race. The story of the three girls is a symbol of resistance against the oppressive policies of the Australian government. Despite their dangers, the girls' determination to return to their families is a powerful message of disobedience against the government's attempts to erase their culture and identity. Furthermore, the film also highlights the strength of the Aboriginal community and their resilience in the face of adversity. The girls' journey back home is aided by members of the Aboriginal community who provide them with food, shelter, and guidance.

The notion of civility as a significant theme of power, oppression, and cultural conflict is depicted in the novel *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*. The idea of civility, as perceived by the colonial authorities, often clashed with Indigenous communities' values, traditions, and ways of life. The story underscores the resilience of the girls and their families in the face of oppressive policies and their determination to maintain their cultural heritage and sense of self. In the name of social welfare and inclusion, the government of Australia has been ignoring the recognition of the contributions of Aborigines that they deserve. An official apology letter was read out in the Australian Parliament, and the Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) spoke in the Parliament:

*“That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past, and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.*

Acknowledgement and apology by the Australian Prime Minister may be treated as a remedial step to assimilate the aged Aborigine community into mainstream state affairs. One of the first



steps towards healing the wounds of the Stolen Generations is the acknowledgement of the past wrongs by the government and a formal apology. In 2008, the Australian government formally apologised to indigenous Aborigines to recognise what they suffered. This public acknowledgement is a significant step in the healing process.

The aforesaid apology by the state representative triggered a discourse and compelled the state mechanisms to provide recognition in a democratic state provision. Doris Pilkington's powerful and poignant narrative explores themes of identity, resilience, and the enduring strength of Aboriginal culture. The characters embark on an incredible journey to find their way home, tracing the rabbit-proof fence that stretches across the vast Australian outback. It also delves into the idea of running for one's native identity and Aboriginality in the face of a government policy.

Molly, Gracie, and Daisy's decision to leave for the natives to undertake the arduous journey represents their resistance to assimilation. They hold onto their Aboriginal identity and culture, defying the government's attempts to erase their heritage. Connection to the native land involves traversing vast and challenging landscapes, highlighting their deep connection to the land. Their ability to navigate the terrain reflects their Aboriginal knowledge and survival skills, emphasising the importance of their native heritage.

Throughout their journey, the reader observes a cultural resilience to sustain themselves. They rely on traditional bushcraft and tracking skills, demonstrating the resilience of their Aboriginal culture and heritage. Molly, Gracie, and Daisy's determination to reach their families and reunite with their culture signifies their commitment to reclaiming their Indigenous identity. The girls' motivation to return home is rooted in their love for their families and the Indigenous community. Their journey highlights the strength of Aboriginal family ties and the importance of preserving these connections in the face of government policies that aimed to break them.

Doris Pilkington sheds light on the resilience and determination of Indigenous Australians to maintain their cultural identity and heritage, even in the most challenging circumstances. The book underscores the significance of running for one's native identity and Aboriginality. Reunion with



Molly, Gracie, and Daisy's family allows them to reunite with their loved ones. The book follows their remarkable journey to escape from the settlement and find their way back home, highlighting the importance of reuniting torn families.

The reception of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* has had a significant impact in raising awareness about the experiences of the Stolen Generations in Australia and the broader issues of Indigenous rights and reconciliation. Here are some key points regarding its reception. It received critical acclaim for its poignant storytelling and exploration of the mistreatment of Indigenous children during Australia's policy of forced removals. It was praised for its ability to humanise the individuals affected by these policies and provide a personal perspective on this dark period of Australian history.

The film adaptation, released in 2002, also received positive reviews and extended the story's reach. Educational and cultural significance has been widely used to enlighten about the Stolen Generations and Indigenous history in Australia. It has contributed to a broader conversation about reconciliation and the need to acknowledge and address historical injustices. Impact on Indigenous rights raising awareness and support for Indigenous rights and issues, including the ongoing efforts for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Literature and cinema have shed light on a painful chapter in the nation's history and contributed to the ongoing dialogue surrounding Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

Another crucial remedy is the preservation and revitalisation of Indigenous culture and heritage. The girls' connection to their Aboriginal identity remains strong throughout the book. Efforts to support and strengthen Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and traditions can help heal the intergenerational trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations. Access to culturally sensitive support services, including mental health counselling, is crucial for those who have experienced the trauma of being part of the Stolen Generations. These services can help individuals and families heal and cope with the ongoing effects of forced removal.

---



Deeply intertwined with cultural ideologies central to the history and discussions about Indigenous rights and reconciliation in Australia. The most prominent theme of the story is the Stolen Generations policy in Australia. The government forcibly removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities to assimilate them into European culture. The book portrays the heartbreaking consequences of this policy through the experiences of Molly, Daisy, and Gracie, who were taken from their families and placed in a government institution. Following the rabbit-proof fence symbolises the girls' determination to return to their families and cultural roots. Their journey showcases the resilience of Indigenous culture and the strength of their connection to the land.

Indigenous cultures have deep connections to the land and view it as integral to their identity. The rabbit-proof fence stretches across the vast outback, symbolising their relationship to their ancestral land. Throughout their journey, the girls rely on their traditional knowledge of the land, plants, and animals to survive. This highlights the importance of Indigenous spirituality and the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next. Molly, Daisy, and Gracie's journey can be seen as resistance against the oppressive government policies. Their determination to escape and reunite with their families represents a broader resistance by Indigenous communities against the injustices they faced. The story contributes to the ongoing national conversation about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It serves as a powerful reminder of the need for acknowledgement, apology, and healing for the historical injustices suffered by Indigenous communities. Cultural preservation stems from a discourse in celebrating Indigenous culture and traditions. It emphasises that the contributions of Indigenous communities enrich the richness and diversity of Australia's cultural landscape.

Through this novel, Pilkington promotes a cultural ideology rooted in acknowledging the past mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, the importance of cultural preservation and resilience, and the ongoing quest for reconciliation and justice. It has become a significant cultural artefact in Australia's efforts to come to terms with its colonial history and work towards a more inclusive and equitable future.

---



In conclusion, Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is a powerful indigenous and Aborigine narrative highlighting the enduring connection to one's culture and identity. The book concludes with hope and triumph as the girls are reunited with their families. It also poses a question of civility, humanity and cultural supremacy in the name of colour and race.

---

### References

- Birch, Tony. "Rabbit-Proof Fence, 'Mr. Devil' and the Desire to Forget: This Is a True Story." *Cultural Studies Review* 8.1 (2002): 117-129.
  - Brewster, Anne. "Aboriginal Life Writing and Globalisation: Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*." *Australian Humanities Review* 25 (2002).
  - --- . "Aboriginality and Sally Morgan's *My Place*." *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography*. Ed. Penny Gay. Sydney: UP, 1996. 1-29.
  - Darian-Smith, Kate, ed. "Spaces of the 'Other': Planning for Cultural Diversity in Western Sydney." *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*. London: Routledge, 1996. 203-217.
  - Dickinson, Peter. "Orality in Literacy: Listening to Indigenous Writing." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 14.2 (1994): 319-340.
  - Dizard, Robin. "*My Place* and the Healing Art of Autobiography." *Australian Studies* 4. Ed. Martin Gray. Stirling: The British Australian Studies Association, 1990. 134-139.
  - ---. "Native Daughters: *My Place* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*." *MELUS* 22.4 (1997): 147-162.
  - Andrews, Penelope. "Violence against Women in Australia: Possibilities for Redress Within the International Human Rights Framework." Bora Laskin Law Library. *law-lib.utoronto.ca*. 20 Nov. 2009. <<http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/Diana/fulltext/andr.htm>>.
  - Attwood, Bain. "'Learning about the Truth': The Stolen Generations Narrative." *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*. Eds. Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan. Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2001. 183-212.
-



- Bennett, Bruce. “Perceptions of Australia, 1965-1988.” *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*. Ed. Laurie Hergenhan. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988. 433-453.
- Betros, Chris. “Lifting the Lid on Australia’s ‘Stolen Generation.’” *Japan Today*. *japantoday.com*. 15 Jan. 2008. <<http://www.japantoday.com/jp/newsmaker/96>>.