

Depicting areas of indigenous Australian women's subjugation under imperialism: An indigenous feminist study of Jack Davis's *No Sugar* and Eva Johnson's *Murras*



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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 19 October 2023

Revised: 27 November 2023

Accepted: 4 January 2024

Published: 16 February 2024

Keywords

Eva Johnson

Imperialism

Indigenous drama

Indigenous feminism

Jack Davis

Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonialism

Subjugation

The stolen generation.

This study aims to examine the portrayal of the oppression of Indigenous women in post-colonial drama focusing on themes of sexual violence, enforced sterilization and the Stolen Generation as depicted in Davis's *No Sugar* and Johnson's *Murras*. A qualitative analysis of these plays reveals the intertwining of sexual exploitation with colonial and imperial conquest. Rape and sexual abuse of Indigenous women are seen as metaphors for land exploitation and political subjugation. The findings of the study indicate a systemic violation of Indigenous women's rights. Indigenous women are sexually assaulted in both *Murras* and *No Sugar* which demonstrates imperialist control over their bodies. Another theme that develops is forced sterilization as shown in *Murras* in which indigenous young women are made sterile without their consent, symbolising a greater assault on aboriginal culture. The trauma of the Stolen Generation is outlined in both plays depicting the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, severing cultural and familial bonds and originating a generational identity crisis. The preservation of Indigenous identity through women's stories and traditional practices emerges as a significant aspect of resistance against colonial oppression. The selected plays underscore the role of Indigenous women in sustaining and transmitting cultural narratives and practices which is essential for preserving Indigenous identity and spirit. The findings of the research need a more in-depth understanding of the historical and ongoing oppression of indigenous women as well as a need for reparative justice.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the profound and enduring impacts of colonialism on Indigenous women in Australian dramatic works by examining the manifestations of imperialist control over female characters' bodies by using several methods like rape, enforced sterilization and the act of child removal which caused the stolen motherhood and the stolen generation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Australians have faced numerous challenges since the onset of European colonization in Australia. This colonization profoundly impacted Aboriginal societies and traditions. Indigenous communities faced multiple injustices including mass killings, forced relocations from their ancestral lands to missions and reserves under the guise of protection and the suppression of their cultural practices by the dominant culture. Massacres, violence, disease and significant upheaval for the Aboriginal people characterize the colonization era.

Furthermore, European colonization in Indigenous Australia had a profound impact particularly leading to the distressing phenomenon known as the stolen generations. This term refers to the forced separation of indigenous

individuals from their families during the early stages of European colonization, a practice that persisted until the 1970s. These forced separations resulted in the disruption of crucial spiritual, familial and cultural bonds leaving enduring intergenerational consequences for Indigenous women and children in Australia.

Two plays have been chosen to examine the subjugation of indigenous Australian women under imperialism: [Davis \(1986\)](#) *No Sugar* and [Johnson \(1989\)](#). *No Sugar* which premiered in 1986 is part of Davis's First-Born Trilogy alongside *The Dreamers* and *Barungin* (smell the wind). The play is set in the 1930s during the Great Depression and relates the story of the Millimurra Aboriginal family who were forcibly transferred from their home to labour in the Moore River Native Settlement. The play vividly portrays their struggles with marginalization, recurrent displacements, racism and dependence on the white government during the 1920s and 1930s. The title "No Sugar" draws from a protest song of the depression era symbolizing the enduring spirit of Aboriginal resistance throughout history.

The play *Murras* is structured into four distinct acts. Act one unfolds in 1967 focusing on a family consisting of Ruby, the mother; Elsie (referred to as Granny), Ruby's mother; Jayda, the sixteen-year-old daughter and Wilba, the thirteen-year-old son. They are immersed in a traditional lifestyle in an isolated rural setting but they are also grappling with the loss of Charlie the family's patriarch. Charlie fell into alcoholism and subsequently passed away a tragedy precipitated by the government's confiscation of his land. Act two illuminates the harsh reality of the family's forced relocation due to governmental policies. The play then advances to 1970 in Act three where Ruby's family is depicted struggling with urban life. Jayda serves as a domestic worker in a hospital while Wilba is enrolled in school. Both siblings confront and navigate through the rampant racism and derogatory treatment from co-workers and fellow students. The final act steps ahead a few years. Wilba emerges as a fervent activist for the Land Rights Movement, a commitment that frequently lands him in jail. The play concludes with Ruby engulfed in sorrow reflecting on the dispersion of her family and lamenting that they are "all gone" ([Johnson, 1989](#)).

2. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study aims to analyze the representations of women's oppression under imperialism showcased in Jack Davis's *No Sugar* and Eva Johnson's *Murras*. The oppression is dissected into several categories:

- 1) Analyzing rape as a mechanism to control indigenous Australian women's bodies.
- 2) Exploring the ramifications of mandatory sterilization on the lives of Aboriginal women in Australia.
- 3) Investigating the Stolen Generation's effect on depriving colonized Aboriginal women of motherhood and the subsequent loss of Aboriginal traditions and identities assessing the role of women's narratives and indigenous customs in countering the eradication of Aboriginal identity and in reviving gender-specific Aboriginal traditional practices.

Each aspect sheds light on the various layers of women's oppression and highlights their determination to preserve identity and culture in the face of imperialist tyranny.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a descriptive approach to examine the portrayal of Indigenous Australian women's subjugation during imperialism. It provides a comprehensive analysis based on an in-depth examination of the plays *No Sugar* by [Davis \(1986\)](#) and [Johnson \(1989\)](#) using concepts from Indigenous feminism to identify the layers of subordination and suppression imposed by colonial powers.

Reviewing the concepts of imperialism, post-colonialism and post-colonial feminism can be essential in order to completely comprehend Indigenous feminism. [Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin \(2007\)](#) define imperialism as the study of the conditions and processes under which empires are formed and maintained. This process involves the interaction between two political entities in which the dominant metropolitan center of one exercises control over

the effective political sovereignty of the other which is frequently referred to as the subordinate periphery (pp. 111–113).

Post-colonialism or commonly just postcolonialism is concerned with the legacy of colonization on civilizations and cultures (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Literary critics have been discussing the varied cultural impacts of colonization since the late 1970s using the term postcolonialism (168). Post-colonial discourse is significantly interested in feminism for two main reasons. First, it is evident that imperialism and patriarchy both exercise comparable types of dominance over the people they subjugate. As a result, there are similarities between the lives of colonized people and women in patriarchy and post-colonial and feminist politics challenge this kind of power. Second, controversial discussions have taken place in several colonized countries over the relative importance of gender and colonial oppression in women's lives. This has occasionally caused a division between political activists from underdeveloped and oppressed countries and Western feminists. On the other hand, the two are inseparably linked in which case the legacy of colonial dominance has a tangible impact on how women are positioned in their societies (p. 93).

The intersections of feminism and postcolonialism give rise to the ideas of Indigenous feminism which emphasises rights for Indigenous women and their families, decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty. It aims to uplift Indigenous women by aligning empowerment initiatives with indigenous cultural values, contrasting the often dominant perspectives of mainstream white patriarchal societies. Green (2008) illuminates that feminism is essential for addressing the systemic gender-based subjugation prevalent in patriarchal societies.

Modern Indigenous feminism emerged in response to the inadequate application of western feminism to the diverse experiences of all women. Green (2008) explicates that Indigenous feminists confront issues stemming from colonization, racism and the intricate interplay of these human rights violations. The most significant challenge for Indigenous women is to overcome the terrible effects of continuing racism, colonization and genocide.

Indigenous populations throughout the world continue to be oppressed and indigenous feminism is a reaction to this ongoing oppression as well as an effect. It facilitates internal cultural critique, enabling Indigenous women to shape their communities proactively, fostering self-determination and cultural ownership. Liddle (2014) underscores the inadequacy of white feminism to encapsulate the Indigenous experience. According to Liddle (2014), the goal of Indigenous feminism is to dismantle the power structures that support the oppression of Indigenous women and are based on racial inequality and male dominance. It encourages the collaboration of genders in the decolonization process which is a crucial strategy for preventing the oppression of Indigenous women.

Fredericks (2010) outlines the sequential steps central to the Indigenous women's empowerment movement. The process starts with the recognition of colonization as a fundamental disempowerment mechanism then moves on to the revival and revitalization of spiritual and cultural practices that are essential for holistic healing. Addressing colonization-inflicted wounds depends on Indigenous women's narratives which are rich with stories that are frequently altered or erased to fit the narratives of colonizers.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it depicts the struggles and difficulties that Indigenous women had during colonization especially as they are reflected in essential plays written by Indigenous authors. Davis's (1986) *No Sugar* and Johnson's (1989) *Murras* exemplify the complicated oppression Indigenous women endured under colonial dominance. A central objective of this research is to explore the violation of the rights of Indigenous women in Australia emphasizing the essential roles of society and government in maintaining their biased treatment.

Furthermore, this research stresses the necessity for postcolonial critics to direct their focus on Indigenous feminist writings. It emphasizes the strategies employed by postcolonial authors to stabilize colonial narratives.

Fundamental to this discourse is the incorporation of traditional female stories and practices which serve as effective tools in countering the destruction of unique Australian Indigenous identities and facilitating the healing process from historical traumas.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundation for this study's primary topic has been established by numerous significant critical individuals in the domains of post-colonial studies, post-colonial feminism and indigenous feminism. Green (2008) is a vital source that clarifies the critical position that Indigenous feminism occupies in both activism and scholarly discourse. The book addresses important questions of citizenship, human rights and identity while providing in-depth insights into the complex methods of decolonization. It also looks at how racism and sexism are entwined within the larger context of Indigenous issues. It makes a strong and unique intellectual and political contribution proving that feminism can help Aboriginal women fight oppression in many ways. The contributors are from Canada, the USA, Sapmi (Samiland) and Aotearoa and New Zealand. The chapters include theoretical contributions, stories of political activism and deeply personal accounts of developing political consciousness.

Suzack's (2015) book "Indigenous Feminisms in Canada" examines three case studies that demonstrate how Indigenous women embody the ideals of Indigenous feminism by highlighting the idea of active silence in order to highlight the social justice objectives of Indigenous communities in Canada. The book begins by defining Indigenous feminism and its broader objectives before turning to a discussion of significant topics the Sahtu Dene's efforts to repair land polluted by uranium mining, Heiltsuk's resistance to the Northern Gateway Pipeline Project, and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

One of the most important works of indigenous feminism literature is "Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism and Culture" authored by Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, and Barman (2010). The authors suggest a nuanced approach to indigenous feminism highlighting the significance of critically examining topics like nationalism, cultural identity and decolonization within the unique circumstances of Indigenous people. The study offers a thorough examination of indigenous feminism while primarily concentrating on North American and Canadian settings. It encompasses several academic insights from fields such as law, history, women's studies and ethnic studies.

Gilbert and Tompkins's (1996) seminal work, *Post-Colonial Drama Theory, Practice, and Politics* (1996) is the first in-depth analysis to concentrate on theater as a vital medium for opposing persistent imperialist forces. The writers use innovative theoretical perspectives from post-colonial and performance studies which they apply to a variety of plays that have their origins in Australia, Africa, Canada, New Zealand, the Caribbean and other former colonies. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) explore the fundamental topics of post-colonial theatres such as the reinterpretation of language and history and the complex relationships between performance theory and post-colonial theory. They also provide insights into how the post-colonial body is portrayed on stage and examine ritual and carnival performances. Their work demonstrates a strong interaction between literary and theoretical viewpoints along with an in-depth analysis of a diverse set of dramatic texts.

Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature by Mudrooroo (1990) provides a perceptive examination of the beginnings and evolution of Australian Aboriginal literature. It thoroughly analyzes several Aboriginal literary works demonstrating how Western music and art have influenced indigenous works. Simultaneously, Shoemaker's (2004) seminal work *Black Words, White Page and Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* (2004) becomes indispensable as the initial comprehensive examination of the substance and influence of Indigenous Australian literature. Shoemaker highlights literary criticism while incorporating historical background of the blossoming of Black Australian literature from 1963 to 1988 a period notable for significant advances in Indigenous affairs. The author investigates the accomplishments of important Aboriginal figures like Jack Davis, Kevin Gilbert,

Charles Perkins and Oodgeroo while offering a detailed examination of the socio-political landscape of those decades and tracing the evolution of black-white relationships in Australia.

Kumar (2012) in his article titled "A Search for 'Aboriginal Identity' in Sally Morgan's *My Place*" conducts a feminist analysis of Sally Morgan's *My Place* to explore the impact of colonialism on Indigenous Australian women. The study aimed to examine the ways in which colonialism has impacted Indigenous women's lives and the ways in which these impacts are represented in literature. The study has found that colonialism has had a profound and lasting impact on Indigenous women and that their experiences have been largely ignored in mainstream narratives. The article recommends that Indigenous women's voices should be centered in literature and that their experiences should be acknowledged and validated.

Sullivan (2017) in her "Indigenous Australian Women's Colonial Sexual Intimacies: Positioning Indigenous Women's Agency," conducts a postcolonial feminist analysis to study the representations of Indigenous women in Australian literature. The study aims to examine the ways in which Indigenous women are represented in literature and the impact of these representations on Indigenous communities. According to Sullivan, Indigenous Australian women's colonial sexual intimacies have been historically positioned as a means to understand their agency. This study reveals how Indigenous Australian women's bodies were simultaneously desired and viewed as exotic and erotic. The focus of the study is on the sexual experiences of Indigenous Australian women providing insights into the dominant historical discourses prevalent in Australia. These discourses often depict Indigenous women's sexualities as savage, promiscuous and primitive reflecting the influence of patriarchal and imperial power structures. Consequently, their voices and perspectives were constrained. The study concludes that Indigenous women are often portrayed as passive and submissive in literature which indicates the maintenance of harmful stereotypes in literary works. The study recommends that Indigenous women's voices be centered in literature and that more diverse and authentic representations be promoted.

However, Indigenous women in Australia have actively challenged these narratives through both individual and collective acts of agency. This paper focuses on how the agency of Indigenous Australian women challenges the dominant narratives of victimization and exploitation that have long singled them out. Indigenous women confront and reject the damaging stereotypes and power relations that are forced upon them by reclaiming their agency. Black Australia 'Writes Back' to the Literary Traditions of Empire was the title of Čerče (2017)'s study from the University of Ljubljana that examined the issue of Indigenous Australian writers "writing back" to the literary traditions of the empire. Her study's primary goal is to examine the poetry of Australian Indigenous writers Romaine Moreton and Alf Taylor emphasizing their critique of the historical and institutional mechanisms that have sustained white people's domination and Indigenous Australians' subjugation. She analyzes the literary techniques and approaches used by Moreton and Taylor to pique the interest of non-Indigenous readers and evoke emotional and political reactions. The purpose of this article is to show how these poets subvert the notions of white privilege and entitlement by using their poetry to question the public dynamics of racial segregation. The research by Čerče (2017) illuminates the significant role that Indigenous Australian literature had in challenging and subverting the imperial literary traditions, thereby advancing the continuing decolonization and Indigenous voice empowerment processes.

Usher et al. (2021) conducted a study titled "Indigenous Resilience in Australia and a scoping review using a Reflective Decolonizing Collective Dialogue" that examined the effects of imperialism on the lives of Indigenous Australian women. The findings reveal persistent obstacles that include economic inequality, unfavorable health outcomes and restricted access to opportunities for education and employment. Their research provides a vivid representation of the harmful effects of imperialism that persist to affect the social, economic, and health circumstances of these women. The authors believe that it is necessary to create and implement particular policies and activities in order to mitigate these residual implications. They present an extensive strategy that addresses

the primary causes of imperialist forces as well as their symptoms, creating the conditions for an impartial, equitable and accepting society for Indigenous Australian women.

Simpson (2021) conducted a thorough analysis on how to develop Indigenous resistance groups that reject the detrimental ideologies of settler colonialism and delve into Indigenous feminism and decolonization politics in her book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous resistance is defined as rejecting modern colonialism through the refusal to dispose of both Indigenous bodies and land. The aim of the study was to elucidate the function of Indigenous feminism in opposing colonialism and promoting decolonization. The study's conclusions emphasized the importance of Indigenous feminism as a transformative force that may challenge dominant narratives and support Indigenous sovereignty.

Renés (2022) conducts a postcolonial feminist analysis of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* in his paper "Alexis Wright's Fiction, Aboriginal Realism and the Sovereignty of the Indigenous Mind." The study examines the politics of representation in Indigenous Australian literature. The study aimed to explore the ways in which Indigenous women's voices are silenced in literature and the impact of this silencing on Indigenous communities. The study found that there is a need for more diverse and authentic representations of Indigenous women in literature and that Indigenous woman's voices must be centered in these representations.

One of the first Indigenous playwrights, Davis (1986) presented a history and culture that had been hidden by colonial tyranny in subtle ways that are revealed in "Unspoken Indigenous History on the Stage: The Postcolonial Plays of Davis (1986)," published in 2022 by Brown (2022). Davis's widely renowned works reflect the essence of Indigenous Australian culture reviving oral histories, dialects and perspectives that were suppressed and rendered unpleasant by colonial powers. He captivated viewers by skillfully transferring these components onto the Anglophone stage. Davis demonstrates a gift for language, striking a balance between the colonial language and Indigenous dialects while enriching the stories with dance and physical theater which are essential to Nyoongah tradition. In particular, Brown examines how colonization destroyed Indigenous voices and identities and applauds Davis's attempts to restore voice to his people's suppressed history and culture through the stage.

Čerče (2022) examines the poetry of Lisa Bellear and Romaine Moreton in her paper "Redefining Female Subjectivity in Australian Indigenous Women's Poetry." Her attention is drawn to their poetic sentiments which highlight the horrific abuse that Aboriginal women endure. Čerče illustrates how the representations of Australian historical and cultural narratives by Bellear and Moreton subvert and undermine long-standing colonial power structures. They successfully challenge the deeply embedded, sexist and racist stereotypes of native American women that have been cultivated by colonial history.

In a nutshell, the earlier research has shed light on important facets of Indigenous feminism, colonialism and decolonization, thereby making a substantial academic contribution. These studies recognize the deep and long-lasting effects of colonialism on Indigenous people including the persistent legacy of health inequalities, economic inequity and restricted access to opportunities for education and work. The basis for this study has been laid by the aforementioned studies as well as a number of others that are cited in it. Davis (1986) has been studied as a post-colonial dramatist and has received considerable attention. Nonetheless, the focus of this paper is on his female characters and the struggles they endure as colonized Aboriginal women under imperialist rule. Conversely, Johnson's (1989) writings have been studied as an expression of the need for Aboriginal people to be recognized and heard. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the areas of women's subjugation under imperialism by applying Indigenous feminism theories to Indigenous literary works in Australia.

6. DISCUSSION

In the sphere of post-colonial literature, dramatic works illuminating the traumatic experiences of Indigenous women have emerged as effective tools for detecting the oppressive legacies of colonization and for fostering dialogues that center on reconciliation, healing and empowerment. Unsettling themes of sexual exploitation,

systematic oppression and cultural erasure are frequently interwoven throughout the lives of characters in post-colonial plays reflecting the real-life experiences of Indigenous women across generations. Johnson (1989) and Davis (1986) *No Sugar* are exemplary plays rich with vivid depictions of Indigenous women's plight under the oppression of colonial domination and yet, remarkably, their unyielding resilience. In a world marred by imperial tyranny, their bodies and spirits become contested territories, spaces where the violence of the past is inscribed and from which the rebellious echoes of resistance arise.

6.1. Rape as a Method to Control the Indigenous Female Body

The intriguing metaphorical relationship that imperial discourse makes between women and land is examined in Gilbert and Tompkins's (1996) book *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, and Politics*. The authors detail how this association, whether intentional or not is often emphasized in post-colonial drama written by both male and female authors. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) illustrate that rape is a common theme in many plays especially in nations where the colonization of 'unoccupied territories' (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996) greatly affected the indigenous people's culture and livelihood. The violation of women in these plays' mirrors the colonizers' exploitation of the land, linking to broader themes of economic and political subjugation.

The two selected plays represent indigenous women harassed and raped or almost raped by white men. In Johnson's (1989) *Murras*, for instance, Jayda was chased by young white men who were trying to rape her. Jayda describes to her mother and grandmother what she faces by stating, "They caught up with us on their horses. I got a stone and hit one bloke in the eye. He got really mad and ripped my dress. He said he was going to Johnson (1989). Sexual violence is evident in this scene. Jayda is an indigenous teenager who is walking back to her house accompanied by her friend. The two teenagers are harassed by young white men in the street and escape after resisting the men. Ruby, Jayda's mother asserts the fact that even if the family tries to go to the police station, they will receive no justice and the police might even arrest the girls for resisting the white men and hitting one of them in the eye. In the family's discussion that follows, Ruby, Jayda's mother underscores the futility of seeking justice from the police. She is convinced that not only would their pleas fall on deaf ears but the girls might also face arrest for their act of self-defense against the white assailants.

In Davis's play *No Sugar*, there are horrifying accounts of white men abusing and raping indigenous women. In the play, Davis presents Mary Dargurru as an Aboriginal girl who is trained to work as a domestic servant and who is fearful of ending up tortured, raped and pregnant by white people. Millimurra meets Mary, a young Aboriginal woman from a different indigenous community who lives on the same settlement in Act Two. They fall in love, meet regularly and decide to leave Moore River Settlement and get married without the permission of Superintendent Neal. Mary fears Neal and being sent out into domestic service because of the high number of girls who are sexually assaulted and come back to the settlement pregnant. Mary in *No Sugar* expresses her concerns regarding working on white people's farms or houses to Joe:

MARY: No! [With shame] some of them *guddeeahs* [white people] are bad. My friend went last Christmas and then she came back *boodjarri* [pregnant]. She reckons the boss's sons used to belt her up and, you know, force her. Then they kicked her out. And when she had that baby, the trackers choked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation (Davis, 1986).

Mary tells Joe about her friend's horrific experience of being "belted," raped, falling pregnant, and having her baby killed by trackers. Mary is scared even more of being sent to work in the hospital. According to Mary, "when Mr. Neal sends a girl to work at the hospital, it usually means that he wants that girl for himself" (Davis, 1986). This focuses the spotlight on the crimes committed against the Aboriginal people and the half-castes. It provides testimony on one of the terrible episodes of Aboriginal history which is the abduction and killing of babies fathered by white settlers because of raping working Aboriginal women. It presents an indigenous side of history to be juxtaposed with the written history provided by the colonizing powers. This illustrates white disdain for Aboriginal

families and lives. Women should have the option to choose whether or not to keep their children, even if they were the result of sexual assault.

Mary and Joe find comfort in Northam, living there for a few months. However, their peace is shattered when Joe is arrested for escaping and sentenced to six months in jail. Mary, in turn, is forced to return to Moore River Settlement. The prospect of returning to the hospital terrifies her as fears of Neal's sexual predation and the potential confiscation of her child if her pregnancy is discovered loom large. This scenario illustrates the overarching theme of imperialism exerting dominance over the reproductive rights of Indigenous women (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996).

Neville as the Chief Protector had particular concerns regarding Aboriginal individuals of mixed descent during this time period especially those living in the Southwest. His opinions were laid bare to attendees from various regions during the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities held in Canberra from April 21st to 23rd, 1937. Neville's revelations revealed a malevolence that was common among white Australians illuminating their ill-treatment of the Aboriginal community. Neville expressed his colonial ideas in his speech by stating:

I know of 200 or 300 girls, however, in Western Australia who has gone into domestic service and the majority are doing very well. Our policy is to send them out into the white community and if a girl comes back pregnant, our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus, these children grow up as whites, knowing nothing about their own environment. At the expiration of the period of two years, the mother goes back into service, so it really does not matter if she has half a dozen children (1937, p. 12).

White people raped many Aboriginal girls while they were doing domestic duties. If an aboriginal young girl gets pregnant, she returns to a government settlement to give birth and the authorities take the child away. She will then be sent back into service.

According to Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) images of sexual violence in post-colonial theater suggest that women's bodies frequently function as "the spaces" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996) on and through which larger territorial or cultural battles are fought. Representations of fertility, pregnancy and motherhood often take on political inflections. Imperialism's will to power over its female subjects is extended to the control of aspects of reproduction (1996, p. 215). Neal, as an imperial agent wishes to have complete control over Mary's body as a subjected colonial female. Whipping of seven-month-pregnant Mary in Act four-scene after she ran away with Joe and refuses to go back to work at the hospital as Neal orders: "[NEAL grabs her. Billy holds her outstretched over a pile of flour bags. NEAL raises the cat-o'-nine-tails. Blackout. A scream]" (Davis, 1986).

6.2. Enforced Sterilization on Aboriginal Women's Body

The fertility of Indigenous women was viewed as a threat by colonizers leading to efforts to suppress it. Eva Johnson's play *Murras* highlights this issue in the Australian context shedding light on the deliberate sterilization of young Aboriginal girls. These girls were misled into taking medication thinking it was for their benefit but instead made them infertile. Jayda, Ruby's teenage daughter is a victim of this destructive practice in the play. She is unknowingly administered injections by sister, a local welfare organization worker during routine check-ups. Ruby, Jayda's mother is kept in the dark about these procedures. A revelation occurs years later when Jayda discovers the sterilizing purpose of the injections previously believed to be vaccines against diseases. This revelation is a disturbing acknowledgment of a systematic violation stripping Jayda of her potential motherhood and natural progression in life.

A few years later, at a routine check-up at a city doctor's office, Jayda discovers the truth about these injections which were marketed as vaccines "to stop diseases." It dawns on her that she has become sterile.

Jayda: It was a routine check-up. The doctor called me in one day. He had some special papers there; he said they were from the government and he said that I was part of a program or something a long time ago. It had to do with those injections that sister used to give me and Jessie.

Ruby: Injections? You didn't tell me about any injections.

Jayda: Mom said it was alright. I thought you knew; she said, she explained it to you. She told me, it was to stop diseases.

Ruby: She lied. Injections to stop disease, injections to stop babies. They lied to us. Who do they think they are? Boss over you, boss over me, your mother?

Jayda: Mum, this was an experiment. We can't do anything about it now (Johnson, 1989).

One could argue that this harsh action interferes with the Aboriginal woman's life. It is an act of oppression and subordination to deny a young girl the chance to grow up and participate in the normal course of a women's life.

Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) have commented on similar incidents stating that the political implications of fertility, pregnancy and motherhood are not surprising. Imperialism often sought control over its subjects, extending to aspects of reproduction (p. 214). In *Murras*, the Aboriginal woman's body is depicted as a battleground of imperial conquest permanently scarred by administrative systems, including seemingly benevolent ones like the church and hospital. Ruby tells her daughter, "You were only fourteen years old, you are still my baby. What kind of law did they get? They mess around with our women's business; they bring death to our land and shame to our children (Johnson, 1989).

This interference in the lives and bodies of Aboriginal women symbolizes a violation of their culture by imperial forces, an act that has crippling effects on entire communities for generations. The enforced sterility imposed on Jayda is a symbol for the burden the colonial government's extermination efforts have caused on Aboriginal culture. Ruby's heartbreaking words in the final scene underline the devastating impact: "She bleeds from her womb the seeds of death. She carries the scars from the *wudjella's* [white fellow's] medicine" (Johnson, 1989). Enforced sterilization in the name of medical management of pregnancy and childbirth is a method of bringing the bodies of indigenous women under control by the colonizer (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Such interventions particularly in the sensitive realms of pregnancy and childbirth are mechanisms of dominance and subjugation that perpetuate the colonizers' control.

6.3. *The Phenomenon of the Stolen Generation which Caused the Stolen Motherhood*

The imperial practice of removing mixed-race children from their Aboriginal families is vividly illustrated in Johnson's (1989) *No Sugar*. The term Stolen Generation encapsulates the heartbreaking experience of Aboriginal individuals who were forcibly taken from their families and communities due to the assimilationist or protectionist policies enforced by the Australian governments during the mid-20th century. Predominantly, these were children of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent who were systematically classified by the percentage of their Aboriginal ancestry. The generational identity crisis that resulted from the loss of language, culture and ties to one's homeland began when these children were institutionalized, fostered or adopted by white families. The rationale behind this forcible removal stemmed from the imperial authorities' presumption that mixed-race individuals were inherently more amenable to education and assimilation into the workforce.

In Johnson's (1989) *Murras*, the character Russell Mitchell, an Aboriginal liaison officer and a product of this policy, epitomizes the plight of the Stolen Generation. As a child, he was separated from his Aboriginal mother and has scant memories of his early years or origins, indicative of the pervasive identity dislocation experienced by many like him. The sentiment expressed by Ruby underscores the profound impact of such dislocation: an individual's identity is intrinsically tied to their roots and forced separation equates to a profound loss of self. This policy, masquerading as "child welfare" unequivocally stands as an oppressive act. These removals were directed by government agents, including missionaries. The Aborigines Protection Board had the power to take away

Indigenous children without the consent of their parents or even a court order. Granny is aware of this policy and therefore hid her son in the sugar bag which can be considered an act of resistance against imperial injustices.

In *No Sugar*, real historical figures like A.O. Neville are portrayed as dramatic characters representing the oppressive era when separating Indigenous children from their mothers was considered a benevolent act. Neville's legacy is tainted with controversial programs, one of which involved moving Aboriginal children to camps like Moore River. Here, the intention was to erase their Indigenous heritage and instill European culture and values. The colonial government was on a mission to integrate Aboriginal children into Anglo-Australian society. This mission involved either fostering these children or moving them to Christian missions to be groomed in the European way of life. This control and dominance over Indigenous women and their families were enacted under the guise of assimilation policies.

Johnson's (1989) personifies the experiences of the people impacted by the Stolen Generations through the use of characters such as Russell Mitchell and Granny. Granny recounts ongoing practices of snatching Indigenous children away leading mothers to hide and protect their offspring. Granny narrates a haunting personal experience to protect her son Charlie from being taken and herself from assault, she had to resort to deception and concealment. Granny declares, "They're still doing' that now [removing half-caste offspring from their families], mothers hiding' their babies. Covering them up with ash to make them look full-blooded" (Johnson, 1989) A few scenes later, the audience learns of Granny's personal experience with the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their mothers. Granny in *Murras is* telling her grand-daughter Jayda how a white man wanted to rape her and to get rid of her son Charlie, Jayda's father:

Granny: Shhh! Soon my time is coming; there is no more for me to do. I've seen a lot of things happening, some good but mostly bad. You know they try to take Charlie away from me. One *wudjella* [white fellow] man wanted me for himself. I told him, I gave him away to 'mother woman. But I hid him in my sugar bag. I was nearly sitting' on top of him while I was lying' to that *wudjella*. He was a good boy and kept really quiet. I kept hiding' until he met your mother (Johnson, 1989).

Government officials and organizations like the Aborigines Protection Board had unrestricted power; they could take Indigenous children without the consent of their parents or legal supervision. Granny's act of hiding her son is a poignant depiction of silent but stern resistance against these colonial atrocities.

Between 1915 and 1920, Neville prioritized establishing government-controlled Aboriginal settlements like Carrolup and Moore River. The objective was dual: to alienate Indigenous children from their roots and culture and to appease white communities uncomfortable with the presence of Indigenous populations nearby. These children were stripped of their identities and groomed for menial tasks, a testament to the era's cultural and societal exclusion tactics established with minimal governmental spending. These settlements became characterized by deplorable living conditions, strict regulations and severe punishments. Davis's (1986) play *No Sugar* illustrates the inhumane conditions endured by the Aboriginal characters at Moore River Settlement. The title of the play hints at the scarcity of essential supplies exemplified by the Aboriginal characters singing a parody of "There is a Happy Land" towards the play's conclusion highlighting their deprivation of necessities like sugar, bread and butter (Davis, 1986). Neville staunchly enforced imperial policies against Aboriginal women fully aware of their deep affection for their children. He advocated for the removal of children from their mothers to place them in institutions, a practice he deemed preferable to allowing the children to grow up in squalid camp conditions. Mothers were permitted to visit their children in these institutions but they were housed separately.

A dramatic scene unfolds with Mary, an Aboriginal woman in labor. She is terrified that the government will take her newborn baby, a fear rooted in the lived experiences of Indigenous women. The government's power to disrupt their lives and take their children is a constant haunting presence. Mary is in labor, begging Gran, "Don't let them take the baby" (102). When Matron Neal, a white woman who runs the hospital and is married to Mr. Neal, arrives, Mary cries of horror: "No! Don't let Matron see Baby. Granny go and hide him. Please don't let

Matron take him away" (103). Mary is afraid that the government will take away her newborn baby and has become hysterical.

Mary: No, don't touch him! You're not having my baby, leave him alone!

Matron: But Mary, it's for your own good and the babies and I only want to help.

Mary: No, don't take him to the hospital. The trackers will get him and kill him.

Matron: What on earth is she talking about?

Mary: [interrupting] and bury him in the pine plantation.

Matron: I think she's delirious.

Mary: Like Lillian's baby. Mr. Neal told them to do it, to kill the baby.

Matron: She's delirious.

Sam: No, she isn't. (103).

This scene illustrates the terror that Aboriginal mothers experience as part of their existence as colonized women. Indigenous women live life under a vague but real sense of threat that their children will be taken from them. Mary knows that the imperial agents like the character of Mr. Neal and the black trackers have the power to take her baby boy and do what they did to her friend's baby which they killed and buried in the plantation. Sam assures her sanity to Matron because he knows what she is talking about and is aware of the killing of babies and the removal of aboriginal children from their mothers. Indigenous women's experiences told them that their lives can be disrupted at any time by government officials. Mary's terror and hysteria during childbirth stem from the ominous reality that her child could be forcibly taken from her echoing the pain and horror experienced by many Indigenous women under colonial rule (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, 1997).

6.4. The Significance of Women's Stories and Traditional Practices in Resisting the Complete Loss of Aboriginal Identity

Indigenous Australian writers often focus on highlighting White Australia's oppressive past while giving a voice to Indigenous communities and celebrating the endurance, pride and heritage of the Aboriginal people. A crucial element of Indigenous Australian drama lies in exploring both individual and shared Aboriginal identity. Writers like Johnson (1989) have significantly increased awareness of Aboriginal issues globally integrating stories, songs and dances into their works to convey rich cultural narratives and experiences.

In Johnson's (1989) *Murras*, Granny emphasizes the value of stories, imparting this wisdom to her daughter and granddaughter. For Aboriginals, understanding their roots, dreams and traditions is fundamental to their identity. According to Granny, Aboriginals are nothing if they do not know where they come from or their stories related to their dreams and traditions (Johnson, 1989). Granny teaches Jayda "women's business" (102) including dances, songs and stories meant to be passed down through generations. Ruby echoes the importance of these stories highlighting the mother's pivotal role in transferring these cultural gems to their daughters. Despite Jayda's inability to bear children as a consequence of a government experiment to control the Aboriginal population the significance of her grandmother's teachings remains engraved in her memory. She recalls Granny's words about the distinct cultural richness of Aboriginal women compared to their white counterparts underscoring a preservation of identity and spirit that the latter seemingly lack.

In Johnson's *Murras*, the practice extends beyond storytelling. Jayda performs a traditional female dance part of the "Inma" ceremony under the guidance of her mother and grandmother.

Jayda: Mom, come here. Remember when Granny said that *wudjella* [white] women had different ways than *gadjeri* [Aborigine] women? They don't have women's dreaming or special dance, *Inma*. Then she said, 'Jayda, you not forget your stories now; you keep them sacred for your children not *wudjella*!' Granny calls them nothing people; she has no spirit (Johnson, 1989).

This cultural transmission acts as a form of resistance and empowerment equipping new generations of Indigenous women with the tools to confront the oppressive forces of colonial culture. Childbirth and childcare are

also prominent themes in the selected plays showcasing the specific nuances of female Indigenous practices. In Davis's *No Sugar*, Gran and Milly aid Mary during childbirth in the camp an event marked by the exchange of traditional practices and stories. Gran explains what she is doing to the newborn baby: "Now, I cut your cord and tie it to make a real pretty belly button for you, just like your daddy's [Joe, her grandson]. Now cover you in ashes. More better than Johnson's baby powder, eh?" (Davis, 1986).

The act of covering a newborn in ashes, a cultural practice among Indigenous Australians is typically performed by an experienced elder woman underscoring the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Songs, another significant traditional practice are a common thread in both Johnson's (1989) and Davis's (1986) *No Sugar*. They serve as cultural markers of Indigenous identity. In *No Sugar*, Gran's song performed in the Nyoongah language expresses grief over the forced departure of her grandson and his family due to colonial oppression (Davis, 1986).

Similarly, in *Murras*, Granny shares a traditional song with her family imparting wisdom and cultural identity through her words (Johnson, 1989). The song ties family members to specific elements and creatures emphasizing the interconnectedness of their spirits and the imperative to remain united. Granny's song reveals a conventional yarn or story conveyed through music. It highlights not just the special bond Indigenous communities maintain with the environment and terrain but also the heritage that elderly generations like granny impart to younger ones to uphold their unique culture. In the song, the moon symbolizes the deceased father who continues to nurture his family from afar. Ruby recognizes this as a monument to unwavering family love and support after hearing Granny's song. Interdependence is a major topic; family members rely on one another for strength and sustenance, similar to parrotfish and dugongs, which live on seagrass. This story underscores the intricate culture of Indigenous people illustrating how it is sustained and conveyed through generations. Upholding familial bonds is pivotal to nourishing and propagating the Indigenous spirit (Whisperinggums, 2020).

7. RESULTS

This comprehensive examination of the works aims to identify the violations endured by indigenous women in post-colonial drama. We navigate the disturbing realities of rape forced sterilization and stolen generations all tools of subjugation and imperial control by taking on the profound insights of Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* and the moving portrayals in Johnson's (1989) and Davis's (1986) *No Sugar*. We will discuss the results as follows:

7.1. Analyzing Rape as a Means of Indigenous Female Body Control

The narratives presented in Johnson's (1989) and Davis's (1986) *No Sugar* depict a brutal portrayal of colonial oppression where Indigenous women's bodies are battlegrounds. They're manipulated and violated mirroring the exploitation of their land and culture. The use of rape and sexual assault as literary devices is not merely a portrayal of physical abuse but is symbolic of economic and political subjugation. Indigenous women's oppression becomes the embodiment of imperial power a metaphor for colonial exploitation.

7.2. Unraveling the Depths of Enforced Sterilization

The violation extends beyond sexual assault to enforced sterilization as depicted forcefully in Johnson (1989). The systematic sterilization of Indigenous women under the guise of health and wellness is a stark portrayal of biopower. Here, the colonizers' authority is not just asserted through land possession but penetrates the very biology of the Indigenous population. This act of enforced sterilization symbolizes a profound loss not just for the individual women but for the entire Indigenous community.

7.3. *The Stolen Generation and the Stolen Motherhood*

Another aspect of colonial oppression is demonstrated by the practice of removing Indigenous children by force those with mixed ancestry. This act is a dual tragedy. The mothers are robbed of their children and therefore motherhood and the children are stripped of their cultural identity. These acts are not random or isolated. They are systematic and deliberate aimed at erasing Indigenous cultures and identities. These acts can be viewed as methods of genocide. The portrayal of these historical methods of genocide in plays like *Murras* and *No Sugar* serves as a stark reminder of the universal impact of colonial policies.

7.4. *Women's Stories and Traditional Practices: A Beacon of Resistance*

Indigenous women's stories and traditional practices stand as resilient testaments to the endurance of Indigenous cultures despite these profound violations. The plays highlight the pivotal role Indigenous women play in sustaining and propagating their cultural heritage. Stories, songs and dances are not merely artistic expressions but are vessels carrying the collective memory and identity of Indigenous people. They serve as forms of resistance, offering Indigenous women tools to confront and challenge the oppressive forces of colonial culture.

The evocative stories in *Murras* and *No Sugar* unveil the multi-layered oppression that Indigenous women endured, yet they equally underscore the determined spirit that defines Indigenous cultures. Each tale of violation is met with narratives of resistance where the silent voices of Indigenous women ascend into influential symbols of defiance. The plays' echoes of historical events such as forced sterilization, rape and the stolen generation serve as constant cautions about the long-lasting impacts of colonial injustices. However, the stories, songs and dances of Indigenous women emerge as profound acts of reclamation of identity, dignity and cultural heritage.

Orality such as songs, stories and dances are dynamic testaments to an ongoing journey of healing and reclamation. Indigenous women become courageous storytellers of their own histories by sharing the truth about their experiences which changes them from silent victims. These stories echo the historical traumas of colonization infused with an essential power they are assertions of an identity that though assaulted remains unbroken. Every story of violation is counteracted by the resilient echoes of cultural preservation and identity affirmation, painting a landscape where the scars of the past coexist with the hopeful murmurs of reclamation and renewal. In this dynamic interplay between historical oppression and contemporary resistance, the enduring spirit of Indigenous women shines as a beacon of resilience and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

8. CONCLUSION

Analyzing post-colonial plays such as Johnson (1989) and Davis (1986) *No Sugar* reveals the painful history of colonial oppression that is profoundly ingrained in Indigenous peoples' daily lives. The explicit descriptions of sexual abuse, forced sterilization and the taking of Indigenous children away from their mothers tell a story of systematic dehumanization and destruction of Indigenous identities with a focus on Indigenous women. Sexual violence is not just an act of physical brutality but is representative of the imperialistic conquest of Indigenous lands. The violation of Indigenous women is strategically parallel to the exploitation of their territories serving as a dual process of asserting dominance. The selected works of Johnson (1989) and Davis (1986) reveal this intentional exploitation making it evident that the bodies and lands of Indigenous women were intertwined spaces of conquest. Enforced sterilization emerges as a disturbing manifestation of biopower where the colonial regime sought not only to control the bodies but also the reproductive futures of Indigenous women. This biological manipulation is symbolic of territorial dispossession as every act of sterilization resonates with the echoes of cultural and territorial robbery. The experience of the stolen generations adds another layer of oppression. Indigenous children were forcefully taken from their families, a strategic move masked in the misleading garb of welfare and assimilation policies. Every child's removal symbolizes a snapped thread of cultural continuity resulting in lost languages, forgotten traditions and dislocated identities. However, the selected two plays illustrate a tale of

remarkable resilience. Indigenous women emerge as the custodians of their cultural identity. Their songs, dances and traditional practices have defied the oppressive silence of colonialism. They resonate as powerful testimonies of endurance, each note, step and word echoing the undefeated spirit of Indigenous peoples. Hence, the oppression depicted in Johnson's (1989) and Davis's (1986) *No Sugar* is juxtaposed with a story of remarkable resilience. Indigenous women subjected to unspeakable violations are not merely victims but difficult preservers of their rich cultural tapestry. Furthermore, the analysis sheds light on the dual narrative of oppression and resilience embedded in the representation of Indigenous women in these important works. Davis's (1986) *No Sugar* and Johnson's (1989) *Murras* not only reveal the harsh realities of imperial subjugation but also spotlight the relentless spirit of Indigenous women. Their stories are not just testimonies of oppression but vibrant narratives of resistance illuminating the pathways of survival carved among systemic subjugation. Thus, the engrossing stories of Indigenous women, their customs and their cultural heritage remain powerful symbols of survival, resistance and optimism even as the horrors of sexual assault, forced sterilization and kidnapped generations continue to reverberate as reminders of the harsh legacy of colonialism.

9. STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is dedicated to examining literary texts, intentionally steering clear of analyses centered on social or political reforms. We outline below the targeted areas for ongoing research within the literary domain:

- 1) Expand the investigation into the portrayal of women's oppression under imperialism within dramas. This expansion should include works by additional Indigenous authors not just within Australia but also in regions like the Caribbean Islands, New Zealand and Canada.
- 2) Explore the literary representations of the impacts of imperialism on Indigenous communities focusing on the mistreatment and displacement of Aboriginal women. Consider the transformation of Aboriginal people, referenced as "fringe dwellers" by Johnson (1989) into city dwellers by imperial forces and the resulting effects on women's lives.
- 3) Analyze literary works by mixed-race authors like Davis (1986) and understand the influence of their Indigenous heritage and Western education on their writing.
- 4) Study the depiction of Indigenous marginalization with a specific focus on Aboriginal women within Aboriginal literature. Areas of interest could include the representation of the mistreatment of Aboriginal people in educational and professional environments.
- 5) Explore contemporary urban challenges confronting Indigenous women in Australia within literary texts. Topics could encompass issues like alcoholism and restricted employment opportunities.

10. STUDY LIMITATIONS

- 1) The current research exclusively analyzes how imperialism subjugates women using two specific plays as primary resources: *No Sugar* by Davis (1986) and Johnson (1989). Any additional works by these playwrights are excluded from this analysis.
- 2) The scope of the research is confined to Aboriginal dramas authored by Indigenous Australian playwrights, deliberately omitting any dramas of European origin within the Australian context.
- 3) The study focuses on the cultures, languages and plays of the Nyoongah and Malak Malak peoples, the Indigenous inhabitants of Western Australia and the Northern Territories, respectively.

11. STUDY IMPLICATIONS

Examining the impacts of colonization's historical and cultural facets on Indigenous communities particularly women and children is pivotal in analyzing Indigenous playwrights' dramatic compositions. Women from Indigenous backgrounds in various nations have experienced the severe repercussions of colonization and racial discrimination. In

Australia, Indigenous females have faced colonization, racial prejudice, inferiority and societal injustices. Further studies should extend to exploring Indigenous women's oppression in other post-colonial regions, including Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the Caribbean Islands. This research underscores the necessity of additional investigations into the subjugation of Indigenous women in contemporary urban settings emphasizing the influence of colonization and historical events on their present-day existence and literary works.

The in-depth examination of Indigenous women's oppression in *No Sugar* by Davis (1986) and Johnson (1989) provides insights into Indigenous Australian playwrights' reflections on colonization's historical context. These plays delve into themes related to gender, power structures, colonization and past injustices. Such insights are instrumental in advancing the exploration of literature's intersectionality involving gender, colonization and historical contexts.

Funding: This research is supported by Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (Grant number: PSAU/2024/R/1445).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Transparency: The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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