International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Educational Research (IJMCER)
ISSN: 2581-7027 ||Volume|| 6 ||Issue|| 5 ||Pages 64-72 ||2024||

(Un) settling Australia: The Sacred Land's Haven in Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea*

Marta Villalba– Lázaro
[1,]*University of the Balearic Islands Department: English Philology*
Address: Ed. Beatriu de Pinos, office 36
Carr. De Valldemossa, km 7,5 07122 Palma (Balearic Islands), Spain

ABSTRACT: This paper delves into the intricate dynamics of contemporary Aboriginal Theatre, focusing on the play Black Medea by First Nations Wesley Enoch. Through an analysis of the play, the paper elucidates the complex interplay between Aboriginal cultural heritage and postcolonial narrative, addressing its significance within the broader context of cross-cultural theatrical practices. Black Medea offers profound insights into precolonial and contemporary Australia, drawing on the mythological account of Euripides' classical story of Medea. This article highlights the play's specific Aboriginal content employed by the playwright to unsettle the audience through poetic invocation of the sacred Land's protection and ruthless exposure of the appalling consequences of the country's colonization. Additionally, the paper investigates the parallels between Aboriginal theatre and classical Greek drama, shedding light on the potential sociopolitical implications of theatrical performance as a medium of cultural resistance and transformation.

KEY WORDS: Black Medea; Wesley Enoch; Aboriginal Theatre, Postcolonialism; Greek Drama; Euripides

I. INTRODUCTION

In the late twentieth century, early postcolonial playwrights and critics focused extensively on a wide range of classical myths to reposition politics and practice within different historical and political contexts. The ground-breaking play *Una Tempête* (1969) by Aimé Césaire paved the way for extensive critical work on Shakespeare and postcolonialism, while socio-political reinterpretations of the Bible and Greek and Roman myths led to a significant body of postcolonial scholarship. For instance, Wole Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* (1973) stands as a remarkable example of "a deliberate exploration of the complex relationship between African ancestral traditions and an imperial culture, which continues to pose numerous challenges to these traditions" (Okpewho1999, 33).

In recent decades, the intersection of myth criticism and postcolonialism has consolidated its position in literary and academic studies. Ancient theatre, in general, and Greek tragedy, in particular, have become increasingly relevant in numerous postcolonial debates and play a central role in contemporary cultural politics (Hardwick 2007, 3). Postcolonial scholars are increasingly identifying postcolonial concerns in the reception of the classics, looking back to both classical mythology and their own precolonial myths to gain a better understanding of their identity and their present. For example, drawing on W.B. Yeats' statement that "the theatre began in ritual and cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty," Ioana Mohor-Ivan studies how the Celtic myth enabled Yeats to forge a new [national] emblem for the nation in the figure of Cuchulain" (2916, 104). As Lorna Hardwick metaphorically argues the classics have undergone a "process of decolonization and subsequent diaspora," shifting from being "establishment icons" to becoming symbols of challenge and intervention in cultural and political processes, eventually transforming into diaspora texts with new directions and identities (2005, 115). Among other well-known classical dramas, such as *The Bacchae*, *Antigone*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *Medea* stands out as a fascinating example of a classical text that has been adapted in various ways to address both gender and postcolonial concerns. Euripides' ground-breaking and progressive drama not only tackled gender issues but also explored ethnic dilemmas, portraying Medea as a character outside her natural environment and doubly oppressed due to her female condition and ethnicity. In the original classical story from 431 BC, Medea, betraying her own family, flees from her homeland of Colchis in pursuit of Jason's true love. Upon arriving in Greece, she faces rejection as a barbarian and is abandoned and exiled not only by Jason but also by the xenophobic and patriarchal society of ancient Greece. After killing her rival Creusa and her own children, Medea manages to escape unpunished with the assistance of the mythological gods. Despite the abhorrent nature of her crimes, the mythical figure of Medea has garnered sympathy from audiences since the nineteenth century. Perhaps the changing times and the emergence of modern society made people more receptive to the revenge of a betrayed mother who is abandoned, shunned, and left alone to survive.

In the ever-expanding realm of postcolonial literary studies, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the intricate domain of precolonial theatre within the broader context of international theatre. Yet, as Liza-Mare Siron contends, we need more research and discussion on how Australian indigenous theatre operates today within cross-cultural theatrical contexts and, thus, how indigenous perspectives can be recognized today as a legitimate domain of knowledge (2008, 81). Building on this call for deeper exploration, this work elaborates on the scholarly examination of Australian contemporary Indigenous theatre, focusing on the contemporary play *Black Medea* (2000) by First Nations dramatist Wesley Enoch. *Black Medea* is part of a contemporary global theatrical practice that involves adapting classical stories and myths through the lens of cultural diversity, myth criticism and postcolonial perspectives, all with the aim of vindicating precolonial culture and advocating for social reform. Furthermore, it is part of the broader tradition of rewriting Euripides' *Medea*. From a diachronic view, Euripides is the only known ancient dramatist to portray Medea sympathetically. Following him, the classical, medieval, and early-modern depictions of Medea traditionally painted her as a vengeful and evil character. Tracing the history of how Euripides's Medea has been represented throughout the centuries provides a wide perspective on a long tradition, pointing out the distinctive intellectual and moral features of each historical period, proving the long-lasting fascination with Medea and its versatility to address the specific social preoccupations. From the nineteenth century onwards, the character started to be portrayed more complex and sympathetically by increasingly diverse writers (see e.g. the pioneering works of Franz Grillparzer's *Medea* (1821)– and Ernest Legouvé's *Medea* (1855)) who reflect ongoing social change. In contemporary times, numerous postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial reinterpretations of the myth depict Medea as a symbol of female agency fighting against hegemonic powers (see my work "After Euripides").

Enoch rewrites the classical Greek drama of Euripides from a cross-cultural postcolonial standpoint. This approach aligns with the work of other postcolonial writers, such as the South African Guy Butler's *Demea* (1990) and Cherríe Moraga's Mexican Medea *The Hungry Woman* (2001). These adaptations challenge conventional narratives and empower indigenous women. By recapturing the resolute and idealistic character of Medea in their respective colonized territories, these postcolonial reimaginings provide an alternative lens through which to review gender dynamics and power relationships in their regions. I will provide a summary of my close reading of the play –as I did not explore the actual performance– , highlighting its unique Aboriginal content. Indeed, *Black Medea* is a highly symbolic postcolonial and postmodernist play that delves deeply into Aboriginal cosmology and their culture of spirits and dreams, intertwining precolonial and contemporary Australia to give voice to the silenced history of First Nations peoples. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is undertaken from my perspective as a European reader—that is, an outsider who certainly lacks the necessary knowledge to fully comprehend the play's distinctive Aboriginal content. My intention is to demonstrate how this play not only connects with outsiders but also how it may resonate internationally as a work by and about Indigenous experiences, specifically tailored for a primarily non-Indigenous audience. To analyse *Black Medea* through the lenses of myth criticism and postcolonialism, before delving into the play itself, I will first explore the potential connection between First Nations theatre and classical Greek drama. Additionally, throughout the document, I will discuss the role of postcolonial Aboriginal theatre in cultural politics and its capacity to challenge and reshape dominant discourses. For the sake of simplicity, the adjectives Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Nations, all of which include Torres Strait's culture, will be used interchangeably.

II. CROSS-CULTURAL POSTCOLONIAL ABORIGINAL THEATRE

Compared to other genres, postcolonial theatre can present a more effective opposition to colonial discourse. This is not only because drama, unlike poetry or fiction, has precolonial roots and can more easily connect with ancient performances. More significantly, the power of theatre to challenge ideas and advocate for social reform lies not just in its ritualistic origins but in its uniquely live dynamic. Theatre is powerful because it is the only art form that must be spoken aloud and performed in front of an audience, and thus "can be more extensive than the relatively isolated circumstances of written narrative and poetry." (Gilbert and Tompkins,1996, 3). More notably, this artistic fictional space can (re)create imaginary cross-cultural places on stage and for an attentive audience, where flowing and new identities and hierarchies can emerge — a Foucauldian approach to theatre as a heterotopic place that allows opportunities for forging new identities and overcoming preconstructions of social order (Hetherington, viii; likewise Tompkins, 139). With these concepts in mind, it becomes evident that there are compelling parallels between ancient Greek theatre and Aboriginal theatre: both ancient performances are rooted in oral storytelling, serving as a means to collectively share and convey cultural knowledge. An outstanding difference between them, however, is that Aboriginal theatre boasts a history that predates ancient Greece. This is further reinforced because ancient Australia is arguably the oldest enduring culture in the world today. Within Aboriginal theatrical traditions,

There are ancestral performances and rituals like the corroboree along with Dreaming storytelling, where initiated males come together to share their stories through music and dance, conveying their spiritual dimension. On the other hand, ancient Greek theatre was originally written and performed to encourage social debate. As a result, its format and purpose contribute to its growing relevance in postcolonial discussions. As discussed, an exemplary case is Euripides' *Medea*, a classical drama that addresses gender and postcolonial concerns, fostering social debate. To my knowledge, Medea stands as one of the rare instances in classical Greek mythology where a woman triumphs over prevailing power structures. Some postcolonial critics also argue that postcolonial Indigenous theatre can provide a more effective opposition to colonial discourse because it can be performed outdoors, making it accessible to a broader audience and facilitating inclusivity and the dissemination of cultural expression (Kizza, 2001, 95). Yet, the more inclusive outdoor theatre contrasts with indoor theatre, which mainly serves to a privileged segment of Australian society. This is evidenced, for example, in the latest National Arts Participation Survey in 2019 by the Australia Council for the Arts, revealing that diverse artists were far more represented than diverse audiences. Furthermore, the production history of Black Medea as a contemporary adaptation suggests its intention to primarily engage with a mainstream white audience.

This poses a clear paradox: why promote Aboriginal theatre when the actual victims of colonization cannot fully participate in the revival of their roots? My core argument claims that the revival of long-forgotten precolonial mythical narratives through cross-cultural Aboriginal theatre seek to demonstrate that Indigenous culture can and should hold a significant place in today's world. Simultaneously, they aim to unsettle the audience with the intent of inspiring societal and political transformation. This becomes particularly significant when an Aboriginal play, such as *Black Medea*, not only reaffirms Aboriginal identity but also raises profound questions about the consequences of colonization. Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie, in their chronological study of First Nations theatre, highlight the substantial contributions of Wesley Enoch to contemporary Indigenous theatre. According to their observations, Enoch, along with David Milroy and other leading practitioners, has played a crucial role in ensuring that Aboriginal drama not only preserves its rich traditions but also shares an alternative narrative with Australians. Their dedication has been instrumental in establishing Indigenous works in mainstream Australian theatre, reshaping how people perceive First Nations Australians and their cultures. The diverse voices in Indigenous Australian playwriting, representing various regions, ethnic groups (Koori, Murri, Nunga, and Noongar), genders, and backgrounds—both urban and rural—highlight the nuanced and multifaceted aspects of contemporary Indigenous Australian cultures. Enoch and Milroy, in particular, have actively contributed to this diverse and impactful storytelling in the landscape of contemporary Indigenous Australian theatre (2011, 6).

Wesley Enoch, a Noonuccal Nuugi member and a blend of Scottish, Spanish, and Danish heritage, emphasizes his diverse histories, stating, "I am the sum of all my histories. I stand here because of them" (Enoch "Philip Larsons"). An advocate for independent theatre, he directed the World Premiere of *I Am Eora* in 2012, showcasing Aboriginal Sydney with over fifty Indigenous cast and crew members. In 2018, he assumed the role of Director for the Sydney Festival, following previous Artistic Director positions, including at Queensland Theatre Company (2010-15). Despite directing acclaimed plays for major companies, some critics argue that Enoch's use of classical Greek drama is overreaching, suggesting Aboriginal theatre should be preserved as an anthropological artifact (Croggon 59). Others praise his experimentation with Western canon traditions, challenging stereotypes tied to Indigenous practitioners (Ewans and Johnson 73). In spite of his unwavering support for First Nations theatre, as amply shown in his theatrical trajectory, Enoch admits his desire to explore different forms of theatre and move away from traditional storytelling and charm. He believes that the concept of Aboriginality is shifting, with Indigenous communities increasingly embracing a black middle-class identity (Blake).

Nevertheless, his *Black Medea* meticulously preserves its Aboriginal essence, plunging deeply into the intricate fabric of Aboriginal cosmology and the rich tapestry of their spiritual culture—an indispensable comprehension for effectively engaging with the nuanced messages and themes interwoven into the performance. The play adeptly captures the essence of Aboriginal heritage through cryptic tropes and cultural codes, which pose challenges for an outsider to fully apprehend. Indeed, the profound layers embedded in the recurring imagery of dreams, poetic blackouts, wind voices, and symbols might be fully grasped only by First Nations community. As noted, this unique perspective is imperative for fully comprehending and appreciating a play that systematically explores profound beliefs such as the dreamtime, the art of storytelling, the sacred nature of the Land, the significance of ancestral links, and the presence of spirits—beliefs intricately interwoven with the cosmogonies exclusively shared by First Nations people. The Land, a focal point of identity, brims with spiritual

significance, serving as a sanctuary where spirits find repose after death. This sacred realm establishes a robust connection with mythological narratives, encompassing the Euripidean tale of Medea, where the sacred realm finds expression through extensive godly imagery.

III. BLACK MEDEA: AN ABORIGINAL EURIPIDEAN MEDEA

The spiritual dimension of Black Medea is evident from the play's outset as it opens with Medea quarrelling with an invisible voice, presumed to be a spirit. She fearlessly challenges it, asserting, "I have not sacrificed everything to fail now. I have dreams, I am Medea!" (Enoch, *Black Medea* 61)[1]. This opening can be drawn from the soliloquy of Euripides' *Medea* as reported by the nurse, and it also echoes Seneca's Medea's famous cry, "Fiam" ("I shall be") Medea", which carries the ongoing transformation of the character implying the threat that those who have betrayed her will not escape punishment (Boedecker, 1997, 127).In Enoch's reimagining of the myth, Medea departs from the desert and follows Jason, a black miner from the city, in pursuit of the wealth and dreams associated with white circles. Medea struggles to survive in an unfamiliar, white-dominated environment, while her spirits continually beckon her to return to the desert, her true home. The protagonist embodies the psychological uneasiness, confusion, and dissatisfaction that can arise from the process of hybridization. The drama showcases Medea as a character torn between her Aboriginal identity and the allure of white society. Simultaneously, Jason confronts the complexities of assimilating into the urban lifestyle of the whites while contending with his personal demons, ensnared in a familial cycle of alcoholism and gender violence.

The play raises serious contemporary issues, such as gender violence and alcoholism, which have a profound impact on First Nations community, particularly the dire circumstances faced by women. Even today, a minority of First Nations people live in remote natural areas, disconnected from white urban environments, wandering across the northern and central parts of Australia. However, other First Nations people have had to adapt to city life and may face negative stereotypes among white population, including issues of alcoholism and sexual violence. The subject of Aboriginal gender violence has been taboo for various reasons. Aboriginal women themselves may fear that speaking out about their experiences will further stigmatise them within their own communities, and white feminists may have been hesitant to address the issue due to concerns of prioritizing sexism over racism or perpetuating stereotypes about violent Aboriginal men (Andrews 1997, 918). However, the crucial distinction may lie in the lack of sufficient government or institutional protection for Aboriginal women, setting them apart from women in other communities where the combination of alcohol and patriarchy can also lead to gender violence (941). As it happens with the sorority displayed by the Euripides' Medea Greek chorus, the modern chorus in Enoch's play strongly advocates for reform and addressing this situation.

Black Medea deviates from the conventions of Greek dramas and unfolds through a fragmented storyline, incorporating continuous flashbacks and prolepses, employing different registers and literary styles. It even pushes the boundaries of drama with numerous poetry recitals. However, in keeping with the tradition of ancient Greek dramas, Enoch's play retains the chorus. In fact, the play is framed by a chorus played by one actor with distinct voices, a device that resonates with the Aboriginal storytelling tradition. One voice represents contemporary Australia, providing contextualization of the events in the present and offering advice or admonishments to the characters and audience. The other voice takes the form of spiritual winds from the sacred Lands, embodying Medea's spiritual dimension and the ancient precolonial Australia. The modern voice of the chorus opens Section two in a surprisingly striking manner. It adopts a youthful and cool tone, urging the audience to employ their imagination and suspend their disbelief, invoking "the spirits of this Land" to halt the violence and alcohol consumption. This chorus warmly welcomes the audience:

"G'day, you fellas. Tonight we got to sing up this story for youse and we call upon the spirits of this Land and the people who have gone before us. We got to make it real but it doesn't mean it is real, we just got to think it is. You got to use your imagination now, bugger this TV shit." (65) Throughout the play, Australian modern-day slang is employed. Despite its informal nature, this chorus delivers a profound message to the audience: the story revolves around evil and the need for change in the country. It emphasizes that alcohol consumption must cease, as well as the violence that plagues society. This chorus advocates for social transformation, particularly for those Australian citizens whose lives are ravaged by alcoholism and the frustrations stemming from a way of life that is completely detached from their traditions. Their alternative is to return to the harsh and challenging desert environment, despite the complexities of cultural hybridization and the virtual eradication of their ancient rites and traditional means of survival by the colonizers.

[1] Further references to *Black Medea* include page numbers only.

The Aboriginal belief in dreams and spirits attached to their ancestral Land, and sacred places, is fundamental to understanding their culture. The Land is an issue of identity, full of spiritual meaning, a haven where the spirits return after death. Despite the great variety of tribes, Aboriginals share many cultural dogmas, particularly beliefs connected with their cosmogonies; stories, myths, and theories relating to the origin of the universe and humankind. According to J.J. Healey, First Nations' theatre must serve to connect all Aboriginal groups and their different cultures "in whatever conditions of survival the two centuries of destruction and containment by the State have left them" (1992, 7). Many other artistic manifestations can obviously serve the same purpose of "connection," as recently illustrated by Kevin O'Bryan's Black Box experience, a "room for sound" that contributes to "rejecting stereotypes and positioning Indigeneity as 'an interdependent condition with global connections'" (2020, 68). As Liza-Mare Syron notes, Enoch believes that "the aim of Indigenous theatre is to write on the public record neglected or forgotten stories" (2015, 230), which is proven, for example, in his direction of Tom Wright's Black Diggers (2014), in which Wesley Enochs aimed "to unsettle and challenge ... a history of institutional silence and a nation's social amnesia" (2014, 23). A similar purpose inspires *Black Medea*, which seeks to unsettle the audience by reminding them of the importance of treasuring First Nations's spiritual riches, almost ruined now by the whites' material riches.

Black Medea was raised in the desert. Like the Euripidean protagonist, she is a wise woman and an enchantress with magical knowledge transmitted within her family. She belongs to an elitist clan and "she's seen some of the world...the best education the government could afford ... a school in a town with a uniform and French and unforgettable wealth... But she's come back..." (66). This period of her upbringing sets her apart from others, intensifying her yearning for another kind of life. Her personality is a hybrid of two cultures, and whether in her Land or out of it, she becomes a misfit and an outcast. As she says: "I've gone mad with living in two worlds" (79). This is, in fact, one of the main points addressed by Euripides in his Medea, which portrays the Athenian view of the polarity between the "civilized" Greeks and the savage barbarians, as shown in Jason's abandonment for a white girl and the Greeks' banishment of the wild mythical woman. The Greeks are at the centre of the world, while the rest are the others. This otherness is also clearly underlined in *Black Medea*; the heroine longs for the whites' materialistic world, for which purpose she betrays her sacred motherland while struggling to assimilate into the whites' urban lifestyle until she realizes she is just an outsider. In the end, her spirits shall have to guide her out of the materialistic world.

Enoch alters the encounter between Jason and Medea, originally set in Colchis during the fifth century B.C., and relocates it to the Australian desert in the latter half of the twentieth century, where city men come to work in the mine. Life in the desert is portrayed as extremely impoverished from a materialistic standpoint: "the girls share one good dress among them" (66). As the modern chorus proclaims, "[t]hey say if you find yourself in this part of the world you're either running away from something or in search of it" (65). Following strict kinship rules, none of the desert girls consider marrying these city men. Medea's marriage has been arranged by her family to a man with the appropriate lineage. However, she intimately knows that her arranged suitor will never fulfil her newfound capitalist desires after experiencing the wealth of white society during her education.

When encountering Jason, she perceives, "this man is different. He's a black man in a suit, working his way up the corporate ladder, a city dweller... He wants to see the world. She's been waiting to run away" (66). This draws a poignant parallel; both Jason and Medea grapple with hybrid identities, attempting and failing to break free from their cultural histories. Despite their struggles, their attraction stems from a shared sense of alienation within their respective cultures. The depiction of Jason as a tormented Aboriginal man ensnared in a destructive cycle challenges prevailing stereotypes that associate gender violence and alcoholism exclusively with women. Instead, it underscores the need for collective responsibility and societal transformation to liberate individuals from these perilous patterns.

To Black Medea, Jason represents exoticism and a way out of her ordinary life. The couple initially feels excited. In her longing to escape the desert, Black Medea assumes the role of the mythological helper-maiden figure. However, instead of obtaining the golden fleece, she devises a plan to exploit the mines, the sacred Land. She declares, "[t]he spirits have led me to this place, Jason. Here, I know our future is secured. Beneath this mound lies the largest vein of the resource you mine" (75) - referring to the sacred Land where their deceased are buried. In pursuit of her love, Black Medea betrays her motherland and her family, similar to her classical predecessor who kills her brother and betrays her father while fleeing with Jason. However, Black Medea's betrayal is directly aimed at her motherland: the desert, and by extension, her spiritual ancestors who inhabit it. The wise black woman assists Jason and urges him to make a deal with other partners, instructing him, "[t]his is what you must do to plan our escape" (75).

The modern chorus portrays Jason's reluctance to the audience, stating, "[a]n unwilling Jason is convinced in the name of his unborn child, in the name of the wealth promised by the white world" (76). Black Medea thus rejects her culture and abandons her family for the love of her black husband, Jason. As expressed by the chorus through a violent sexual image, Medea will "violate" her mother - the land - for him (75). However, her raped motherland will never release its hold on her. In the spiritual dimension, the wind voice's identification is ambiguous. It is apparently one of Medea's ancestors, a great spirit, a protector of the Land and its people. It is a voice from the desert in form of wind, a spiritual voice that plays the role of a choral character, interacting and dialoguing with the others. This ever-present wind forms part of the Aboriginal cosmology, spiritual beings who are believed to guide the natives' lives through dreaming and natural connections, such as the wind or the rain, animals, or flowers. The desert wind enters Jason and Medea's city house: "don't let it in, you know where it's coming from" (63) begs Medea to Jason. It is this ancestral spirit that asks Jason, over and over again, to leave Medea, to reject her, to set her free so she can return where she belongs.

At a particular moment, Jason and Medea engage in a violent quarrel. Jason, intoxicated and overwhelmed by the haunting "damn wind," feels suffocated and consumed by madness (62). Medea gently approaches him, asking about the contract to exploit the desert mines: "Jason, my love...you need to get them to agree. We need their signatures" (62). In a bitter response, Jason informs her, "It fell through. The deal is off" (62). As Medea starts to bitterly complain about their lack of money, unable to afford their child's shoes or education, Jason, overwhelmed by Medea's complaints and the piercing voice of the wind, physically assaults her. In contrast to his classical counterpart, Enoch's portrayal of Jason in this adaptation highlights a stark contrast. Jason is not driven by ambition; he is not on the verge of marrying a princess or a white woman to gain power. Instead, he is defeated by his own condition as an Aboriginal man, unable to live up to Medea's expectations. The play refrains from passing judgment. Is Jason a vulnerable black Australian man controlled by his own vices? Does his transgressions echo a hereditary affliction seen in his father, who haunts his dreams? Or is it a manifestation of an unbroken familial cycle, where misconduct is witnessed across generations? Perhaps, does it reflect the broader cultural dynamics of the community? Throughout the plot, Enoch's play provocatively raises these inquiries, employing evocative imagery of dreams and spirits.

Embedded within the play's encrypted meaning, Rania Khalil suggests that many works by Aboriginal playwrights are culturally coded, embodying a semiotic system of ideas deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the nation. These codes may indeed be challenging for outsiders to decipher. *Black Medea*'s unique Aboriginal content may likely stem from Enoch's profound Aboriginal postmemory. Postmemory, as Khalil explains, refers to "experiences of past generations [that] come to dominate those of the present, sometimes even substituting one's own thoughts and memories" (in Frosh 516). This concept of postmemory particularly impacts those who grow up under the influence of narratives that preceded their birth, narratives that may overshadow their own present stories. Jason and Medea frequently dream of their ancestors. Khalil argues that Black Medea exemplifies a performative Aboriginal account that documents the intergenerational continuum of traumatic Aboriginal experiences and the struggle to cope with the inherited burden of trauma. Since trauma is challenging to convey orally, Khalil suggests that the use of silence, gestures, storytelling, and theatre in *Black Medea* becomes vital for documenting this generational continuum of trauma (2022, 130). For instance, Jason's ancestors and their mistreatment of women are recurring themes in his haunting dreams.

Jason is tormented by memories of familial violence: "Mum huddled in the corner with the kids...Him...punching the door [...] There was so much blood. I cleaned the floor and walls. I couldn't clean the door. It terrified me" (71). He also envisions his male ancestors trapped in a narrow alley, forming a line from which they cannot escape. His child is there, trapped just behind him (75). Jason learns from his dream that he is confined within a familial chain of decadence and violence, and that his future, as well as his son's, is doomed. This can be interpreted as a traumatic postmemory recollection, as the relationship between present generations and the traumatic experience of the past is manifested through memories of stories, images, songs, or dances (Khalil 2022, 131).In the play, Jason's memories are further reinforced by the spiritual chorus, which repeatedly delivers an insidious message to him: "You are becoming your father. You've learned the lessons as your father did to his father, and you can't see that you're just the same. And so the father becomes the son becomes the father becomes the son" (71).

Eventually, Jason, driven to madness, throws Medea out of their family home. Jason's debauchery and abuse prevent the audience from sympathizing with him, even though they may feel compassion for his situation. Once Medea is rejected, there are clear references to the classical Medea, such as when she laments, "I've sacrificed all for you" (73) and experiences bouts of jealousy, mirroring the classical Medea's obsession with

Jason's infidelity. Like the classical Jason, Black Jason is an oath-breaker who cheats on his wife with multiple women (77). Medea, suspicious and embodying the clichés of a jealous woman, demands answers: "Who is it? I want to know. Is she pretty? Say something! What's she got I haven't? We promised each other..." (73), reminding him of their marital vows. In the section titled "MEDEA PRAYS," the author portrays the excruciating dilemma faced by Black Medea at the crossroads between the white world, with the violent Jason, and her beloved Aboriginal community. In a clear parallel to the classical Medea, she states: "I have known the riches of the white man's world, but you have shown me poverty of the spirit. I gave up a father, a brother, a mother, a country. I led him to sacred places. I have no choice. In crime, I have gained my home; in crime, I must leave it" (74).

Black Medea's decision to kill their son is initially triggered by Jason's refusal to allow her to take him with her to the desert: "If you take that fucking boy, I'll track you down to the ends of the earth and beat your fucking brains out... Go to bed" (77). This illustrates the ordeal that mistreated women often have to face. The insanity and possessiveness of this type of macho behavior are obsessive, and women who have experienced it are all too familiar with it. The spirit of the sacred Land relentlessly haunts Medea throughout the play, urging her to return home with her son: "Bring the boy back, and all will be forgiven. We are waiting for you. Free the boy before he becomes a copy of his father" (68). This statement is crucial for understanding the play. Many contemporary rewritings of Medea justify the filicide as a symbolic means to break the cycle of male abuse, in this case, the symbolic break of a generational chain of alcoholism and gender violence. Enoch himself analyses his work, confirming this view and emphasizing the lyrical dimension of the play:

"What I want to do with Black Medea is to think beyond the naturalistic and to grapple with the poetic forms of a classic story [...] The story of an Aboriginal woman from the desert coming to the city and coping with seeing her love slip away is so potent for Indigenous Australians. I am interested in Medea's choice to kill her son to stop a cycle of violence in her home" (Doyle 2005). Enoch indeed grapples with the poetic forms of the classical story, as Black Medea ultimately complies with the sacred Land's instructions. Black Medea will murder her son not only to break the cycle of violence but also to free him from the narrow-minded and dissatisfying material world. Arguably, in the genuine Aboriginal view she kills the physical body of his child but she does not kill his spirit, she will take her son with her to the Land haven where they belong. As she says when planning the murder, "I will not allow the sun to rise for him another day in this house. Before this night is through, my son will be freed, before the next day dawns, my son will know the spirits of his Land. I will take him." (79). This is Enoch interpretation of the classical Medea's burial of her sons: when the latter escapes, she holds the corpses of her two sons in her arms "to bury them in the sanctuary of Hera Akraia" (Euripides 431 BC, l.1378), where she will "authorize a sacred festival and ritual/to last forever for this unholy murder." (ll. 1381-82). Black Medea takes him to a different sanctuary, the one placed in the sacred Lands.

Black Medea kills her son with a pipe. First, hesitatingly she tries to kill Jason as conveyed by the stage directions: *"Medea carries an iron pipe. Jason is asleep at the table, a bottle of beer beside him"* (76) but finally, as her son is looking at her, she backs out. Later, while her unnamed son is asleep, she thinks aloud "in this long dark night I see it clearly – If he stays, he will become a copy of his father. He will grow up bruising the ones he loves, his children will live in fear, he will be another wandering soul. A mother's love will not allow it." (79), and determinedly beats her child to death This is the unsettling message to the settled audience of settlers' descendants. Like in Euripides' account, the infanticide has to be understood out of the human realm, as a symbolic and spiritual plea for a life free of violence, whether invoking Australian spirits or Hellenic gods. C.A.E. Luschnig explains that in Greek mythology, oath-breakers like Jason were severely punished by the gods; "what happens to oath-breakers is that their family is wiped out. Medea will speed the gods' will by making Jason childless" (38). Additionally, the classical Medea claims that she murders her children to save them from a crueller death in the hands of her enemies; as she reasons in a given instance, "I have determined to do the deed at once,/ to kill my children and leave this land,/ and not to falter or give my children/ over to let a hand more hostile murder them" (Euripides ll. 1236-39). Black Medea also saves his unnamed boy, though from different enemies, from a life of abuse and alcohol, shielding him from the destructive cycle perpetuated by his father.

Once Jason is aware of the filicide she addresses him "I have saved him from becoming you" … [l]ook at me. Let my face be tattooed in your brain for I have done the rites and this house must burn to honour our son. Look at me and see the last face that loved you."(80). The ambivalent protagonist, whether classical or Australian, obviously seeks also revenge on Jason, she wants him to suffer, to live a lonely life in pain, without descendants. Medea continues, "I want you alive, I want you to feel an emptiness for as long as you live.

I want you to carry the torment to your deathbed, alone and unloved" (78). Equally, the Euripidean Medea keeps Jason alive, but she prophesies his future death "you will die a coward's death as you deserve,/struck on your head by a remnant of the wreck of the Argo" (Euripides ll.1385-86). Passion, jealousy, and rage are the intense emotions of a tragedy that continue to impress audiences by portraying the agency of a solitary woman in her quest for justice. Although Medea is primarily driven by anger, the audience empathizes with her and views her crime as an act of retribution. She is in anguish and laments, yet her desire for revenge drives her onward. She shouts at Jason, "the spirits call me back to my home...Whatever my hell, I will sleep pleased in the knowledge that my grief has yours as a company " (80). She then burns down the house, leaving Jason silent and defeated. Once again, as seen in many interpretations of Medea, whether original or adapted, the protagonist finds pleasure in Jason's misery. These elements underscore the intricate and conflicting emotions within Medea's character. While she pursues justice and liberation, her desires also extend to vengeance, intending to inflict maximum emotional suffering on Jason.

The conclusion of Black Medea somewhat parallels Euripides', but instead of being transported in a chariot drawn by dragons sent by Helios to continue her nomadic existence, she runs into the desert to die and transform into a spirit. As the stage directions indicate: "*Medea disappears and becomes the wind"* (81), growing into a kind of spirit among her people, returning home and taking the spirit of her boy with her; now "my son will know the spirits of his Land" (79). Enoch, like Euripides, invokes mythical justice to restore the dignity of the oppressed. While it is true that many of the structural parts of Euripides' story are mirrored in the play, *Black Medea*'s rewriting of the classic alters some of the essentials of the original; Jason is not the practical, charming, and corrupted man as appears in the hypotext and in most of Medea's remakings. On the other hand, Medea is not the proud, rebellious, and idealistic person who follows Jason in pursuit of true love. Enoch does not feature mythological beings but portrays down-to-earth characters who struggle to succeed in an alien and hostile environment in order to raise awareness of the sad reality affecting many Aboriginal families in contemporary Australia.

Aboriginal theatre and, more crucially, the socio-political landscape in Australia are experiencing noteworthy transformations. Despite setbacks in recent attempts to reform the constitution for the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, this ongoing struggle deserves impetus from the realm of drama. Works like *Black Medea* play an active role in shaping this unfolding chronicle, striving to establish a meaningful presence for Aboriginal culture in the contemporary world. Unfortunately, patriarchal and white supremacist structures are deeply ingrained in the universal human heritage, as evident in many mythological stories as well as in real life. However, Euripides' *Medea* already challenged these structures and shocked the Athenian audience over two thousand years ago. While Euripides may have used Medea's infanticidal actions to intensify the dramatic pathos of his tragedy, he also achieved a significant goal that has resonated through the centuries: creating an iconic ethnic woman who triumphs over the powerful white man. As Irene Vallejo-Moreu recently expressed, "Antigone, Oedipus, and Medea—these beings made of ink and papyrus, threatened by oblivion—have travelled throughout the centuries to inspire our revolutions" (159).

WORKS CITED.

1. Andrews, Penelope. "Violence against Aboriginal Women in Australia: Possibilities for Redress within the International Human Rights Framework." Albany Law Review Vol. 5, no. 60, 1997, pp. 917-941.
2. Blake, Elissa. "Theatre's "party pooper": Wesley Enoch's nasty side", Sydney Tribune Herald, 11.01. 2014.
3. Boedecker, Deborah, 1997 "Becoming Medea". Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art, edited by J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston. Princeton University Press: 127-148
4. Casey, Maryrose, and Cathy Craigie. 2011. "A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre". Melbourne: Australian Script Centre (2011).
5. Croggon, Alison, 2010 "How Australian is it? [On Nationalism and the Theatre]". Overland literary journal, 200: 55-629.
6. Doyle, Brendan. 2005 "Greek Tragedy Meets Black Australia", Green Left Weekly, Review of Black Medea, April 27, no.624
7. https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/greek-tragedy-meets-black-australia
8. Enoch, Wesley. 2007 Black Medea, Contemporary Indigenous Plays edited by Larissa Behrendt. Currency Press.
9. Enoch, Wesley, "Philips Parsons Memorial Lecture", 2013.
10. http://belvoir.com.au/news/i-dont-do-it-for-the-money.

11. Euripides, Medea. Trans. by C.A.E. Luschnig. Diotima, 2006,
12. /www.diotima-doctafemina.org/translations/greek/euripides-medea/.
13. Ewan Michael and Marguerite Johnson, 2019, "Wesley Enoch's Black Medea" Antipodean Antiquities: Classical Reception Down Under edited by in Marguerite Johnson, Bloomsbury Publishing: 73-86.
14. Frosh, Stephen. 2020. "Postmemory and Possession." International Journal of Semiotic Law, 33:15-528.
15. Gilbert Helen and Joanne Tompkins, 1996, Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics, Routledge.
16. Grillparzer, Franz. 1956 (1821) The Golden Fleece, translated by Arthur Burkhard. Register Press.
17. Hardwick, Lorna. 2005, "Refiguring Classical Texts: Aspects of the Postcolonial Condition." Classics and Colonialism, edited by Barbara Goff, Duckworth: 107-117.
18. Hardwick, Lorna, 2007, "Introduction." Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds edited by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie, Oxford University Press: 1-11.
19. Healey, J.J. 1992. "Ethnogenesis, the State and the Beginning of Aboriginal Literature in Australia." Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada, Australian Catholic University, 8: 7-14.
20. Hetherington, Kevin. 1997. The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering. Routledge.
21. Khalil, Rania, 2022. '"Aboriginal Australian Autobiographies of Postmemory and Trauma'" in Wesley Enoch's Black Medea and the 7 Stages of Grieving". Hermes, 11 (3): 127-160.
22. Kizza, Immaculate, 2001, "African Drama: A Post-colonial Tool for Rejuvenating Indigenous Languages and Promoting Development." Precolonial and Post-colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa edited by Lokangaka Losambe and Devi Sarinjeive, New Africa Books Ltd.:95-105.
23. Legouvé, Ernest. 1867 (1855).Medea a Tragedy in Three Acts, translated by T. Williams. John A. Gray & Green Printers, Jacob Street.
24. Luschnig, C.A.E., 2006. translator, Medea by Euripides. Diotima, 2006,
25. /www.diotima-doctafemina.org/translations/greek/euripides-medea/.
26. Mohor-Ivan, Iona. 2016. "Envisaging a Post-Colonial Theatre: W. B. Yeats and the Cuchulain Cycle of Plays". Cultural intertexts, 6 (6): 102-111
27. O'Brien, Kevin. 2020. "Blak Box: A Room for Sound and a Space for Storytelling." Architecture Australia, 109 (2): 68–71
28. Okpewho, Isidore 1999. "Soyinka, Euripides, and the Anxiety of Empire." Research in African Literatures, 30(4):32-55.
29. Syron, Liza-Mare 2015, '"Addressing a Great Silence': Black Diggers and the Aboriginal Experience of War". New Theatre Quarterly, 31(3): 223-231
30. Tompkins, Joana. 2014 Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Kindle, 2014.
31. Vallejo Moreu, Irene, 2019. El Infinito en un junco. La invención de los libros en el mundo antiguo. Madrid: Siruela.