

## Indigenous Ambivalent Figure in Jack Davis's Play, *The Dreamers*

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### ABSTRACT

History of Australian Aboriginal's colonisation, exploitation and assimilation has had ill effects on the performance of Indigenous gender relations, challenged the heteronormative conception of gender and directed Aboriginal people into shaping marginalised type of masculinities and femininities. With this background, this study attempts to depict the trajectory of shift in gender enactment of Aboriginal men and women in the pre and post contact era. The purpose is to account for the gender enactment of Indigenous people of Australia as has been veridically represented in Davis's *The Dreamers* in the decades of 1970s and 1980s. Zooming in on such issues as unemployment, imprisonment, alcohol consumption, and acts of violence, among others, this paper argues that Indigenous characters in the play show signs of crisis of masculinity; in this regard, Tim Edwards's notion of the crisis of masculinity has been employed. As the counterbalance of Indigenous emasculated men, however, the masculine performative role of Indigenous women has been highlighted. Raising these assumptions, we touch upon Judith Butler's notion of performativity and gender identity, at the heart of theoretical framework, and prove the authority of our discussion regarding Indigenous ambivalent figures in the light of Indigenous critics such as Brendan Hokowhitu, Kim Anderson and Shino Konishi, to name but a few.

Keywords: Jack Davis; *The Dreamers*; Indigenous Gender Roles; The Crisis of Masculinity; Performativity

### INTRODUCTION

Jack Davis is a prolific and distinguished 20th-century Australian playwright and poet. As Healy (1988) puts it, "all the strengths of the other Aboriginal writers appear in Jack Davis" (p.81). Davis was born in 1917 in Perth and raised in Yarloop, Western Australia. Having spent several years on the Brookton Aboriginal Reserve, Davis began to learn the language and culture of his people, the Noongar of Western Australia. Before setting out to write plays, Davis was known as a poet and short story writer. His first collection of poems was *The First-Born and Other Poems* published in 1972. Over years, he fuelled his rage toward the injustices of an apartheid system and alongside poetry selected drama as another outlet to express his frustrations and grief over the plight of Aboriginal people. In the early 1970s, however, he began to write for performance. *Kullark*, Davis's first full-length play, was performed in 1972. It was followed by *The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1985), *Honey Spot* (1985), *Moorli and the Leprechaun* (1986), *Bargungin* (1988), and *In Our Town* (1990).

*The Dreamers* is the first one of the Davis's *The First Born Trilogy*. The three plays of the trilogy, *The Dreamers* (1983) *No Sugar* (1985) and *Bargungin* (1988) probe the fundamental socio-political issues Aboriginal Australians encountered in modern Australian society. Originally, these plays were not written as a trilogy and yet they share extended periods of Aboriginal survival and oppression. *The Dreamers* is set in a country town in Western Australia and its first performance was given in Perth in 1982. The action spans over six months in the home of the Wallitch family from Beeruk-Summer (Act One) to Moorga-Winter (Act Two). It centres on domestic and recreational activities within the house such as drinking, parties, and card playing. The family includes Dolly, wife to Roy, mother to Peter,

Meena and Shane and niece to Uncle Worrui. Robert, a nephew, and Eli, a cousin who appears briefly in the Second Act of the play, complete the extended family. Moreover, the only white boy is Darren, a twelve-year-old playmate of Shane and Meena's. Davis makes use of one of the most recurring motifs in Aboriginal drama, familial relationships, and draws on the microcosm of the family as a marker of Aboriginal society demonstrating not only the personal family stories but also the hegemonic social injustice toward Indigenous people.

According to Larissa Behrendt (2012), in the pre-contact era, gender roles among Indigenous cultures were specific to themselves. Men did the hunting while women gathered food and bore children. Spiritual life and cultural stories were also matters assigned to men and women separately. In other words, the gender roles performed by men and women were referred to as “men's business and women's business” (Behrendt 2012, p. 57). Behrendt (2012) further elucidates that the separation existed between gender roles in Indigenous cultures did not mean to say that women were inferior to men rather “in Aboriginal society, female Elders can have as much influence — or even more — as male Elders. They participate in key decision-making processes of the community and have moral authority” (p. 57). Nonetheless, male Elders were the ones who disseminated knowledge about the Dreaming, Aboriginal laws, and traditions, yet as a consequence of colonisation “power relations altered considerably” (Atkinson 1990, p. 22). Along with the establishment of white coloniser's settlement in the lands of Australia came a series of arguments for and against Indigenous lifestyles. For example, education, sanitation, and the legal right of Indigenous people to hold official positions as well as participate in the new, blended society were observed as perks granted to them as a result of British colonisation. Despite that, colonisation also brought a variety of afflictions to Indigenous people. Of its negative effects are the introduction of alcohol to Aboriginal people, unemployment, imprisonment and subsequently the divestiture of Indigenous people from their lands, rights, and customs which has led to the loss of their Indigenous identity.

The accurate reconstruction of Indigenous gender relations is difficult to accomplish given the scarcity of written sources. However, it is widely held that Indigenous men and women alike had participated in rituals and other activities without a strict assignment of roles to each gender. In other words, while men, known as male Elders, had the highest authority, women too exercised their degree of independence. In general, the study of Indigenous gender relations has proven to be contentious given the men and women's different performances before and after colonisation. Leah Sneider (2015) writes that “at the centre of Indigenous gender studies are the effects that settler colonialism has had on both individuals and communities as a whole and the need to recover and/or transform tribe or culture-specific gender ideologies, knowledge, and practice” (p. 74).

In his book, *Cultures of Masculinity*, Tim Edwards (2006) broaches the subject of the crisis of masculinity and provides a rather comprehensive overview of the issue. He puts the crisis of masculinity into two overlapped categories, the crisis from without and the crisis from within. As a perception relating to men, the crisis from without centres on the lost position of men, compared to their prior positions, within such institutions as work, family, and education. For instance, work, as a bedrock of masculine identity, not only does matter for men and play a major role in constructing masculine identity but its lack thereof, that is unemployment, also does establish the crisis of masculinity; “successful masculinity was equated with success at work” (p. 8). In a different manner, the crisis from within is directed inward and points to the men's “experiences of their position as men” (Edwards 2006, p. 8). We should not disregard the fact that Indigenous communities have been in crises ever since colonisation because their entire taxonomies were disrupted. Accordingly, although Edwards does not extend his argument in claiming that Indigenous communities are in crisis, we argue that colonisation has brought along issues of unemployment, racism, family crisis, among

others, and therefore made Indigenous family members in the play suffer from a crisis know as the crisis of masculinity.

Furthermore, the crisis of masculinity and the very idea of a shift in the performance of Indigenous gender roles in the pre and post-contact era, remind us of Judith Butler's notion of gender as performative. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) introduces the concept of gender as an unrehearsed performance. She questions the polarity of sex/gender and regards the body (sex) itself as a construction since there are numerous bodies constituting gender subjects. For her, sexed bodies cannot function without gender and it is the function of gender that establishes an apparent existence of sex prior to cultural institution in the construction of identity. In other words, one is not simply a body rather one perform one's body which indeed differs in time and place. However, it is not to say that our bodies act like passive tablets for culture to inscribe its code on; instead, our bodies form our identities through a set of acts which are either deemed as culturally intelligible or unintelligible. Butler calls this concept performativity (pp. 5-104). What her notion of performativity did was first collapse the biased binaries (male/female, sex/gender) and second forge no fixed relationship between male bodies and masculinity and female bodies and femininity. In other words, according to Butler, men can enact feminine traits in the same way women present masculine traits. The rich scholarship on Indigenous masculinity and femininity would provide this opportunity to better understand the mainstream notion of masculinity and femininity and place it side by side with the pre-contact or authentic Indigenous gender relations stripped of all extraneous factors like negative effects of colonisation . In light of this de-essentialising notion of gender, this paper analyses Indigenous gender roles and discusses the ways in which the perpetuation of these norms has led to the crisis of masculinity and Indigenous women's masculine gender achievements.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shoemaker (2004) inspects Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* focusing mainly on the play's diction, theme and humour. For him, *The Dreamers* is "one of the most culturally independent and autonomous Black Australian theatrical statements to date" (p. 253). Shoemaker concludes that "cultural nationalism, literary talent, and Aboriginal pride" are three major elements constituting Black Aboriginal literature (p. 266). In a different vein, Prasenjit Das (2012) highlights the essences of Aboriginal Dreaming, as an element in Aboriginal writings of identity formation in Davis's *The Dreamers* and Kim Scott's *True Country* and examines how they are employed as "resistive tools of appropriation, subversion and identity creation" (p. 2).

Probing into different Indigenous plays including Davis's *The Dreamers*, Sibendu Chakraborty (2014) shows the "inherent scepticism which Indigenous theater unfolds in course of its identity formations." His objective is to "uncover the hybridity of indigeneity as articulated through variously indigenous performative texts" (p. 62). For this purpose, Chakraborty de-essentialises Indigenous stereotypes portrayed in Indigenous plays.

Shino Konishi (2011) calls to mind that from the early period of settlement in 1788, British colonists had portrayed Aboriginal masculinity as being primitive, childlike, treacherous, irrational, and vicious toward women (p. 163). She brings the discourses of Aboriginal masculinity in line with masculinity studies. Likewise, Brendan Hokowhitu (2013) employs Indigenous masculinity to dissect colonial power. Hokowhitu believes that the dominance of coloniser man over the Indigenous man and the man/woman binary creates an "ambivalent figure of the indigenous heterosexual patriarch; both oppressor and oppressed" (2013, p. 29) For Hokowhitu, Indigenous masculinities rest in their complicated

forms since they both perform colonial heteropatriarchy and are resistant to it. He further examines the role of tradition as both preserving and creating an elite Indigenous masculinity and altering alternative forms of Indigenous masculinity as deviant and anomalies. According to Hokowhitu, “Indigenous and First Nations men have come to define themselves, or rather have come to be defined through an allegorical relationship to the white man” (2007, p. 331). Australian white masculinity establishes the foundation of Indigenous masculinity or what Martin Crotty defines as hegemonic masculinity. From Crotty’s point of view, hegemonic masculinity is “the ideal of manliness prevalent amongst those with the power to formulate the ideal and disseminate it... the ideal that, through various social, cultural and legal practices, oppresses all those whom it excludes” (p. 4).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In general, gender studies is an interdisciplinary field of study devoted to the representation of gender and identity both in gendered categories and in the level of society. The notion of gender was employed in Second Wave Feminism to distinguish between individual attitudes and actions and physiology. Some theorists like Simon de Beauvoir argued that gender studies extends its scope of analysis to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities and is less concerned with the state of being male and female (1973). However, not all gender theorists agree upon it. Judith Butler, for instance, challenges the conventional notions of gender and develops her model of gender as an act to be performed.

In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) introduces the idea of performativity arguing that “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 25). Therefore, for Butler, gender is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts. In like manner, gendered identity is not something placed in us to be discovered, rather it is something that is produced through language and discourse that “effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal” (Butler 1990, p. 192). Butler gives the account of a drag queen as an example of subversive performance that destabilises the normal and naturalised identity categories. It is with such breakthrough and claim that queer theory finds its ground and contests and confounds the established boundaries between male and female, normal and abnormal. Butler’s aim, in general, is to identify various social performances which are deemed abnormal and deviant by the norms of society and, in the meantime, establish links between categories, acts, desires, and identities. She argues that our definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed rather than inherent from within us. For Butler, “identity categories are not merely descriptive, but always normative” (1991, p. 160). She further extends her argument noting that women can only be defined in a way that conform to some unspoken normative requirements (like having a feminine personality) (1990, p. 8).

Butler’s theory of performativity dismantles the concept of essential, stable identity and, what is more, her definition of gender as a ‘free-floating artifice’ expands the scopes of masculinities and femininities and generates confusion. Therefore, her argument fits the Indigenous gender deviations spelled out in the body of this study.

As a set of attributes associated with men, masculinity is influenced by social and cultural factors. In *Masculinities and Culture*, John Beynon (2002) maintains that masculinity is composed of many masculinities; “while all men have the male body in common (although even that comes in a variety of sizes, shapes, and appearances), there are numerous forms and expressions of gender, of ‘being masculine’ and ‘being feminine’” (p. 1). Beynon argues that there are many social, historical, and geographical factors specific to each location that ruin

the uniformity of masculinity as a single concept. In other words, masculinity is a “diverse, mobile, even unstable, construction” (Beynon 2002, p. 2).

The common stereotype is that men are naturally powerful, vigorous, competitive and successful while women are, weak, submissive and emotional. In Ronald F. Levant (1995) words, traditional masculine norms are "avoidance of femininity; restricted emotions; sex disconnected from intimacy; pursuit of achievement and status; self-reliance; strength and aggression, and homophobia" (p. 9). In the same vein, traditional feminine traits often include, passivity, sensibility, dependence, empathy and so forth, however, we should bear in mind that these traits vary depending on context, place and time and are regulated and influenced by a number of social factors.

Instead of being constructed around ‘essences’ or ‘fundamentals’, masculinity and femininity are sets of signs that have been performed in what Kersten (1995) refers to as “situational accomplishments” (p. 160) and Butler (1990) calls “performative acts” (p. xiv). Butler’s view of gender performance undermines the rule of masculinity and femininity as strict biological makeups into which males and females are automatically fitted. Instead, she posits that gender is nothing but a set of socially defined traits and characteristics that over time labelled as feminine and masculine. What is more, the masculine can be enacted and displayed in a variety of ways by both men and women in the same way feminine can be displayed by both sexes in different places at different times. In Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) words, “there are male and female versions of masculinity and, equally, female and male versions of femininity” (p. 15).

Given the variable nature of masculinity, a correct definition of Indigenous masculinity is difficult to propose unless it is placed in a side-by-side comparison with an alternative type of masculinity that is white hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic, dominant, or invader masculinity, as has been labelled differently, enables this comparison and clearly reveals the divergence between the Indigenous and other types of masculinities. One way to deal with Indigenous masculinity is to recognise, as Michael Mangan (2003) points out, that masculinity, in its nature, is always relational and exists with relation to both femininity and other forms of masculinities (p. 9). In this matrix of relations, Hokowhitu (2007) maintains that Indigenous masculinity has actually constituted and formed through “complicity with and assimilation into forms of invader masculinity” (p.93). Hence, without white hegemonic invader or dominant masculinity, Indigenous masculinity would not carry any meaning.

In Australian settler-colonial context, however, white masculinity is the normative masculinity and Indigenous masculinity is pushed to the background and has no other alternatives than being performed and represented in abnormal and deviant forms. The main reason, as has been stated, is colonisation. That being said, the dominance of coloniser man over the Indigenous man and the man/woman binary creates an “ambivalent figure of the indigenous heterosexual patriarch; both oppressor and oppressed” (Hokowhitu 2013, p. 29). In Innes and Anderson’s words (2015) “colonisation and the imposition of a white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy” have been two factors that have left negative legacy for Indigenous communities in general and their members in particular (p. 4).

In the following, we examine these gender issues and look into some of the masculine abnormalities which Edwards considers to be parts of the crisis of masculinity and Butler to be effects of gender performativity.

### THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

According to Edwards’s classification of the crisis of masculinity into the crisis from without and the crisis from within, those men who are unable to fulfill family and work’s

expectations and consequently become reclusive and socially inhibited experience the crisis of masculinity. As a result of crisis from within, men fall into depression and experience senses of uncertainty and meaninglessness toward life and themselves. Horrocks (1994) touches upon this type of crisis albeit rather implicitly:

I have found in my work that in fact many men are haunted by feelings of emptiness, impotence, and rage. They feel abused, unrecognised by modern society. While manhood offers compensations and prizes, it can also bring with it emotional autism, emptiness, and despair. (p. 1)

This second type of the crisis of masculinity is more of psychological engagements and all the social factors affecting the crisis from without can and will influence the degree of the crisis men experience within themselves. Overall, having brought up the historical, psychological, and post-structural analysis of the crisis of masculinity, Edwards leaves the discussion of the crisis of masculinity for the sake of further investigations. He argues that such aspects of men as “loss of employment prospects, despair as to their [men’s] future, rising demand from women in their personal lives, and frustration at perceived inequalities with other men” are only tendencies towards crisis (p. 16).

Emasculation is a term which is ascribed to those men who develop a sort of crisis regarding their masculinity. Emasculation as a concept that a man feels less male because of lacking in confidence and power has become increasingly widespread within humanities and is mostly dealt with when critics and social theorists choose to examine and discuss the crisis of masculinity. Emasculation or symbolic castration, however, is best defined in David Marriott’s (1996) words as “the alienation or social dysfunction of black men in relation to the public sphere” (p. 191).

The origin of the crisis of Indigenous masculinity lies in the emasculation and social death of black men under colonialism. Likewise, a fairly noticeable feature in *The Dreamers* is the emasculation of men or the loss of Indigenous men’s authority.

Indigenous male subjects tend to show grave crisis of masculinity to the point that they are unable to perform well within their family and society. They even find it difficult to come to term with themselves and thus depict a negative picture of themselves and their culture. As Attwood (2005) puts it “According to the historical theory, there was a natural course of history beginning with the state of nature or antiquity, which was aboriginal, and progressing towards modernity, which was Europe’s present. In this theory, peoples such as aborigines were always figured in terms of a lack or deficit” (p.137). This very lack or deficit is the same social problems Aboriginal men showed when they got into contact with the Europeans. Another reason for the identity crisis among Aboriginal subjects are the facts that they attempt to adapt to the new social norms and still feel attached to the old ones. The very “back and forth shift between past and present norms” results in identity crisis (Moosavinia & Yousefi 2018, p. 168). While the subjects struggle to adapt to the new social norms, they feel attached to the old ones. In the following different factors of Indigenous crisis are taking into consideration.

### THE DREAMERS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

According to Hammill (2001), one of the integral components of Indigenous male identity is connected with the value of work Indigenous men have done. He contends that “today older men, of whom there are few, speak with pride of their years of hard work as stockmen and laborers, often working alongside their fathers and uncles, albeit for only a token wage, but there was no question of worth. It was an identity from which an Aboriginal man could

garner esteem” (p. 22). That being said, when Indigenous men remain idle for a long time, with no job to do and no land to reclaim their heritage and identity, they become emasculated. The root cause of unemployment might be the result of negative effects which colonisation put on Aboriginal people leaving them inexperienced and distressful in the face of any job offered by non-Indigenous people. In the case of *The Dreamers*, there is an extended family whose Indigenous men are unemployed or have no jobs, for that matter. Uncle Worru is old and sick, Roy, Dolly’s husband, is jobless, Peter is arrested for joyriding while Eli scrounges money from other people. In Act One, we see Roy collecting cigarette butts and breaking them open for tobacco. As Dolly leaves the house to pay Uncle Worru a visit in the hospital, she leaves Roy, her husband, some money to buy some food for the kid’s lunch:

Roy: ‘ow about some gnummari? [tobacco]  
Dolly: get yourself a job and you’ll have plenty a smokes.  
Roy: come on love. Gimme another forty cents an’ I’ll ‘ave enough for a packet. (p. 13)

Here, Dolly sarcastically brings the subject of unemployment to the fore. The ensuing outcomes of such unemployment and idleness would result in violence, crime, and drinking problems which would raise wider issues concerning Indigenous family and society and at the same time aggravate the emasculation of Indigenous men.

#### THE DREAMERS AND ENACTMENT OF VIOLENCE

The issue of violence is sometimes considered to be one of the performances of gender and especially a masculine trait. In De Lauretis’s (1987) words, “the representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender” (p. 33) and “the subject of the violence is always, by definition, Masculine” (p. 43). In a related vein, conditions which breed violence are arranged, in Sally Engle Merry’s (2008) words, to include “racism and inequality, conquest, occupation, colonialism, warfare, and civil conflict, economic disruptions and poverty” (p. 2). However, there are times in which the upsurge of emotion fails to be expressed through language and thus is channelled instead into acts of violence especially physical violence.

A body of available data indicates that “Indigenous Australians—wherever they reside—are over-represented as both victims and perpetrators of all forms of violent crime in Australia” (Carrington & Scott 648, Northern Territory Government 2007). What men do is crucial in defining their masculinity. Drawing on Butler, we can conclude that male performance is normatively evaluated according to a range of socially and culturally constructs. In this regard, Connell illustrates this point with the example of male pub-drinking practices. He contends that such practices are a significant site of power and legitimacy in rural community life, where forms of rural masculinity are performed, constructed, reproduced and successfully defended (Campbell 2000, p. 563).

Violence in Indigenous communities can be a defining feature of systematic shifts in the structure of society. A parallel may be drawn here with shifts occurring in rural Indigenous communities, in which the traditional forms of rural life is being challenged by marked structural change introduced by the new era (Karstedt 2008).

In *The Dreamers*, there are numerous examples of violence occurred and spread by Indigenous men and especially the youth culture. Eli does not like his cousin, Robert, and is jealous of his money, knowledge and social status. As Robert continues to convince Eli that the story of Noah and basically Bible stories are based on faith and not facts, Eli gets mad, grabs Robert’s finger and twists it hard and says “I told you not to point, didn’t I? [Twisting it viciously] didn’t I? (Davis 1982, p. 63). This sudden outburst of indignation is a sign of

jealousy and hatred toward a person who knows better, earns more, and is also more respectable.

In another scene, Robert and Eli get into a fight because Eli cheats in a card game and Robert catches him red handed. Robert grabs Eli by the hair and Eli tries to kick him:

Eli: let go of my hair. Fight like a man, not a bloody woman.  
Robert: you fight like a bloody horse. (Davis 1982, p. 69)

Konishi (2011) sees the violence in Aboriginal communities not as a problem of Aboriginality and their culture but rather as “one of masculinity and socio-economic disadvantage” (p. 173). Similarly, Connell notes that masculinity is a fluid and dynamic configuration, constantly being reshaped and contested and violence is a one strategy in range employed to articulate masculinity (1995, p. 76).

Of the socio-economic disadvantages are poverty, unemployment, and single-parent families, to name but a few. When Indigenous people become short-changed in these ways, they either become indolent like Roy or aggressive like Peter. In another scene, when Roy decides on who should go and buy some wine, Peter says that he would not go because he had been kicked out of the bar the night before:

Peter: fuckin' barman put me outta there last night...he reckon I king hit that *Wetjala* [white fellow] bloke in the *goonamia* [toilet] Friday night.  
Eli: that bloke. He's always hangin' around *Nyoongah* [man], he's only a gin tailor.  
Fancy refusin' a man a drink over scum like him; bastard deserved all he got.  
Peter: yea, an' I give it to him, flattened him, [*miming a heavy punch*] *bukily* [hit]. Put 'im right down in the *koomp* [urine]. (Davis 1982, p. 14)

### THE DREAMERS AND INDOLENCE

On the opposite side of violence which is taken as an active gesture, there is indolence, a passive deed, prevalent among Aboriginal men. It is often claimed that the root cause of Indigenous indolence goes back to colonialism which rubbed Indigenous people of their masculine vigour and gave them little incentive to work. For Carrington and Scott (2008) “men's sense of masculine identity is defined through work, especially in rural contexts” (p. 655). Nonetheless, it has also been argued that the types of work Europeans had been engaged with were disproportionate to the Aboriginal ethos of communality. Aboriginal male figures, despite their cause, are portrayed in literature and media as indolent and emasculated. This fact accounts for Butler's argument in which men enact their masculinities in relation to the norm. Here, the norm is Australian context with all its white hegemonic ideologies and because Indigenous men are unable to fit into an unjust white system, they become marginalised and learn to be indolent as a performance of their masculinity as well as an embodiment of the norm. When Dolly tells Roy “if you weren't so bloody bone tired we'd get a good 'ouse an' good furniture” (p. 10) she is actually taking issue with Roy's indolence and sloth. One must be mindful of the fact, however, that we are not claiming that Indigenous men are indolent nowadays. Our positionality only accounts for Davis' play as a work of literature in a period in which it was committed to paper.

### THE DREAMERS, CRIME, IMPRISONMENT AND MASCULINITY

In *The Dreamers*, crime and imprisonment have been shown to be the integral parts of Indigenous lifestyle. The men's discussion at home mostly revolves around doing time in jail



or committing crimes. The male characters each has spent some time in jail for one thing or another. Even Auntie Rose's boys did their time. ("Zak got moved to Pardellup and Reggy was out on parole but he broke it and now he's back in again") (Davis 1982, p. 34). Often, the male characters see imprisonment and crime as objects of ridicule and speak about them jokingly:

Eli: [miming handcuffs] I thought you was woonana. [behind bar].  
Peter: was you afraid I mighta 'ad your favorite cell?  
Eli: [laughing] which one's that?  
Roy: he's got his name scratched in all of 'em. (p.12)

Elsewhere, Eli, in an objectionable manner, takes the conditions of the prison much better than those of their home:

Eli: [Shouting] Freeo? What's wrong with Fremantle Gaol?  
Peter: what's wrong with it?  
Eli: you git three meals a day and a hot shower. Not like this place.  
Roy: ay, an' how you gunna git on for a drink?  
Eli: Yuh can git a boot polish cocktail now and again. (p.17)

In a different manner, when Shane asks about Peter's condition in jail, Dolly responds that "he's all right...he's getting fat" (p. 49).

The enactment of Indigenous masculinity in places such as prison is another means of building and subsequently performing an identity. For Comack (2008), "Prison is described as a gendered space in which violence is a systemic feature, and the pressures for men to "do" masculinity in violent ways are even more pronounced (p. 7). When for the characters such as Eli and Peter, prison becomes a laughing stock, it means that they have accustomed to being in prison and this act has been so many times repeated and recited, as Butler would argue, that becomes a part of their identity as well as a performance of gender.

Messerschmidt (1993) has argued that crimes can be considered as 'resources' for accomplishing masculinity when other forms of expression are limited. For example, men experiencing powerlessness in the labour market may choose violence as a means to express what they perceive to be an 'authentic' and legitimised form of masculinity. Violence may also be a means of momentarily reversing structural subordinations of masculinity (as cited in Carrington & Scott 2008, p. 657).

### THE DREAMERS AND THE CRISIS OF ALCOHOL

According to a large body of research carried out throughout different periods and in different regions of Australia, the description 'drunken' has been the most common Aboriginal stereotypes employed by white Australians.<sup>1</sup> The findings exceed a point in which Aboriginal alcohol abuse is considered to be a crisis both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of Australia (Larsen 1979, p.143).

Wilson et al. (2010) stated:

"Aboriginals acquired a taste for alcohol, thus suited European colonists who reportedly used alcohol as a means of exchange for sex or labour with Aborigines... As a response to the devastating effects of colonialism, including dispossession, and illness and death resulting from disease and confrontation, alcohol became somewhat of a panacea for Aboriginal people's pain, with many using it as a means of escape and solace". (p. 7)

This reliance on alcohol is detrimental to the survival of Aboriginal culture in various communities. In the case of *The Dreamers*, Davis vividly portrays the issues of alcohol

ensnaring the Aboriginal family in its trap. All the male characters, more or less, abuse alcohol. In fact, Worru, the elder of the family, had been hospitalised due to some alcohol-related disease and when he is dismissed, he resumes drinking alcohol. Whatever money they receive from the Social Welfare Service along with the money Eli receives from soliciting from people is lavishly spent on alcohol:

Shane: you better wait until they get home.  
Meena: they'll be drunk anyway.  
Shane: Yea, Social Service cheques today. (p. 49)

One may suggest that the removal of Aboriginal peoples' identity and culture led to overwhelming alcohol consumption and non-economic participation, however, the opposite can also be true, that is, overwhelming alcohol consumption can lead to identity loss for Aboriginal people. On that account, Hudson (2011) stated:

"The absence of a real economy and appropriate controls on alcohol has created social environments where welfare payments are spent on alcohol and heavy drinking has become endemic." (p. 7)

Garrison and Dean (1984) in a related study argued that alcohol consumption was a culturally related factor and since Aboriginal people were introduced to alcohol with the settler's arrival, it was difficult for them to have control over its use (pp. 4-5). For Kahn (1982), however, "alcohol intoxication may substitute for traditional spiritual experience" (p. 45). The excessive use of alcohol by the Aboriginal people also created health problems. As the family money was used to buy alcohol, the chance that children would not get enough healthy food was high. A case in point is when Dolly goes out of the house to bring Worru back from the hospital and runs some other errands. She gives Roy some money for the kid's lunch when they are back. The money, however, is all spent on alcohol and the kids survive on a piece of pie. Dolly is the only character who scolds others for drinking and wasting their money although she sometimes accompanies Roy in his drinking and wears off the exhaustion of her daily life thus.

Whether to put the blame on the exploitation and hold the Europeans accountable for the Aborigine's drinking problem or regard drinking alcohol as a substitute for the Aborigines lost rituals and shattered identities, one thing is certain and that is the fact that alcoholic beverages have completely changed Indigenous lifestyles and gender identity and therefore brought about new problems within society, namely, the crisis of masculinity.

Kathryn Elizabeth Foy (1999) tops it off when she describes the characters in *The Dreamers* as a group of "lovable no-hopers, permanently unemployed, fringe-dwellers, and slaves to alcohol" (p. 218). That being said, Indigenous men's unemployment as has been shown in *The Dreamers* leads to committing violence and crime and the consumption of alcohol; either way strengthens the notion that Indigenous men are emasculated and thus in deep crisis.

Davis's discourse of alcoholism and his portrayal of Indigenous alcohol consumption is another way of challenging such stereotypes. Alcohol, as a means of colonialism has been introduced to the Aboriginal people in order to oppress them. As has previously been mentioned, Aboriginal people's problems with alcohol began with invasion. Presenting drunk Indigenous characters on the stage, Davis challenged the dominant stereotypes that Aboriginal people are drunk, idle, lazy and thus good for nothing. The fact is that, contrary to the public opinion, fewer Aboriginal people drink alcohol than non-Aboriginal people do. The emphasis on Aboriginal people's alcohol consumption is just adding fuel to the fire. White settlers have begun to spark a crisis and now it is about time Aboriginal people fought back and directed the root cause of their crisis to dominant ideologies of white settlers.

The crisis from without, again, is conducive to the loss of identity and hallucinations as instances of the crisis from within. The latter case is evident in the character of Uncle Worru, the eldest of the family, who keeps telling stories about Dreamtime and talking about Milbart, his dead Aboriginal friend, thinking he is still alive. (“Milbart, Milbart, Milbart, gidjti wah [do you have a spear], Milbart. Make a spear. I wanna catch a kulkana [mullet]”) (p. 34). As a custodian of Aboriginal culture, Uncle Worru is portrayed as a helpless old man, on the verge of dying whose desperate cry for help remains unanswered. In other words, he struggles to overcome his crisis in an era where his younger generation wrestles with a deeper crisis of masculinity. Showing that Aboriginal men, according to Edwards’s definition of the crisis of masculinity, reveal tendencies which are accountable for their masculinity crisis, in the following, we turn to the issue of Indigenous women and the ways in which their femininity has been signified and embodied in the post contact era.

### *THE DREAMERS AND FEMININE MASCULINITY*

While the terms ‘feminine masculinities’ and ‘female masculinities’ are sometimes interchangeably used, Caludia Breger (2005) prefers the former to the latter. For Berger, the term ‘feminine masculinities’ highlights the notion of gender performance and does away with the question of anatomy. She contends that ‘feminine masculinities’ refers to “configurations of gender identification and performance that are constituted through the combination of elements commonly associated with masculinity and elements commonly associated with femininity. In today's language it might correspond to something like "partial" rather than complete transgender identifications” (Berger 2005, p. 82). Halberstam (1998), however, proposes that female masculinity, by virtue of its non-normative embodiment can be a sort of gender practice which successfully challenges the hegemonic model of gender conformity (pp. 32-33).

The coexistence of both masculinity and femininity as a sign of performativity is conspicuous among Indigenous women.

One might posit that the authority of men has been shifted and fallen into the hands of Indigenous women. Konishi (2011) takes the loss of Aboriginal male authority both in the family and society alike as the result of colonisation and expropriation of Aboriginal land (p. 174). Also, Jan Hammill (2001) ascribes the dysfunction of Aboriginal men as individuals within the sphere of family and community to “the malice of the created environment, one bereft of the benefits and guidance of traditional law-makers and cultural role models” (p. 21).

When society engenders the position of Aboriginal male figures to the point of emasculation, it is the duty of female figures to stand out and appear as the heart and soul of their communities. Along similar lines, Kim Anderson (2000) agrees, “the division between genders in native traditions is more reflective of the need for balance, complementarity, and reciprocity” (p. 50).

The female figures in the play, Dolly and Meena, are the only characters handling the household chores as well as running errands that keep the family together. They are responsible, clever, and caring and, eventually, they possess the strength of their Indigenous community. Without them, the family bond would be easily broken. Despite the spiritual and emotional sides, Dolly manages the economy as well. When Meena asks her for some money, she says “I’ll give you a dollar, it’s all I got to spare. Gotta buy tucker, can’t depend on your father to bring anything home” (Davis 1982, p. 55). Dolly also manages other member’s money every time the Social Welfare Check arrives at the end of each month. To Roy and Eli

after taking their money away “that’s rent and tucker for the next couple weeks anyways” (p. 60).

This very concept does not imply that Western gender stereotypes are no longer performed within Aboriginal communities, but rather it suggests that women shoulder more responsibilities, aside from being the angel of the house, they handle works generally attributed to men. Meena as a girl is responsible for cleaning the house and doing the laundry while Shane spends his days playing soccer:

Shane: did you wash my footy shorts?  
Meena: yea  
Shane: where are they?  
Meena: here (p. 48)

Dolly’s hands-on experience about Indigenous men as well as life has made her, first, care about money among other things. Somewhere Dolly materialises Meena’s choice of her boyfriends by saying that:

Dolly: why don’t you get yourself a decent boyfriend like Robert?  
Meena: Aw Mum, he’s my cousin.  
Dolly: I know that but somebody like him. he’s gotta good job, nice car.  
Meena: what’s wrong with Ross’s car? he’s got a V8 panelvan and he’s done it up real nice, got an airconditioner, stereo, bed, and....and....  
Dolly: yea, I bet he has. You make sure you’re home by ten o’clock. (Davis 1982, p.52)

Another reason for the Indigenous feminine masculinity could be the symbolic missing of fathers. Prison, drug, alcohol, illness, and unemployment which result in traveling to other places (in search of jobs for example) are all reasons for the fathers not to be mentally, spiritually and sometimes physically present in the family. Bollen, Kiernander, and Parr (2008) posit that “The absence of the father and husband throws a spotlight on the role of motherhood within Indigenous society, and celebrates the work of women in ensuring survival, at least in a material sense, as the mothers cook, clean and keep house for their families”(p. 79). Eli and Peter are the two characters who live in the same house without us knowing about their parents. The absence of their fathers and mothers, for that matter, aggravates their crisis and magnifies the roles of Dolly as a provider and nurturer. Similarly, as is evident in the history of Indigenous Australian people, histories of child removal and institutionalization meant that some removed Aboriginal people had little experience of parental figures, which in turn impacted on their own parenting style.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper was an attempt to use sociological studies of Aboriginal gender relations and masculinity to analyse *The Dreamers*, and not analyse the play as evidence of the Aboriginal ‘crisis of masculinity.’ The study of Indigenous masculinities helps us understand the ways in which Indigenous men perform their identities and learn how Indigenous men strive to prevail over the negative empowering masculinities that have engulfed them. It also clarifies the degree to which Indigenous men adopted and adapted the western heteronormative conception of maleness leading to their own oppression. In like manner, Judith Butler’s performative notion of gender assists us to understand gender as something that is taught to us and is continuously being shaped by society’s expectations. It accurately justifies the shift in behaviour and identity of Indigenous people in the post-contact era and shatters the traditional notion that masculinity is assigned to men and femininity to women.

In other words, masculinity and femininity have multiple and ambiguous meanings that alter according to time and context.

Given that masculinity is diverse and fluid in nature, the identification of a new form of masculinity for the Aboriginal men in the post-contact era is not out of ordinary. Furthermore, the main conclusion to be drawn is that Indigenous men, according to Tim Edwards's categorization of the crisis of masculinity, in the decades of 1980s in Western Australia as Davis realistically depicted, are in deep crisis. Lack of experience and education, oppression at the hands of non-Indigenous people, and colonialism, in general, have left Aboriginal male characters with no jobs and no prospects. As a result, they either become indolent or perpetrate crime and end up spending time in jail. Other factors like drinking alcohol have also exacerbated Indigenous men's situations and sparked off their crisis. In the meantime, Performing acts and rituals are one strategy available to defend men's positioning in traditional fields of masculinity under threat (like Uncle Worru's dreamtime stories and dances).

Indigenous women, on the other hands, have managed to perform their gender roles successfully and maintain the balance existed between men and women in the pre-contact era. They are strong Indigenous women (Dolly, for instance) who not only are responsible caring mothers and wives, they also complemented their emasculated husbands by acquiring a tinge of masculinity.

Given that common masculine tropes have transformed in the last couple of decades, it is safe to maintain that our conviction in this paper is neither to be racist nor to universalise Aboriginal men. What we have hoped to achieve was to treat Davis's play as a work of literature and depict Indigenous gender character roles in the time period and context where the script was written and then performed.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, M.W, Hunter, E. Heather N, and Tebbutt J. in 1990 published a review entitled "Australian Aborigines and Alcohol." In it, they argue that the amount of alcohol abuse varies substantially based on the geographical location, Indigenous community type, and their accessibility to liquor. All the same, Healy, B, Turpin T, & Hamilton, M. (1985) pointed out "there appears to be a national consensus that excessive consumption of alcohol is widespread among Aborigines and, furthermore, that its consequences are destructive of individuals, groups and even of their entire culture" (p. 200). Therefore, to avoid reinforcing popular stereotypes concerning Aboriginal drinking status, this study takes into account the drinking problem in the decades of 1980s in Western Australia where Davis committed *The Dreamers* to paper.

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