



## **SELF EMPOWERMENT OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN AGAINST WHITE HIERARCHY IN *WOMEN OF THE SUN* BY HYLLUS MARIS AND SONIA BORG**

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### **Abstract**

This research is an analysis of novel *Women of The Sun* by Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg (1985). The design of this research is qualitative content analysis. The analysis discusses the events that occurred before, after, during the arrival of whites in Australia and the monopolization of aboriginal tribes' native territories also the oppression from white experienced by Aboriginal Women. It contributes to the analyzing process by aiding in the meaning's revelation. This study's data is based on women agency theory within feminism theory, which examines women and the acts of aboriginal people that come from the analysis, specifically women's empowerment against white. The purposes of this analysis are to show oppressions experienced by the Aboriginal female characters in the novel *Women of the Sun* and to show how the Aboriginal female characters in the novel *Women of The Sun* empower themselves to face the oppression imposed on them.

**Key words:** Oppression, Hierarchy, Self-Empowerment, Aboriginal Women

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Jebb (1992) stated, since the inception of European colonization, gendered racism has been notably visible in the sexual and physical dominance of Aboriginal women in particular. Huggins J (1994) added, Aboriginal women were not supported by white women, who were frequently more harsh bosses than their husbands, inflicting horrific punishment on Aboriginal women in domestic service. In truth, the white people had power and throne so that the aboriginal tribes lost and then submitted to the white people. Moreton-Robinson (2013:331) stated that Whiteness is a form of dominance in a hierarchy of oppression officially declared in Australia through the declaration of *terra nullius* and the subsequent

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appropriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereign lands in 1770. Bhopal (2004:441) gives some context for the phrase when discussing race, the word (White) is typically used to designate persons of European ancestry whose identify or are recognized as White.

The book utilized in this research, *Women of the Sun*, by Borg & Maris, 1985. In the afterword, they note that it is a permanent reprint of their original television miniseries from the 1980s in order to maintain the rising interest in the Aboriginal concerns raised in the book. The original television mini-series was immensely popular in Australia at the time and won numerous national and international awards for highlighting the plight of Australian Aborigines who had to deal with prejudice and racial discrimination as well as their struggle ever since white men had invaded their country. The author utilizes the 1985 first printing of the book by Penguin Books, Australia. Five chapters, each telling the tale of one of five separate Australian Aboriginal female main characters and their struggles for their native identity throughout colonization in Australia, make up the 175 page novel that the writers wrote. Each of these prominent Australian Aboriginal women is set in one of the five distinct periods of white male hierarchy, which began with the first white invasion of the Australian continent in the 1700s and continued through the period of white male hierarchy and into the contemporary years of white male hierarchy in the 1980s. Empowerment may also be seen as a result since it can be evaluated in relation to anticipated results. But because the former is more precise and analytical than the latter quality, the process may be more educational than the result.

Despite these claims, the majority of empowerment studies have emphasized results. Both in their book, (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) also (Darlington et al., 2005) claimed the empowering process or path has been the subject of certain research, although their findings were more applicable to the final result than to the ongoing process itself. Empowerment's goal was to "improve people's ability to manage their own lives". The term "empowerment" refers to a multifaceted notion that incorporates socio-ecological, educational, psychological, social learning, and many other ideas (Rappaport, 1981). It has several uses, and its methods may be applied to draw attention to and solve issues including social exclusion, marginalization, and equality as well as power dynamics". Despite this, the term "empowerment" is frequently misused, and in Australia, its use is frequently defined in terms of the dominant culture. It can be shown that the phrase empowerment has origins in the women's and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as in the "self-help" and "social action" ideologies. Literally, the word "empowerment" implies "growing in power." But it is impossible to use both theory and procedure in social work. It is a theory "concerning how individuals may attain collective control over their lives, in order to further their interests as a group and a means through which social workers aim to increase the power of those who lack it (Thomas, 2014)

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

Data of this study is taken from *Women of The Sun* which consist of sentences or utterances that showing the women's self-empowerment against white

hierarchy. The design of this research is qualitative content analysis. This critique also touches on the idea of feminism by Bell Hooks. The data of this study also related to the women agency theory by Lois McNay which discusses women and the actions of the aboriginal people which get the results of the analysis of oppressions experienced by Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women's self-empowerment against white people from the novel *Women of The Sun* by Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg (1985).

## C. DISCUSSION

The first analysis discusses the types of oppressions experienced by the Aboriginal female characters in the novel *Women of the Sun*, and the second analysis discusses how the Aboriginal female characters in the novel *Women of the Sun* empower themselves to overcome the oppression imposed on them. The second analysis is divided into three chapters: the first discusses how aboriginal women empower themselves in education, the second discusses how aboriginal women empower themselves in career, and the last chapter explains how aboriginal women empower themselves at home (raising their children).

The story depicts the fight of indigenous women for equal rights in their homeland. The story features the voices of aboriginal women who desire to be recognized for their presence. Towradgi, Alinta, Maydina, Nerida, and lastly Lo-Arna are the five Aboriginal female characters in the novel *Women of the Sun*. And each character has their own experience and tale that depicts how the battle of Aboriginal women in protecting their homeland, battling white people, by fighting them via the rising of Aboriginal women, especially to educate their children and make them equal to white people. It is also said in the character of Lo-Arna that aboriginal women would not forget their country even if they travel and do not dwell in their homeland.

### 1. Oppression experienced by Aboriginal Women as the result of White Hierarchy

#### 1.1 Exploitation

Exploitation included in one form of oppression. Power has recently been viewed as shared since it may truly grow stronger when shared with others. According to Kreisberg (1992), it is a process since it evolves across space and time, is flexible, and is frequently unpredictable. The first time white people arrived in Australia and met with Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal people were already unhappy with the presence of the white people and even disturbed by the arrival of the white people because the arrival of the white people by calling them "hunter" meant it would only destroy their God, which at the time was the nature around the Aboriginal settlers such as trees, stone, and air.

“Joala felt a surge of anger; his face became darker as the blood rushed to his cheeks, his eyes flared: 'Gub'mint took all the land.' He flung his arm wide.

"Took all this!" Joala looked at her; he had no grudge against her. She had been good to him and to his little son, but he said stubbornly: This is my mother's country; so it's mine, too..." (P.78)

Then the white people showed their power making the Aboriginal women feel frightened and think about leaving their area, but they were forced to obey the rules that had been made by the white people and they did not want to break them because if they broke them then they had betrayed their God also their spirit. And despite their attempts to flee their area, they were unable to do so, and they attempted to remain in the area of their homeland despite the fact that the whites had colonized by force and even tried so that the Aboriginal people there could not escape and resist the white people, making them feel unsafe in their homeland. It demonstrated that feminists who were black, non-Anglo, and from Third World nations contested the notion that gender discrimination was inescapably the root of all injustice. They argued that racism, colonialism, and issues of race and ethnicity had an equal impact on the lives of women.

## 1.2 Cultural Imperialism

To experience cultural imperialism is to witness how a society's dominant meanings render one's own group's distinctive perspective invisible while stereotyping and labeling one's own group as other. These preconceptions determine what they can and cannot be, reducing oppressed people to a mass of others with no distinct identities. One of them is by 'Whitening.'

According to Arnado (2021), 'Whitening' is a postcolonial phenomenon that emerged from internalised colonialism, manifested in fascination with whiteness as an embodiment of power and status. The Whites spread the teachings of Christianity and changed their names to western names, so that there were no more names of the original names of the Aboriginal people that were characteristic of the Aboriginal people, so that Australians appeared to come from white nations, but the indigenous people of Australia were Aboriginal people.

"She learnt that his name was Jesus, that he was seated on a golden chair in a place called Heaven, waiting for all those who suffered. She went to the prayer meetings like the others, twice a day, and she began to enjoy the communal singing. She did not see much of Biri in the day; Mrs McPhee looked after her and the boy called Johnny. She taught the children to read and write, and she told them. stories from a book she called the Bible and which she handled with great reverence. She also made them do small chores, such as weeding, dusting, sweeping." (P.61-62)

One form of oppression, such as the quotation above, is contrary to the feminist theory. Feminism has been and continues to be a resistance movement which valorizes spiritual practice. It is to change how we worship then it was necessary to re-envision spirituality. Feminist critiques of patriarchal religion coincided with an overall cultural shift towards new age spirituality. Within new age spiritual circles practitioners were turning away from the fundamentalist

Christian thought that had for centuries dominated Western psyches and looking towards the East for answers, for different spiritual traditions. Truly, there can be no feminist transformation of our culture without a transformation in our religious beliefs.

### 1.3 Violence

Violence is undoubtedly the most blatant and evident type of oppression, with all sorts of sexual assault and hate crimes being common examples. Aboriginal women find it difficult to develop a unique "voice". They are creating their own theoretical framework for interpreting their circumstances.

To rescue her kid, Maydina, who was also an Aboriginal woman at the time, opted to stay even though in the end the white people did what they liked, which oppressed her, even though she had run away, and she felt unwilling to leave her motherland. She was also terrified that the white would discover her and torture her, and she didn't want to show her opposition because she was afraid that her son would be harmed, and the white would torment her much more. This demonstrates that Aboriginal women at the time lacked the ability to fight and were forced to accept any treatment they received from white people.

“Many times she and Takari had talked about escape, but had not dared to take the actual step. Their own lands were far away, they were now living in the land of another nation and were here without permission of those who had looked after it according to the Law. The spirits would be angry and might punish them if they walked through the bush. And even if the spirits understood their plight, there were white men who would capture them- men just as bad as, perhaps worse than, Alf and Joe. She was full of fear: now that she had decided that the child would live she thought that Alf might kill it. She wondered if she should have run away. But she would not have got very far: she was exhausted and it would be easy for Alf to catch up with her and murder both of them.” (P.48)

This following quote as proof that the whites maintain their selfishness by sticking to their desire to rule Australia. The Aboriginal stand against discrimination from white hierarchies shows that their dream was of replacing that culture of domination with a world of participatory economics grounded in communalism and social democracy, a world without discrimination based on race or gender, a world where recognition of mutuality and interdependency would be the dominant ethos, a global ecological vision of how the planet can survive and how everyone on it can have access to peace and well-being.

The oppression and violence perpetrated by whites against Aborigines was also caused by Aborigines refusing to have their identities removed and their territories seized by whites, so they fought whites. However, because they lack strength and they have no power, the Aborigines are easily defeated and killed by white on a large scale.

## 2. Self-Empowerment of Aboriginal Women Against White Hierarchy

Women's empowerment or independency especially for Indigenous Women from a Tribe that mostly has a stereotype as "An Oppression women", being a Slave who were treated arbitrarily by those who had the power which at that time was always held by the white. And that also it is not always women who are considered weak and belittled do not show strength, enthusiasm to rise up, and show that they are actually equal to white women depicted in the novel's characters.

### 2.1 In Education

Towradgi was a teacher who could be considered a women's leader at the time, tutoring women and teaching many things about life and the resilience that Aboriginal women should have to endure and realize that they can rise from their weaknesses and do things that women can do but mostly men did at the time. She is also a woman who follows the idea of respecting and caring for the environment and its surroundings.

"They were Towradgi's pupils. As they grew up they would learn from her many things: the use of herbs to cure pain and to heal wounds, to assist in childbirth, or to prevent conception They would learn self- discipline, and the codes of conduct by which the people lived. They would learn about the mystery of creation, and their place in it. How much knowledge was given would depend on their ability to understand." (P.1-2)

Nerrida learnt from her mother, Ivy, that whites discriminated against and alienated Aboriginal women. Her mother was always herself and was never swayed or influenced by white people, and she was not scared of anything that might happen to her, and she preserved the cultural values that made her unique, and she had pride that had been created and became the only thing Aboriginal women could protect. The complexity of social influence, however, means that one's capacity for self-definition is not simply a function of belonging to one empowered or disempowered group. As subjects with a range of attributes that are assigned innumerable meanings in a particular culture, our ability to define ourselves in positive and authorizing ways may be assisted by some of these meanings and undermined by others.

"That was the most important thing in life: to love each other. In the days when Granny Johnston had still talked now and then, she had told the others that it didn't matter whether you were black, white or brindle, you had to love one another. She hadn't really had too much success with that remark: the people were happy to love other koories, but the whitefellers  
- how the hell could you love them! And they didn't love you back. Not that you would have wanted their love, anyway.

Still, the feeling of love and trust and affection among the people on the site - that was quite evident. That's what made it possible to live here, despite the rain and the wind and the cold in winter,

And granny Johnston also stated that the most important thing in life is that we love and respect one another, even though white people had committed crimes against the Aborigines at the time, the Aborigines should not be divided and should still care for and love one another. Most people have no understanding of the myriad ways feminism has positively changed all our lives. Sharing feminist thought and practice sustains feminist movement. Feminist knowledge is for everybody.

## 2.1 In Career

Maydina lived with a white man, she continued to work and didn't want to rely on her husband at the time, and she worked very hard so she was confident she could live independently, and she didn't want to be a woman who wasn't spoiled, and she was afraid that men, the white man, committed violence against herself and her children. If she does, then she shows her reliance on them. The idea of agency is discussed in relation to debates on globalization and its detraditionalizing effects upon society, including the intensification of levels of reflexivity on the part of the social actor and the emergence of indeterminacy at the level of social action.

“She worked hard; harder than before which had been hard enough. She was afraid to cause any anger because in a fit of temper Alf might bash the baby. She helped skinning seals; she fetched and carried, chopped wood, did everything that was asked of her; she lay with him at night though she hated the stench that came from him, hated his hard cruel hands, hated every fibre of his body. She hated his mind, his spirit.” (P.49)

Alice was separated from her child Lo-Arna because at the time white people were ‘whitening’ Aboriginal women's children and separating them from their mothers, but Uncle the color mother, Alice, had also worked and was trying to support herself and her children, proving that Aboriginal women can work and support their children without having to ask for help or rely on the white nation. A revised understanding of agency has long been the explicit or implicit concern of feminist research devoted to the uncovering of the marginalized experiences of women. These experiences attest to the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities.

“I had to go to work!” She was almost inarticulate. ‘We would have starved!’ Well, at least I didn't shirk my responsibilities - which most of the blokes would have done.’ He sounded like the injured party. ‘I didn't want a child!’ So now it was all her fault. She stood, fists clenched, finding it hard to breathe. She could feel her heart thumping in her breast.

'Look, Alice,' he tried to sound calm and reasonable, "what's past is past, we cannot change what happened.'

'No,' she thought, 'you can never give me back those years I could have had with my daughter...'" (P.155)

Nerrida, a lady who desired to work in her own country at the time, was subjected to one kind of oppression perpetrated by Europeans on Aboriginal women. However, because the homeland was already under white authority, Europeans treated her in an unnatural manner: Aboriginal women were not permitted to work, be employees, or have high-value positions, and were only hired at a low level, such as bookkeepers or maids.

"She began to think of her family, and of all the others who lived at Koomalah, and of those on the other Missions - people she had never seen, She felt surrounded by some great benevolent power, something that connected her with the vast space around her, something that reached beyond the clouds, and the stars behind them." (P.120)

This remark demonstrates that aboriginal women are still willing to fight to maintain themselves without the assistance of white people. They demonstrate the equality experienced by aboriginal women and white women through working. The women agency idea outlined above assists women in demonstrating their ability to make decisions for themselves. In all nations, men and women are frequently separated in many sectors. Both in terms of expressing ideas, in the sphere of education, in the workplace, and even in daily routines.

## 2.1 At Home

Towradgi was pleased to see a family that appeared harmonious and peaceful, there were no quarrels there, and she saw a man who was very devoted to her daughter, whom she brought, her child also appreciated her father, and he also saw that the role of men is very important in a family, which he can protect, guard, and try to fight against things that can damage or hurt their family. It is fundamentally important for women's individual well-being and quality of life. It is useful for efforts that increase the well-being of women and their families as stated in Women Agency Theory.

"She looked for Wonda, and they sat together and furtively watched how Murra unwrapped the presents he had made. Her father looked very pleased. She wondered if Murra would be kind. If she made mistakes, would he punish her? Some of the men were quick to beat their women. If he did, she would run away and come back to her own people. Wonda agreed with her." (P.12)

There is also the meaning in the Towradgi part, Alinta said that a family was not going adequately without a male figure who would be the leader, women were able to survive even though it was tough to live far from their families or



detached from their families, it means that women could not be taken for granted women were also difficult to bother with and very valuable so women were highly valued and could not be taken for granted And there were some women who believed that not having a male role in her life or being away from her family is precisely what makes them strong and capable of defending themselves against threats.

“She had seen a little of the world outside, but the people here were cut off; they didn't know what was going on outside Koomalah. They were like prisoners here, and life was passing them by. Nerida's heart grew heavy; she didn't think she would be able to bear staying here for any length of time, despite her love for her family. Where could she go? What could she do? There was no answer.” (P.100)

And Lo-Arna, who at the time was able to fight and try to be brave against her father, a white man, to meet her biological mother. It demonstrated that Aboriginal women actually had strength and courage but lacked power, so they could be oppressed, but when they have that courage, they can fight and act decisively to get what they want.

“And you want me to go on lying! You are making me feel ashamed of myself! Why should I feel ashamed?” Lo-Arna choked back her own tears.” (P.173)

This shows that Aboriginal women still have extremely high self-esteem and values, demonstrating that despite being discriminated against, Aboriginal women can rise up and fight back against white tyranny one step at a time related to Women's Agency Theory which helps women to demonstrate their ability to make choices for themselves. This helps women to demonstrate their ability to move freely. It is meant that the freedom of women in making their movements to get out of limitations is like getting out of demands to stay at home and now being able to go out looking for their wants and interests.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

In the novel *Women of The Sun* by Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg (1985) reflects the Aboriginal women oppressed by white people, organizations, and communities can control over issues that affect them through their self-empowerment. It can be concluded that there is an oppression There is the subjugation of indigenous women by white people. However, indigenous women could not just give up. They may stand up against injustice and strive to protect their dignity and value as indigenous women. The author also describes their struggles to survive and how, in the end, they were able to fight back, and stand put up in the face of injustice.

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