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The “Mad” Woman in Medea and Decolonial Feminist Revisions: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Three Plays

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The “Mad” Woman in *Medea* and Decolonial Feminist Revisions: An Intersectional Feminist
Analysis of Three Plays

Abstract:

This thesis focuses on *Medea*, the classical Greek play by Euripides that was first produced in 431 B.C., and its feminist, queer, and decolonial revisions in contemporary global contexts. These revisions include *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by Chicana queer feminist author Cherríe Moraga and *Black Medea* by Indigenous Australian playwright Wesley Enoch. Common to these primary texts are themes of Medea's madness and anger, which are tied to the fraught questions of home, nation, and the Other. Each section of this thesis focuses on a different play, analyzing the intersectional feminist politics of Medea's madness across varying sociopolitical and historical contexts. While all the individual sections of this thesis develop a nuanced argument specific to the sociopolitical context of the play, the guiding theme throughout the thesis is that readers must interpret Medea's madness through an intersectional feminist lens. Each section situates the play within its specific historical and geographical context and interprets Medea's madness within that context. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the function of Medea's madness is determined by her marginal, exiled locations as a woman *and* an ethnic Other within the domestic space and the nation-space. Reading the source text and the revisions through an intersectional feminist framework allows the reader to see how Medea must navigate "home" as a gendered, racialized, and/or nationalist space, as well as a discursive construct.

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Introduction

What is it about Euripides' *Medea* that makes it so relevant in the twenty-first century, more than 2,400 years after the famous tragedy first premiered in Athens? The answer is simple: the politics that drive the plot of the play operate across the world, transcending time and geographic location. The play centralizes questions of othering, agency, and marginalization in its exploration of archetypal binaries: Male versus Female, Greek versus Barbarian, and Sanity versus Madness. *Medea* has been adapted in various socio-historic contexts to highlight the politics of marginalization and resistance in multiple contexts in different parts of the world. While othering and resistance always exist institutionally and in social relationships to some extent, the specific forms and tools of oppression are context-dependent. Accordingly, each revision of *Medea* underscores varying political realities and forms of oppression differently, depending on a myriad of intersecting identity politics. Thus, the revisions need to be read through an appropriate contextual lens in order to understand the specific socio-political commentary the play provides, what power structures are at work, and how each playwright's construction of Medea, the female protagonist, is subverting those structures.

My thesis focuses on *Medea*, the classical Greek play by Euripides that was first produced in 431 B.C. and its feminist, queer, and decolonial revisions in contemporary global contexts. These revisions include *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by Chicana queer feminist author Cherríe Moraga and *Black Medea* by Indigenous Australian playwright Wesley Enoch. Common to all of these primary texts are the themes of Medea's madness and anger, which are tied to the fraught questions of home, nation, and the Other. My thesis argues that these themes need to be re-contextualized and interpreted through a transnational feminist lens,

given Medea's intersecting exiled locations as a woman *and* an ethnic Other within the domestic space and the nation-space. Reading the source text and the revisions through an intersectional feminist framework allows the reader to see how Medea must navigate "home" as simultaneously gendered and racialized spaces—as both spatial and discursive constructs. In this Introduction, I contextualize each play within the appropriate scholarly conversations, lay out my methodologies for examining the three plays, and explain why I use the theater as a site of literary criticism.

In Chapter 1 of my thesis, I analyze Euripides' *Medea* through a second-wave feminist lens, drawing on scholarly interpretations of feminine "madness" by Shoshana Felman and Hélène Cixous. Felman explains madness as a product of phallogocentric discourse—the patriarchal discourse's attempt to explain the "incomprehensible" feminine. Cixous theorizes further on feminine madness, positively characterizing "madness" as the only honest form of feminine expression in masculine discursive traditions, which subject women to silence. A "mad" woman, for both Cixous and Felman, is simply a woman who is not silent. Both second-wave feminist scholars interpret the "madness" of women as a form of resistance to the oppressive patriarchal structures that they operate within; I apply this framework to my reading of Euripides' *Medea*.

Second-wave feminist scholars have used psychoanalytic frameworks to re-examine patriarchal scripts of the woman-as-Other and re-contextualize women's expression of madness as transgressive feminine language. However, second-wave feminist theories are based on a conception of the "woman" as a singular, homogeneous, and universal category. In effect, this theoretical framework excludes women who experience and resist marginalization along the multiple, intersecting axes of gender, race, nation, sexuality, class, and more. Through

intersectional feminist readings of *Medea* and its revisions, my thesis seeks to reconceptualize women's madness as resistance to hetero-masculinist nationalist scripts of the woman-as-Other and the foreigner-as-Other. I nuance the frameworks of Felman and Cixous by providing an intersectional feminist analysis of Medea's madness in Euripides' play; after doing so, I transition into the intersectional feminist politics of Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* and Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea*. Moraga's and Enoch's revisions, written from the playwrights' settler colonial contexts in the U.S. and Australia respectively, intentionally highlight Medea's multiple, intersecting marginal identities as female, ethnic, and/or the queer Other. In effect, each of these revisions opens up an interpretive space that allows the audience to recognize her resistance through an intersectional feminist lens.

The historical context for Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1995) is the 1960s' Chicano nationalist movement. The Chicano movement drew attention to systemic racism against Mexican Americans while seeking a collective racial identity through the *Plan de Aztlán*—the Mexican American community's right to return to their original homeland in the southwest territory of the U.S., described as Aztlán in pre-Columbian Aztec mythologies. Moraga's play is set in a post-apocalyptic future where the Chicano homeland of Aztlán is a reality; however, women continue to be marginalized and there is no space for queer people within this homeland. As a result, Medea, a queer Chicana, is evicted from the hetero-patriarchal nation-space of Aztlán. Moraga develops a decolonial, intersectional feminist critique in her essay "Queer Aztlán" by discussing the Chicano nationalist movement's imagined nation-space. In Moraga's critique, the idealized Chicano nation of Aztlán becomes an enactment of what Emma Pérez would call a "decolonial imaginary," a subaltern nation-space that is re-enacting politics of oppression in its retaliation against colonial U.S. structures. I examine Moraga's

cultural production and scholarships in dialogue with other decolonial feminist scholarships, including those of Emma Pérez, Chela Sandoval, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Each scholar makes a difference intervention within the shared theoretical framework of U.S. Third World feminisms.

First, Chela Sandoval offers a framework for “differential consciousness” in response to mainstream feminism’s—that is, white feminism’s—exclusion of women of color from conversations about oppression. Differential consciousness nuances conversations about the oppression of women along the axes of race and nation, as well as gender (2). Second, Mohanty proposes a transnational feminist framework, or “feminism without borders,” stating that the “borders” between nations, sexualities, races, and other intersecting identities are real (2). She argues that feminism is shaped by the “conflicts” and “differences” determined by different women’s racial and national locations (2). Third, Perez presents another framework for Third World feminist resistance: the decolonial imaginary. Perez argues that colonialist and nationalist historiographies have shaped Chicano nationalism (4), and thus proposes a “decolonial imaginary” to create a space for the Chicanas who have been excluded (7). The construction of a nation inevitably reinforces marginalization and the oppression of gendered and racial Others because the idea of a nation is intrinsically built on a homogenized gendered and racial identity (5). Moraga writes from a similar tradition of Third World feminism and anti-U.S. colonialism in her essay, “Queer Aztlán.” Moraga argues that women and queer communities, in addition to Mexican Americans as a people, have been subjugated, and the Chicano movement cannot be fully anti-colonial until it rids itself of its internalized colonial ideologies of gender and sexual oppression (227). Sandoval, Mohanty, Perez, and Moraga all focus on the intersectional nature of Third World feminism, but propose different frameworks for describing and responding to the

oppression of women in U.S. colonial structures. I situate my analysis of Moraga's play within these frameworks.

The third revision of *Medea* that I discuss, Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* (2005), contextualizes Medea's experience of domestic violence and act of infanticide against the backdrop of her exile from her Aboriginal home and exploitation within an urban, white, capitalist culture in Australia. Unlike Moraga who writes within the U.S. settler colonial context, Enoch situates his play within the Australian settler colonial context. Australia was first colonized by the British Empire in the eighteenth century. Relations between the British colonizers and the Indigenous peoples of Australia went from hospitable to hostile as the Indigenous peoples realized the British colonizers threatened their way of life with the ongoing seizure of Indigenous lands and resources. Succeeding generations of white Australians expected the Indigenous peoples either to die out or assimilate into white corporate Australia. Indigenous Australians were faced with combatting the idea that their way of life and their people are no longer suited to modern Australia. Enoch responds to this traditional, oppressive ideology by arguing for Indigenous Australians' political and cultural autonomy as people who will not conveniently die out nor subject themselves to erasure.

To underscore Enoch's political point, I put his play in dialogue with scholars who explain the modern plight of Indigenous Australian men and women, including Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie, Enoch himself, and Celeste Liddle. Casey and Craigie contextualize Enoch's cultural production within the tradition of Indigenous Australian theater, describing the theater as a site where Indigenous Australians can claim their identities and provide their own representation on stage. This act of resistance directly defies the white, colonial idea that Indigenous Australians are disappearing and have no place in the modern world. Last, Enoch

explains the utility of theater for Indigenous peoples, arguing that the theater provides a site for Australians to remember their histories, claim their rights to Australian land, and—most importantly—assert the legitimacy of their existence as Indigenous individuals in modern Australia.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that Medea's marginalized position in Enoch's play is compounded by both race and gender in white, colonial, patriarchal Australia. I draw on Indigenous feminist scholar, Celeste Liddle, to understand how gender operates in Indigenous Australian communities. Liddle explains that Indigenous Australian women are often caught in the crossfires of a colonial battle; they are faced with the threat of Indigenous erasure by the white colonizers and frequently suppressed by other Indigenous men. Indigenous women are ultimately faced with the predicament of fighting to preserve their ethnic group's collective identity *and* asserting their agency within their Indigenous communities. I read *Black Medea* and interpret Medea's madness against the backdrops of Australian colonialism and Indigenous Australian feminism.

Each cultural production comes from a different theatrical and cultural tradition and responds to different processes of racial and gendered Othering. Thus, it is necessary interpret each production through a culturally-specific lens and to interpret Medea's madness as decolonial and anti-nationalist feminist resistance. The methodology guiding my analyses is intersectional feminism: the idea that gendered oppression overlaps with other forms of social oppression and identity to create a unique experience of oppression. In each section, the context of the intersectional feminist lens changes to fit the social institutions to which the play is responding—namely, the different notions of nation, gender, and race operating in each play. In Euripides' play, Medea's madness results from her marginalized status as a woman and as a

“barbarian” within the Greek nation-space. On the other hand, I examine Medea’s madness in Moraga’s play as a product of her marginalization as feminine and sexual Other within U.S. colonial structures and the imagined Chicano nation-space. Finally, in Enoch’s *Black Medea*, Medea’s madness must be read as a means of resisting the double subjugation of Indigenous women within Aboriginal communities and the erasure of Indigenous peoples in white, colonial Australia. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge how the space of the theater in Euripides’ and Enoch’s texts helps Medea resist and claim her space as feminine and foreign Other across radically different historical and colonial contexts.

Why is the theater used as a site of feminist praxis? The theater has long been dominated by patriarchal discourse, literally enacting the “male gaze” on stage. This is evident through women’s absence in the theater in the classical Greek tradition—both in its production and on stage. Ideas of gender have always been created and reinforced through theater, as actors are literally “acting out” a gender. In the Greek tradition, women were depicted even though women had no part in creating plays or in the representation of their own gender on stage. Sue Ellen Case observes that, in the theater, male playwrights and male actors often created a notion of femininity that suppressed women’s voices: “the culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was this fictional ‘Woman’ who appeared on stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings, and fantasies of actual women” (7). Nowhere is this statement of women’s suppression more self-evident in Greek theatrical traditions than in the absence of women on stage: “Within theater practice, the clearest illustration of this division is in the tradition of the all-male stage. ‘Woman’ was played by male actors in drag, while real women were banned from the stage. This practice reveals the fictionality of patriarchy’s representation of the gender” (Case

7). As these historical observations suggest, the theater is useful as a site of feminist critique because it demonstrates a culture's conception, construction, and ultimately, suppression of gender. Reading theater through a feminist framework allows the audience to observe how gender is being created on stage, making women and their systemic oppression visible.

Moreover, the concept of becoming visible can be applied not only to women in patriarchal discursive traditions, but also to marginalized racial Others in colonial discursive traditions. In white colonial traditions, when people of color are depicted in theater, "the discourse is necessarily distanced from the actual experience which shape [the position of people of color]" (Case 95). People of color, notably women of color, are not representing themselves, but are being spoken for by their oppressors. This kind of ventriloquism creates and reinforces racial stereotypes in the theater, which "serve to bolster the privileges of class" (95) for white people in colonial structures. It is important to stay aware of the replication of racial or ethnic stereotypes in order to observe how the racial Other is being rendered invisible. These politics are at work in Euripides' *Medea*, who writes a "barbarian," non-Greek female character into his play. It is important to remember that, for authors such as Euripides, their construction of a racial Other is written from a

Distance [that] is not an objective distance, but one which reflects a perspective of racial and class privilege. The white author cannot write from the experience of racial oppression, or from the perspective of the ethnic community, and must thus omit a sense of the internal composition of such a community or of its interface with the dominant white culture (Case 95).

As Case argues above, when a person of the dominant culture tries to write about or from the perspective of someone from a marginalized group, they can never fully represent that

community and the marginalization it experiences. On the other hand, members of a marginalized community, such as Moraga and Enoch, can speak more honestly about the “internal composition” of that community. It is equally important to understand how reclaiming the theater and constructing an image of one’s own racial group is effective, which is true for both Moraga and Enoch who use the theater to claim a voice and represent their communities.

Thus, I examine the theater’s utility in reinforcing or resisting toxic constructs of gender, race, and sexuality. Medea’s performance of “madness” on stage is loaded with racial, gendered, and/or sexualized imagery in all three plays across different historical and geopolitical contexts. My analysis of her madness consequently offers readers a more nuanced, intersectional feminist understanding of the truly archetypal significance of Medea, a woman who, like Helen, continually embodies the condition of being a female Other in both Western and non-Western cultures.

Chapter 1

The “Mad” Woman in Euripides’ *Medea*: Subverting Greek Patriarchy and “Nationalism”

Medea’s madness—solidified by her behavior, the murder of her children, and the treatment of other characters—stresses the intersections of identity politics in Euripides’ acclaimed Greek tragedy. Multiple scholars, dramatists, and producers provided political readings of *Medea* and critiqued the institutions that marginalize her, but few have analyzed specifically how Medea’s madness in Euripides’ play also allows her to subvert the hetero-patriarchal discourses that systematically disempower her. In this chapter, I explain how Medea comes to be understood as mad through her refusal to be silent and through male characters’ attempts to explain her behavior. Then, I explain how her “madness” is actually a strategy through which she subverts the Greek patriarchy. Additionally, I argue that Medea’s madness develops from her occupying intersecting liminal positions within both domestic and nation-spaces, and her madness is an intentional attempt to subvert *both* Greek patriarchy and national identity.¹

Euripides’ *Medea*: A Feminist Text?

First, I must address the arguments of scholars who contend that, given the historical context in which Euripides writes, *Medea* cannot necessarily be read as a proto-feminist text. In his essay, “Protofeminist or Misogynist?: Medea as a Case Study of Gendered Discourse in Euripidean Drama,” Andrew Messing argues that Euripides capitalizes on an all-male audience’s societal anxieties around empowering women. Thus, his depiction of Medea as a strong woman

¹ I acknowledge that “nation” is a construct that did not exist as we use it in literary criticism at the time *Medea* was written. For the purposes of this paper, I define “nation” as an imagined community based on a shared ethnic identity.

was a dramatic ploy to heighten conflict between her and patriarchal Greek culture, which only reinforces the ancient Greek sentiment that women must be controlled. Specifically, Messing maintains that while Medea's story at the narrative level can be thought of as identifying gender disparities and evoking sympathy for Medea's situation from the audience, a feminist reading of Euripides' text fails to take into account meaning-making at the intersections of authorial intention and audience reception. When analyzing Medea's speech on women's unfortunate lot in society, Messing contends that many scholars have wrongly assumed that the speech was an attempt to evoke sympathy from the audience. Messing argues that this interpretation is a misreading by reminding his readers that "[Euripides'] spectators had not been exposed to over a century of increasingly frequent and penetrating social criticism by women" and that his audience "would have been suspicious of any such talk" (9). Rather, he suggests that Euripides cleverly attempts to evoke audience distrust of Medea rather than sympathy by noting that Medea's speech was "crafted at the authorial level as a deliberate attempt by Medea to deceive the Chorus and win its aid" (Messing 9).

Another scholar who contends that Euripides' text cannot necessarily be read as feminist is Helene Foley. In *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, she argues that Euripides' development of Medea and personal stance on these social structures is ambiguous:

Medea exposes male suppression of women and marriage and the tragic results of a male refusal to recognize in women the capacities, feelings, and needs that they accept for themselves; and it shows the corrupting effects of this mistreatment on a woman of tremendous feeling and intelligence. At the same time Medea's overly literal imitation of an anachronistic masculine code, her dehumanization, and her betrayal of her own sex

could be said equally to confirm woman's ultimate incapacity for independence and civilized behavior (183-4).

Given these contradictory interpretations of Medea's subversive femininity, Foley makes it clear that Euripides likely did not construct Medea with feminist motives and that the intended audience also did not read a feminist message. While there is no contention about the representation of Medea as a subversive woman in Euripides' play, whether Euripides intended Medea's subversive femininity to be celebrated has been the subject of scholarly debates. In other words, does Medea's subversive character reaffirm or challenge the Greek patriarchal institutions in which Medea is constrained? In the absence of any definitive conclusion about Euripides' intentions, it is possible to read Medea's madness as politicized resistance to Greek patriarchal nationalism.

Although Messing and Foley bring up well-considered points when arguing about the gap between possible authorial intent and contemporary readings of Euripides' play, I contend that Medea's subversive femininity does function to challenge and unsettle the Greek patriarchal structures that seek to constrain her self-expression and attempt to secure justice—regardless of whether Euripides intended to glorify or denigrate Medea's subversiveness. As a result, Medea's character has raised critical questions about women's restricted freedom for self-fulfillment among Western audiences across historical eras. This feminist legacy is evidenced by women's long history of appropriating *Medea* in Western political movements, especially when women's issues moved center-stage. For instance, in Edith Hall's article "Medea and British Legislation before the First World War," she discusses how Medea was adapted in theaters to comment on women's issues in marriage and divorce in nineteenth-century England:

[The Infant Custody Act of 1837] precipitated a vigorous debate on marriage and women's rights, which was to increase in importance over the next few decades. It is in this context that adapted versions of Euripides' *Medea* began to be staged in Victorian London . . . At the close of Planche's *The Golden Fleece* [a nineteenth-century revision of *Medea*], Medea takes the children, alive and well, off to Athens in her chariot. Jason has little concern for the children, and Medea is the abandoned, 'ill-used' wife, watching her husband alienated by love for Glauce. The drama thus explores, in a comic vein, the plight of women should divorce become accessible to men [who are] unenthusiastic about their paternal duties (53).

The mythical figure of Medea as an angry, subversive woman in Euripides' play has thus been used to engage and challenge women's societal standing and image across cultures and historical contexts, since this particular female character has been the basis for many conversations about women's oppression and resistance. If Medea was not a character who went against societal norms in a coherent or meaningful way—i.e. if she was simply “mad” in an un-politicized context—she would not have attracted the interest of feminist theorists nor played a significant role in contemporary women's political movements.

Madness as a Construction of Patriarchal Discourse

Second-wave feminist scholars, who have theorized the relationship between femininity and madness, would argue that the male characters' and the Chorus' perception of Medea as a mad woman stems from a patriarchal discursive tradition. For instance, Shoshana Felman argues that patriarchal discourses have associated madness with women who refuse to be submissively silent:

Women as such are associated with both madness and with silence, whereas men are identified with the prerogatives of discourse and reason. In fact, men appear not only as the possessors, but also as the dispensers, of reason, which they can at will mete out to—or take away from—others” (32).

This idea that “madness” is simply meted out to women who demand to be heard is also echoed by Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa.” In her essay, Cixous explains that vocal women have been misunderstood and even denied the right to express themselves in hetero-patriarchal discursive traditions. Cixous explains that a woman speaking is “a double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine” (880-1). Later in this section, when I discuss how Medea’s madness is a strategy of resistance, I draw on specific parts of the Greek play to demonstrate where and to what effect Medea breaks the silence traditionally associated with women within Greek patriarchy.

“Madness” is also a framework that patriarchal discourses have used to explain feminine difference. For example, Jason’s attempts to explain Medea’s motivations are misguided. Felman describes the masculine response to madness by explaining that “man’s reason reacts by trying to appropriate it, by claiming to ‘understand’ it, but with an external understanding that reduces the mad woman to a spectacle, to an *object* that can be known and possessed” (33). Jason, Medea’s Greek husband, chalks up Medea’s anger to the lack of sex she has gotten since he has left her. Not only does he claim to understand why she is upset—he also claims to understand a broader truth about women:

... You’d agree with me,
if you weren’t so upset about the sex.

But you women are so idiotic—you think if everything is fine in bed,
 you have all you need, but if the sex is bad,
 then all the very best and finest things
 you make your enemies (ll. 675-81).

Here, it is obvious that Jason's understanding of Medea's "madness" is viewed through a patriarchal discursive lens and is woefully naïve and misguided. Both Felman and Cixous explain in their theoretical texts that "madness" is assigned to women because they are misconstrued and misrepresented in patriarchal discourses. Jason, likewise, misrepresents Medea in his failure to understand Medea's anger and discontent. Jason's skewed and limited understanding of Medea is made clear not only by chalking all of her discontent up to a lack of sex, but also through his perception of Medea as unfeminine and sub-human.

"Madness" as a product of patriarchal discourse to understand feminine difference is further reinforced by assigning animalistic and monstrous qualities to the woman: "If the mad woman is throughout the story seen as and compared to an animal, this pervasive metaphor tells us less about [her] delirium than about the logic of her therapists. For the object is precisely to capture the animal and to tame it" (Felman 33). Upon discovering that Medea murdered her children, Jason laments: "You're not a woman. You're a she-lion. / Your nature is more bestial than Scylla, / the Tuscan monster . . ." (ll. 1600-2). Jason's reductive explanation of Medea's "madness" supports Felman's argument that a woman's "madness is not contingent on but directly related to her femininity." Felman asserts that "a scheme to capture and master" the woman is to "metaphorically *rape* the woman" (33), and by comparing Medea to an animal (e.g., she-lion), Jason suggests that Medea must be "captured," "mastered," and "metaphorically raped." In comparing Medea to an animal-like creature, he ultimately suggests the loss of her

womanhood—“you’re not a woman”—and her humanity more broadly. Reading Jason’s perception of Medea as a mad woman within the second-wave feminist framework suggested in Felman’s essay, I contend that Jason’s assessment reflects patriarchal discourse.

Madness as Feminist Resistance

Once we deconstruct Medea's madness and attempt to reframe it outside of the limiting patriarchal discourse, how can we more fully and accurately interpret Medea's madness? One way to read her madness is as feminist *resistance*—as opposed to a loss of womanhood, sanity, or humanity—because her oblique style of communication is a refusal to participate in the patriarchal discourse that demands that she be silent. Characters like Jason cast Medea off as incomprehensible because “madness and women . . . [are] two outcasts of the establishment of readability” (Felman 29). However, given the appropriation of Euripides' play in women's political movements, as discussed previously, audiences often read Medea's “madness” as more calculated and nuanced than a patriarchal notion of feminine pathology. Moreover, Felman goes on to disclose another aspect of woman's “madness,” namely its function of “reinventing” language:

out of this (cultural) imposition of madness *without* taking up the critical and therapeutic positions of reason: how to avoid speaking both as *mad* and as *not mad* . . . to “reinvent” language . . . to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by phallacy of masculine meaning (40).

Felman's theorization of madness as a reinvention of phallogocentric discourse is representative of second-wave feminist scholarships on femininity and madness. Cixous provides an acute example of this theorization of madness when she discusses the silence women are subjected to in masculine discourse and how women have used “feminine writing” to resist that expectation of silence. Greek patriarchy demands that Medea remain silent and characterizes her as “mad”

when she does not do so; thus, the refusal to be silent is more of a rejection of gender roles than a pathological “madness.”

Medea’s assertion of her body and voice indicates that what Jason attempts to frame as “animalistic,” “unfeminine,” and “mad” is actually a calculated response to and an intentional rejection of the gender roles that Greek patriarchy attempts to confine her to. This is made clear when, in the beginning of the play, she asserts her presence by leaving the “oikos” (house), which used to be the “feminine space” for Greek women in fourth-century BCE:

Women of Corinth, I have come here,
 outside the house, so you won’t think ill of me.
 Many men, I know, become too arrogant,
 both in the public eye and in their homes.
 Others get a reputation for indifference,
 because they stay at ease within the house.
 There’s no justice in the eyes of mortal men.
 Before they know someone’s deep character,
 they hate the sight of her, though she’s not hurt them (ll.243-51).

In this passage, she asserts the right to have her body be seen and be heard, suggesting that the men who think she should stay confined to the “oikos” are “arrogant” and that in their eyes, “there’s no justice.” In this scene, Medea steps out of the backstage into the center of the stage, and in effect, defies the traditional roles of silence and invisibility that Greek patriarchy subjected women to.

By asserting her right to claim her body in a public space, Medea’s method of resisting Greek patriarchy mirrors the politics of Cixous’ “feminine writing.” Cixous argues that “by

writing herself, woman will return to the body, which has been more than confiscated from her . . . [when humans] censor the body . . . [they] censor breath and speech at the same time” (880). It is also this assertion of the female body that has characterized women as “mad” in patriarchal discourse. Women are expected to be silenced and physically unobtrusive, and when women defy this expectation, they are frequently dismissed as “mad” by characters and audiences who internalize patriarchal values. Cixous focuses on a woman claiming her sexuality in her writing. Most importantly, her theory on the “return to the body” underscores the importance of women asserting their bodies to resist patriarchal discourse. Medea’s attempts to reject Greek gender roles and the silencing of women does not focus on reclaiming a feminine sexuality, but it does centralize the importance of asserting and visibilizing the body to empower women in patriarchal Greece; Medea’s assertion of her body and voice on stage is her method of “writing herself” and “returning to the body.” As I observed in a close reading of Medea’s stage movements earlier in this chapter, Medea “embodies” her resistance by asserting herself physically, which is an essential component to the resistance and “madness” discussed by second-wave feminist theories.

Medea’s Resistance to Greek Nationalism

While I draw on Felman and Cixous to contextualize Medea’s madness as a form of resistance to gender roles, I also argue that second-wave feminist theories of madness do not provide sufficient contextual frameworks to address a second, equally important element to Medea’s madness: her resistance to Greek nationalism. As a foreigner, or “barbarian,” within Greece, Medea experiences a particular marginalization that results from the intersections of both gender and nation. The frameworks proposed by Felman and Cixous fail to engage the more nuanced intersectional feminist politics that are characteristic of Medea’s liminal location within

the Greek hetero-patriarchal system, and, in fact, reenact the very exclusive national boundaries through which Medea is also marginalized.

While explaining how the phallogocentric concept of madness is only used to describe women who are not submissive and silent—and explaining why women *should* resist this expectation through “feminine writing,”—Cixous asserts: “Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be coned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem” (881). Cixous appropriates the racist, orientalist imagery of the “harem,” which calls upon notions of “barbaric Others” who are supposedly oppressive and uncivilized; she attempts to empower women by discouraging them from being like racial and national “Others.” Cixous reinforces the divisions between “us” and “foreign Other” in order to elevate women *exclusively* within a white, nationalist framework by contrasting an empowered woman to a foreign feminine “Other.” This implicit colonial dichotomy between the civilized and the uncivilized in Cixous’ statement above is characteristic of the general lack of intersectionality in second-wave feminist scholarships. Feminist theories of femininity and madness need to include an intersectional framework that does not reinforce colonialist dichotomies. I put second-wave feminist scholarships in dialogue with feminist theories of intersectionality² in order to interpret Medea’s madness as resistance in relation to her multiple, intersecting marginalization. Medea’s marginalization stems not only from her status as a woman, but also her status as a foreigner within the polis or Greek nation.

Medea’s backstory as a princess from Colchis provides the backdrop for the intersecting oppression that she is subjected to in Greek nationalist and patriarchal structures. Medea’s

² Kimberlé Crenshaw’s article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1993) is an influential scholarship on intersectional feminism.

frequent references to her foreign status within the Greek nation indicate that her marginalized status also stems from her exclusion from Greek citizenship. In a dramatic speech to the Chorus, Medea laments the alienation and lack of security that she experiences as a foreigner in the Greek nation-space:

. . . But I'm alone.

I have no city, and I'm being abused

by my own husband. I was carried off,

a trophy from a barbarian country.

I have no mother, brother, or relation

to shelter with in this extremity (ll. 294-99).

Her status as a foreign Other oppresses her by making her “homeless” and “family-less.” Creon reinforces Medea’s oppression as a “barbarian” woman in Greece when he demands that Medea exit Corinth—she is an outsider, un-belonging, and displaced, and there is no room for someone like Medea within the Greek nation. Creon, Jason’s father-in-law, is ill-at-ease with her mere presence, and he sees her as a threat to Greek national identity. He makes his anxieties clear when he threatens her with his command to leave Corinth:

. . . But let me warn you—

if the sun catches you tomorrow

within the borders of this country,

you or your children, you’ll be put to death.

Don't assume I'm not telling you the truth.

So if you must remain, stay one more day.

In that time, you can't do the harm I fear (ll. 416-22).

I argue that Medea's performance of madness as resistance needs to be contextualized in relation to her intersecting liminal locations as both feminine Other and ethnic Other. In turn, Medea's madness subverts not only patriarchal notions of femininity, but also the ethnophobic construction of Greek national identity.

Medea's decision to kill her children is seen as "mad" in Greek society's discourse, as demonstrated by Jason, Creon, and the Chorus. However, when her act of infanticide is viewed through an intersectional feminist lens, one may argue that Medea kills her children as an act of feminist, anti-nationalist resistance. If the people of Corinth construct "family," "citizen," and "spouse" along exclusive nationalist lines, then these constructions must be eradicated. Because of Jason's nationalist loyalty, he is acquiescent towards Creon's decision to exile both his children and Medea, which Medea points out when Jason "mourns" the deaths of their children: ". . . So now, at this point, / you'll talk to them, you'll give them an embrace. / Before this, you shoved them from you" (ll. 1669-71). Until then, he is distant from his children and more motivated by the opportunity to elevate his status in Greek society than by the emotional well-being of his family. His desire to conform to Greek notions of success and propriety is demonstrated clearly when he defends his decision to leave Medea to the Chorus: "What greater good fortune could I have found / than marrying the daughter of the [Greek] king, me—an exile?" (ll. 657-8). Despite that Jason claims to be remarrying so that he can "raise [the children] in the proper way" (ll. 668), this is inconsistent with his knowledge that Medea and the children

are about to be exiled, which he comments on earlier in the play. Jason tells Medea that he will attempt to alleviate the hardships that she and the children will experience in exile (ll.542-6), acknowledging that they *will* be exiled. It is impossible to “raise [the children] in the proper way” when they are exiled, which Jason already had previous knowledge of; thus, any claims Jason makes about acting in the children’s best interest is disingenuous. By killing her children, Medea demonstrates how Greek nationalist identity and “virtue” have effectively made Jason cold towards Medea and their children, despite his claims that he is acting in their best interest.

Many readers may interpret the children’s homicide as an evil and unfeminine act, arguing that if Medea attempted to deconstruct the conditional notions of family in the Greek nation, then her alternative was just as destructive. In response to the argument that Medea’s murder of her children suggests that she is just as cold—or colder—than Jason, I contend that her deliberation and conflicted attitude towards the infanticide proves that she does *love* her children more authentically than Jason does. Medea vacillates between the decision to kill her children or live in exile with them because the infanticide will bring more pain to her than to Jason:

... You women here
 my heart gives way when I see those eyes,
 my children’s smiling eyes I cannot do it.
 Goodbye to those earlier plans of mine.
 I’ll take my children from this country.
 Why harm them as a way to hurt their father
 and have to suffer twice the pain myself (ll. 1225-1231).

However, Medea remembers her larger goal to speak and act out against the callous and oppressive Greek patriarchs. Medea chooses resistance in spite of her love for her children,

which she indicates in a monologue shortly before completing the homicide: “What’s wrong with me? Do I really want / my enemies escaping punishment, / while I become someone they ridicule?” (ll. 1234-1236). Medea’s decision to commit infanticide ultimately stems not from coldness towards her family, but her limited agency as a foreign woman within the Greek patriarchal home and nation. Her ability to change women’s status within and deconstruct nationalist ideology is limited, but killing her children allows her to express her dissent when she might not have otherwise been heard. It is thus more appropriate to characterize Medea’s act of infanticide as a sacrifice rather than a cold murder, as she chooses to suffer personally to grant herself greater agency. In claiming her own agency, she inadvertently claims the agency of other women and foreigners within the Greek nation.

To sum up my arguments, Medea’s madness is a calculated, anti-nationalist, feminist resistance to patriarchal *and* ethnophobic discourses. The analysis of this part of my argument has thus demonstrated that second-wave feminist theories of femininity and madness are not sufficient to understand the intersectional aspects of Medea’s madness and has contended, moreover, for the need to contextualize Medea’s madness within intersecting frameworks of race, nation, and gender. We can look not only to Euripides’ tragedy, but also to contemporary revisions of *Medea* to observe intersectional feminist frameworks. For instance, Chicana playwright Cherríe Moraga places Medea in the context of Chicano nationalism, where her marginalization results specifically from her status as an exiled queer woman within the hetero-patriarchal Chicano nationalist movement. In turn, her play explicitly contextualizes Medea’s madness in relation to the hetero-patriarchal, Chicano nationalist discourse. If we attempt to understand *Medea* through the lens that Moraga provides, the intersecting roles that her gender, sexuality, *and* national identity play in Medea’s marginalization becomes much clearer. In effect,

contemporary feminist revisions of the Greek play, such as *The Hungry Woman*, offer more nuanced and intersectional interpretations of feminine madness than provided by existing second-wave feminist scholarships. The intersectional feminist reading of madness in contemporary revisions is more befitting of Medea's resistance in the Greek play, given her location as a feminine Other *and* an ethnic Other. In the next section, I examine how we can understand the complexities of the character's marginalization through the contemporary Chicana revision of Euripides' play, Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*.

Chapter Two

The “Mad” Woman in Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman*: Reimagining the Chicano Nation-Space

In Euripides’ play, Medea’s “madness” is simultaneously a product of oppressive phallogocentric discourse *and* an act of resistance against the nationalist and hetero-patriarchal institutions she is implicated within, and this is precisely the motivation behind her decision to kill her children. Cherríe Moraga offers a more direct intersectional feminist, anti-nationalist lens through which we can analyze Medea’s multiple liminal locations as Other. In her play *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga’s Medea chooses to kill her son for reasons nearly identical to Euripides’ Medea: she is using her limited agency to defy the destructive heteropatriarchal values of Chicano nationalism. Moraga’s queer feminist critique is not just a response to Chicano nationalism in the United States, but also to hegemonic, specifically second-wave feminism. Medea’s infanticide and act of “madness” is an explicit act of defiance against Chicano hetero-masculinist nationalism. I argue that Moraga’s play foregrounds the links among nationalism, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity, and I examine Medea’s madness—as both punishment and resistance—within this intersectional framework.

Moraga situates *The Hungry Woman* within the context of the Chicano movement in the 1960s. Her play, on the other hand, takes place in an imaginary country called Aztlán—a hypothetical location in a hypothetical future era in which Chicano nationalists won territory in Mexico and in the Southwest U.S. to create an independent nation-state. To understand the nation, race, and gender politics in Moraga’s play, it is important to examine the context of the Chicano movement and the tensions within the Chicano movement itself. I begin this section by providing a brief historical context of the Chicano movement in the United States, describing the

feminist critiques of the Chicano nationalist movement itself, and situating my analysis of Moraga's play within the context of other influential decolonial feminist scholars in the U.S.

The Chicano Movement, White Feminism, and Moraga's Queer, Feminist Critique

The Chicano movement began during the 1960s' Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., but the state oppression of Mexican Americans began in the U.S. long before the 1960s. Carlos Muñoz Jr. explains that racial tensions between Mexican Americans and the white citizens of the United States began during the nineteenth century as the United States expanded westward:

Mexicans became an oppressed racial group in the United States as a consequence of the expansion of the American empire in the nineteenth century, and that fact has a profound impact on their place in the class structure and the political and intellectual development ever since. As a conquered people, beginning with the Texas-Mexico War of 1836 and the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-48, they have never been considered a moral or constitutional issue by U.S. society (2).

Muñoz notes that present-day oppression and racist attitudes towards Mexican Americans come from these imperialist politics: "This legacy remains visible in the present day, most recently manifesting itself through a series of anti-immigration laws accompanied by racist rhetoric by major politicians and news outlets" (2). Due to a shortage of laborers in the steel and Southwest agricultural industries in the early twentieth century, many Mexicans immigrated to the United States to fill these positions (Muñoz 3). However, during the economic crisis of the Great Depression, white Americans believed Mexicans were taking jobs from them, which led to anti-immigration laws and attitudes that cast Mexicans as "a peril and threat to the social and cultural fabric of American society" (Muñoz 3). Racist sentiment manifested itself in mass deportation and anti-immigration laws as well as in white imperialist practices.

In the early twentieth century, American society defined “American” identity by traits of the dominant, white culture. Thus, Mexicans were subjected to violent cultural erasure through various American institutions, including schools:

Schools served as agents of cultural imperialism and the colonization process by contributing to the erosion of Mexican culture through the assimilation of immigrants and Mexican American youth. They were taught that Mexican culture was inferior, and those who did not assimilate in the colonizer’s culture were often placed in classes for students with developmental and learning disabilities (Muñoz 4).

Many Mexican Americans began to fight for educational rights in court in the 1930s, such as *Jesus Salvatierra v. Independent School District*, and in the 1950s, “new Mexican American middle-class community and political organizations emerged” (Muñoz 6). However, “the majority of these groups promoted the image of Mexican Americans as a white ethnic group with little in common with African Americans” in order to avoid the same discrimination that African Americans faced (Muñoz 6). Therefore, Mexicans did not overtly organize around a collective, non-white, racial identity until the 1960s in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1960s, Mexican American student activists gave birth to their own civil rights movement. Students were inspired by communist and socialist youth groups, anti-war protesters, Martin Luther King Jr. and “anti-imperialist and decolonizing socialist revolutions in the so-called Third World against the U.S. and European capitalist nations” (Muñoz 7). Muñoz notes that “by 1968, numerous student organizations had been formed throughout the Southwest,” including the United Mexican American Students, which “played a significant role in organization of high school student protests against racism in the largely segregated schools of East Los Angeles” (8). These protests were known as “walkouts.” The walkouts constituted the

“first mass protest explicitly against racism undertaken by Mexican Americans in the history of the United States,” and they “largely ignited the emergence of the Chicano movement” (Muñoz 8). Thus, from the late 1960s to the present, there has been an organized, collective movement for Mexican Americans’ civil rights “located within a framework of an ethnic, radical, nationalist, and anticolonial ideology that came to be known as cultural nationalism” (Muñoz 11).

The cultural nationalism movement in the post 1960s, which was started by Mexican American student activists, sought to define a specific Chicano identity and unity. Together, multiple Mexican American student activist groups consolidated to form the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA) (Muñoz 12). The adoption of the new, unified name and organization “encouraged students to see themselves as part of a new Chicano generation committed to militant struggle against oppressive U.S. institutions,” which also included the “rejection of the hyphenated ‘Mexican-American’ identity that had been the product of assimilation and accommodation to the melting pot ideology guiding earlier generations of activists” (Muñoz 12)—hence the new term “Chicano.” MEChA’s goals were to “be organically connected to the Mexican American community by participating in local struggles for civil rights,” “establish itself as a power base on campuses to increase the presence of Mexican American youth in institutions of higher education,” and create and implement “Chicano studies departments and programs with curricula focusing on the Mexican American experience” (Muñoz 12). Each of these goals constitutes MEChA’s *Plan de Aztlán*, and it is within this political context that Moraga writes her play—she is working within the Chicano framework of the *Plan de Aztlán*, or a cultural nationalism defined by Chicano racial identity.

Many cultural producers, including Cherríe Moraga, emerged from the Chicano movement. Muñoz notes that this movement was politically effective: “artists, poets, and writers . . . collectively generated a decolonizing cultural resistance . . . and played a key role in the development of radical ideology in the movement.” Moraga is one of these writers producing Chicana scholarship and helping define a Chicana identity; however, before one can understand Moraga’s intervention within the *Plan de Aztlán*, it is crucial to understand the exclusion of women and queer communities within the Chicano movement itself. In her essay “Queer Aztlán,” Moraga notes that the empowerment of women and the queer community within the Chicano movement was dismissed:

Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women’s sexuality are occupied within Chicano nation. If women’s bodies and those of men and women who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated (227).

In referring to the Chicano nation as an occupied “nation within a nation,” Moraga here is critiquing the Chicano movement for perpetuating the colonial logics of domination and subordination along the axis of gender and sexuality. In her play, Moraga addresses the crucial need for liberated gender roles in the Chicano nation and provides a queer, feminist critique of the hetero-masculinist Chicano nationalist construct of Aztlán.

It is important to note that Moraga’s feminism departs from mainstream white feminism because it is situated within a Chicana framework. In this same essay, Moraga argues about the need for a “Queer Aztlán” because the idea of a recognized Chicano identity and homeland within the Chicano movement excluded women and queer identities. Moraga argues about the need for an anti-colonial strategy for Mexican Americans—which the Chicano movement

provides: “what was right about Chicano nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano people” (227). However, the Chicano movement itself failed to entirely “develop Chicano consciousness, autonomy, and self-determination” because Chicana and queer voices were suppressed within the movement: “what was wrong about the Chicano movement was its institutionalized heterosexism, its inbred machismo, and its lack of a cohesive national political strategy” (227). As Moraga suggests in the excerpt quoted above, Chicana women and queer communities, in addition to Mexican Americans as a people, have been subjugated, and the Chicano movement cannot be fully anti-colonial until it rids itself of its internalized colonial ideologies of gender and sexual oppression: “it is historically evident that the female body, like the Chicano people, has been colonized. And any movement to decolonize them must be culturally and sexually specific” (227).³ Moraga concludes by providing a “culturally and sexually specific” decolonial framework in her play:

The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown and female body as it decolonizes the brown and female earth. It is a new nationalism in which la Chicana Indígena stands at the center, and heterosexism and homophobia are no longer the cultural order of the day. (228)

In her essay, Moraga proposes a “new nationalism” to transcend the cultural and sexual borders within the United States *and* the Chicano nationalist movement. However, in her play, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, she highlights the limitations of the very framework of nationalism, which in turn complicates her ideas of a “new nationalism” presented in her essay.

³ In addition to Moraga, Maria Lugones has written extensively on the coloniality of gender in the Latin American context. See: Lugones, Maria. "The Coloniality of Gender." *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. 13-33. Web. Accessed 8 May 2017.

Moraga's play shows the impossibility of organizing decolonial resistance around nation-state politics because the nation-state is always organized around homogenized identities, thus excluding specific groups of people. In other words, nationalism is always exclusionary, and Moraga complicates her argument for a "new [more inclusive, decolonial] nationalism" in her essay by deconstructing Chicano nationalist identity through Medea's "madness" in her play.

Third World Feminism

Moraga's framework for a "queer Aztlán" and a transnational feminist framework developed alongside other Third World feminist scholarships in the United States⁴, such as Chela Sandoval, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Emma Pérez. Each scholar challenges readers to expand beyond the color-blind scope of mainstream feminism and acknowledge the impact that national boundaries have on gendered oppression. Chela Sandoval proposes "differential consciousness" as a means of engaging the intersectional nature of gendered oppression in the United States. Sandoval argues that mainstream white feminism has dominated feminist discourse in the United States and has been "incapable of making the connections between its own expressions of resistance and opposition and the expressions of consciousness in opposition enacted amongst other racial, ethnic, cultural, or gender liberation movements" (Sandoval 11). On the other hand, U.S. Third World feminism connects "feminist theory in general" with "other theoretical modes concerned with issues of social hierarchy, race marginality, and resistance"

⁴ The term "Third World" is contested in feminist scholarships. In this chapter, I use the term "Third World feminism" to specifically refer to decolonial feminist scholarships based out of the United States. See: Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary 2*. 12/13 (1984): 333-58. Web. Accessed 8 May 2017 and Sandoval, Chela. "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." *Genders* 10 (1991): 1-24. Web. Accessed 10 April 2017.

(12). Sandoval further explains that mainstream feminism centers a white female subject and reenacts oppressions against men and women of color; this is because mainstream feminism proposes a political organization along a gender binary. Thus, she proposes “differential consciousness” to counteract mainstream feminism by deconstructing the binary thinking pushed by mainstream feminism (Sandoval 2).

An important theme in U.S. Third World feminist discourses is the relationship between “home” and “borders.” Writing from a U.S. Third World feminist positionality, Chandra Talpade Mohanty addresses the differences within hegemonic Western feminist movements and suggests a transnational feminist framework in her influential book *Feminism Without Borders*. Mohanty discusses the necessity of acknowledging the “fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent,” and argues that the “lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real” (2). Mohanty continually states that feminism is not a “monolith”—it is deeply contextualized and shaped by the “conflicts” and “differences” determined by different women’s racial and national locations. She ultimately offers a transnational feminist framework to argue that feminist resistance must “envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division” (Mohanty 2). Moraga’s play centralizes ideas about boundaries and borders of gender, nation, and sexuality and their impact on one’s “home” or sense of belonging, which Mohanty discusses in her influential work. The national, sexual, and gendered boundaries of the fictional Aztlán shape the feminist and queer politics of *The Hungry Woman*. The fictional space of Aztlán and the queer, feminist resistance to the hetero-patriarchal Chicano nationalism that defines Aztlán are reminiscent of the tensions within the “decolonial imaginary,” as discussed by Emma Pérez.

Emma Pérez describes the “decolonial imaginary” as a contested site between colonial and postcolonial spatio-temporal categories that reinforce politics of the “self” and the “Other,” inclusiveness and exclusiveness: “I think that the decolonial imaginary is that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (6). Pérez explains that “political borders, geographic boundaries, and discursive strategies” (3) shape our understanding of history and our place within it. This is true of Chicano nationalism as well, which “mimics the making of the frontier, or ‘American West,’ while at the same time opposing the ideological making of the ‘West’” (4). Inevitably, when nation-spaces are created, a set of exclusive racial and gender constructions define the collective who share the nation-space; because of this reductive construction, some histories and voices will be suppressed:

My argument is that Chicana/o history, like any other subaltern history, will tend to follow traditional history’s impulse to cover ‘with a thick layer of events,’ as Foucault writes, ‘the great silent, motionless bases’ that constitute the interstitial gaps, the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken . . . I argue that these silences, when heard, become the negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subject (Perez 5).

Chicano nationalism responds to white imperialism, but in doing so, it ignores the internal marginalization of women and queers within the Chicano community. Thus, the suppressed struggles of women and queer communities constitute the “interstitial gaps” in the Chicano nationalist discourse:

the decolonial imaginary is located in between that which is colonialist and that which is colonized . . . where women are conceptualized merely as a backdrop to men’s social and political activities, they are in fact intervening interstitially while sexing the colonial

imaginary. In other words, women's activities are unseen, unthought, merely a shadow in the background of the colonial mind . . . yet persist whether acknowledged or not (7).

A space that acknowledges women's (and queer communities') roles in the Chicano movement is a space that is practicing, as Pérez defines it, the decolonial imaginary. Connecting Moraga's play to Pérez's idea of the decolonial imaginary is necessary: Moraga's play enacts this decolonial imaginary by creating a space of resistance for the exiled queer Chicana, Medea, who is constantly negotiating and subverting Chicano nationalism and its marginalization of women and queer communities.

To summarize, Sandoval, Mohanty, and Pérez, Third World and transnational feminisms have argued for the need to decolonize hegemonic white feminism as well as hetero-masculinist, anti-colonial historiography. As a site of "decolonial imaginary," U.S. Third World feminism, and transnational feminist critiques, Moraga's play highlights and enacts the tensions between Chicano nationalism and decolonial feminist critiques of the Chicano nation-state. The queer Chicana protagonist, Medea, in Moraga's revision of the classical Greek play becomes the site of this tension as well as the mouthpiece of Moraga's decolonial feminist critique of Chicano nationalism. Moraga's play offers a revisionist reading of Euripides' play by highlighting the role of the modern nation-state in reinforcing the colonial logic of domination and subordination through gender and sexuality, and by situating Medea as a multiple subaltern figure—as female and queer—within the neo-colonial nation-state of Aztlán in a mythical future. It is within these intersecting contexts of neo-colonial nationalism and decolonial feminist critique that this chapter seeks to understand the politics of Medea's madness.

Medea's Exile

The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea by Cherríe Moraga, a contemporary, Chicana revision of Euripides' *Medea*, is about a Chicana named Medea. The play opens with Medea in a hospital being treated for "insanity." Throughout the play, the narrative shifts back and forth between Medea in the hospital and the past events that brought her to the hospital. The audience learns that Medea played an active role in the Chicano revolution and helped establish a Chicano nation-state: Aztlán. However, despite being of Indigenous descent (which is required to own property in Aztlán), she could not own land herself because of the patriarchal and patrilineal structures that ruled Aztlán, which represent the heterosexism and machoism of the Chicano nationalist movement. Instead, Jason owned the land that Medea had by birthright, and he could only possess this land if he was married to Medea because Jason himself is not of Indigenous descent. Medea was exiled from Aztlán to a border city known as Tamoachán because of a relationship with her lesbian lover, Luna, and could only return to Aztlán if she left Luna and remained married to Jason. Medea lives with Luna and takes her and Jason's son—Chac-mool—with them. Since Jason needs Medea or an Indigenous heir to inherit land in Aztlán (as he is not of Indigenous descent), he seeks out Chac-mool and convinces him to return and take his rightful place as a "man" in Aztlán. To prevent her son from continuing heterosexist, masculinist practices in Aztlán, Medea sacrifices her son in an act of infanticide. Thus, Medea is sent to live in an asylum to treat her "insanity."

Moraga draws attention to Medea's restricted status as a woman and a queer within the Chicana homeland and connects that disenfranchisement with the patriarchal structures of the imagined Chicano nation-space. In Moraga's fictional Aztlán, the Chicano revolutionaries prevail against the United States, and the geography of North America and nationalist boundaries change dramatically. Much of Mexico and the Southwest is ceded to the Chicano revolutionaries,

and the land is consolidated to form the country of Aztlán. However, once the Chicano movement attains this land, women within it are subjected to a strict patriarchal order. Two female characters in *The Hungry Woman* remark on Aztlán's regression into strict patriarchy when they discuss the Chicano revolution and the consolidation of Aztlán. They explain how Aztlán becomes its own country, and then lament the direction it took afterwards:

Mama-Sal: We were contentos for a while--

Savannah: Sort of. Until the revolutionaries told the women, put down your guns and pick up your babies (24).

After the audience receives a brief explanation of Aztlán and the roles that Chicanas were expected to fulfill within the postcolonial nation-space, we learn that Medea is not only expected to act within the submissive roles designated for women, but she is also exiled from Aztlán because of her inability to fit the Chicano nationalist notions of femininity and citizenship.

In a flashback, Medea vents to Luna about the injustice of her exile, stating that "men think women have no love of country, that the desire for nation is a male prerogative. So like gods, they pick and choose who is to be born and who is to die in a land I bled for equal to any man. Aztlán, how you betray me!" (15). In this monologue, we see that Medea is rejected by the Chicano nationalist movement despite her active role in the fighting and nation-building for Aztlán. Women are supposed to occupy passive roles by submitting to the male leadership of the Chicano revolutionary movement. Medea does not fit this mold and sees the patriarchal institutions in Aztlán as hypocritical, so she is rejected along the axes of gender, sexuality, and nationalism.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Chicano Cultural Nationalism

Medea's murder of Chac-mool is motivated by anti-nationalist, feminist resistance because she is rejecting the patriarchal institutions that govern Aztlán. Throughout Moraga's play, she attempts to teach Chac-mool the toxicity of Chicano masculinist ideology and convince him not to return to Aztlán with Jason. When Chac-mool indicates that he wants to be "initiated" within Aztlán and to live a "normal" life with his father, Medea contends that his conception of "normal" is destructive:

You want normal? Then go with your father. He's perfectly normal. It's normal to send your five-year-old child into exile then seven years later come back to collect the kid like a piece of property . . . that's normal for a country that robs land from its daughters to give to its sons, unless of course they turn out to be jotos (74).

Moraga's Jason, like Euripides' Jason, cares more about his personal gain and privilege within Aztlán than the well-being of his son.

Moreover, Jason cannot keep the land he currently owns if there is no male heir to inherit the land. In a heated altercation with Medea, Jason reveals his selfish intentions by depersonalizing his own son as a body, a means of holding onto the land and his own future: "I have what I want now. Land and a future in the body of that boy" (69). Jason does not love or care about Chac-mool authentically in the way Medea cares about him, and in this same dialogue, Medea calls Jason out for his callousness and masculine thirst for power: "My son needs no taste of that weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and you will not make him one in your likeness! The man I wish my son to be does not exist, must be invented . . . he will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example" (69). Medea is asserting that Chicano nationalism instills a power-hungry, exploitive mentality in the men who participate in these

nationalist institutions, and she wants to prevent Chac-mool from becoming the destructive, power-hungry patriarch (inspired by a nationalist ideology) that his father has become.

Chicano nationalist ideology makes men look at people and the earth as objects to be attained and controlled, which Medea notes when she states that “betrayal occurs when a boy grows into a man and sees his mother as a woman for the first time. A woman. A thing. A creature to be controlled” (70). Medea promises that Chac-mool “will leave [Medea] as a daughter does, with all necessary wrenching, and his eye will never see [her] ‘as woman’” (71).

However, Medea fails to keep Chac-mool from being seduced by the very masculinist Chicano access to power that she overtly resists, which is why Chac-mool decides to leave with Jason and claim his land in Aztlán: “I have a country. I am not despised as you are. There is a piece of dirt a few hundred miles away from here that still holds the impression of my footsteps. I belong somewhere. I am going” (79). Medea decides to kill Chac-mool only after he decides to leave, thus revealing that the “mad” act of Medea killing her child is actually an attempt to dismantle toxic Chicano nationalist ideology and the destructive masculinity that it creates. After Chac-mool rebels against Medea and asserts that he is leaving, she laments in a monologue that he will fall prey to Chicano nationalist construction of manhood, in which men relinquish their compassion for the power they can have as dominant males in Aztlán:

He refuses my gifts and turns to my enemies
 to make a man of him.
 I cannot relinquish my son to them,
 to walk ese camino triste
 where they will call him by his manly name
 and he goes deaf

to hear it (89).

In this monologue, Medea foreshadows her plans to sacrifice Chac-mool because it is the last hope she has to resist the marginalization that she experiences as a queer woman in Aztlán and the virulent definitions of Chicano nationality. Medea refuses to let her child become an oppressive patriarch within a nationalist institution that turns the men into power-hungry oppressors. The murder represents a revolt from the patriarchal ideology that dominates Chicano nationalism, which allows her to, as Sandoval would put it, “produce a new culture beyond the domination/subordination power axis” in favor of all Chicanos *and* Chicanas.

Queer Identities in Aztlán

Medea’s madness is also shaped by her marginalized location as a queer woman within the Chicano nation, and Medea’s queer identity exposes the destructive limits of Chicano nationalist ideology even further. Her choice to develop and pursue a relationship with her female lover, Luna, is the reason for her exile from Aztlán. The Chicano nationalist movement envisioned a political system in which a nationality and race that had been systemically silenced—Mexican American Indigenous peoples—is acknowledged as an ethnic group with rights to their ancestral land in the Southwestern United States; however, even within this anti-colonial resistance group, only a certain type of community was being represented: heterosexual males.

Moraga bases her hypothetical Chicano nation—Aztlán—off of this masculinized, “heroic” Chicano national imaginary, in which the voices of women and queer people are silenced. In other words, despite the fact that Aztlán was created by anti-colonial revolutionaries, the Chicano nationalists in the movement still enacted a “domination/subordination” political dynamic. Micaela Diaz-Sanchez refers to the women and queers who fought for the Chicano

anti-colonial movement as “impossible patriots,” noting that Medea is frequently “cast away as an impossible patriot” (142) because of her queer and female identity. The Chicano patriarchs treat the queer population, or *jotería*, as exempt from the Chicano nationalist movement and even as repulsive; thus, Medea is treated “a monster, a slave in the ‘wasteland of counter-revolutionary degenerates’” (Diaz-Sanchez 147). The *jotería* are monsters in Chicano nationalist discourse, which is why Medea’s queer identity makes the Chicano patriarchs see her as “mad.” Moraga’s goal is to expose the limits that Chicano nationalism imposes on those who try to identify with a Chicano/a ethnic identity, and how, within its own movement, to resist colonial marginalization, it reenacts other systems of marginalization. By constructing Medea’s queer identity, Moraga furthers her transnational feminist analysis by challenging “the sexist, homophobic, and patriarchal legacies of Chicano nationalism” and “re-envisioning a ‘nation’ in which woman and *jotería* are embraced as citizens critical to the constitution of the liberatory imaginary—Aztlán” (Diaz-Sanchez 141). Through Medea’s queer identity, Moraga adds another layer to her anti-nationalist critique of the Chicano movement and continues to use Medea’s “madness” to resist the limits of patriarchal Chicano nationalist ideology.

Medea claims her queer identity—which, in the context of Chicano nationalism, is an act of “madness”—to resist the destructive limits of what constitutes the Chicano nationalist imaginary and to reimagine Chicano nationalism. Medea knows that she can return to Aztlán as soon as she leaves Luna, but chooses not to do so until Jason threatens to take her son away from her. Her conscious decision to remain exiled and use her agency to defy Chicano patriarchal institutions is why Diaz-Sanchez refers to her lesbianism as “the ultimate act of self-defining womanhood outside patriarchy” (147). In other words, in the many years that she chooses to stay with Luna, she also consciously chooses exile; her queerness and her madness are thus

intentional acts of resistance against the hetero-patriarchal exclusivism of Chicano nationalism. Medea could choose to live as a relatively privileged woman in Aztlán as long as she accepted the subservience of her location as a woman married to Jason. When Medea refuses to claim her “home” as a Chicana within Aztlán by embracing a queer identity, she is resisting the limits that Chicano nationalist ideology poses on women; thus, she calls for an alternative Chicano cultural nationalism and its othering of women and queers within the Chicano movement.

Home and Nation

Once Medea leaves Aztlán and lives in Tamoachán, the exiled land of marginalized Chicanos/as, she is in a state of what Mohanty refers to as “not being home,” or “a matter of realizing that home [Aztlán] was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences within oneself” (90). Mohanty argues that to claim privilege within a certain place, one must submit to the limits of that place; in the context of Chicano Aztlán and *The Hungry Woman*, Medea’s limits are to be submissive and heterosexual, thus marginalizing both women and queer Chicanas. Chicano masculinist discourse views Medea as “mad” because she consciously chooses the marginalization that results from her deviant sexuality, and thus sacrifices her place of relative “security” and privilege within Chicano nationalism. Chicano masculinist discourse also views deviant sexualities as “undesirable”—given that queer Chicanos/as are exiled from Aztlán and sent to live in Tamoachán; thus, to choose a queer identity constitutes “madness” in Chicano nationalist discourse. However, given Medea’s criticisms of hetero-patriarchal Chicano ideology, Medea’s “madness” proves to be a calculated rejection of the exclusion and limits that Chicano masculinist national ideology imposes on its citizens; Medea’s “madness,” which is defined by

her decision to claim a queer identity and kill her son, is not irrational the way that Chicano masculinist discourse depicts it, but rather a calculated resistance.

When situated within the systems of marginalization that Medea experiences in *The Hungry Woman*, “madness” takes on a more nuanced meaning than it does in Euripides’ play—Medea’s “madness” is a calculated and intentional attempt to subvert both the colonial and patriarchal systems that oppress her. The infanticide is not adequately explained by Medea’s attempts to subvert only patriarchal ideology. Without understanding that the infanticide is also an attempt to subvert masculinized Chicano nationalism, the notion that Medea is calculating and *not* irrational is less believable. The intersectional nature of Medea’s madness in *The Hungry Woman* can also inform readings of Euripides’ original Greek play. Moraga exposes how nationalism constructs a destructive and toxic masculinity, destroys relationships between family members, inspires an egotistical thirst for power, and marginalizes any “abnormal” person. In *The Hungry Woman*, a revisionist reading of Euripides’ play, Moraga criticizes the callousness that national boundaries create between people and how it encourages people (especially men) to prioritize property and status over family and love.

Chapter 3

The “Mad” Woman in Wesley Enoch’s *Black Medea*: Connecting with the Past and Looking to the Future

Patriarchal discourses define “madness” as a pathological feminine trait, but defining feminine madness as pathological instead of political resistance does not lend itself to a sufficiently complex or sophisticated understanding of female literary characters in any cultural or historical context. “Madness” must be understood as a form of politicized feminine resistance against patriarchal discourses; additionally, “madness” must not only be read as resistance, but also must be read against a nuanced and specific historical context in order to be truly empowering to the female in the story and useful as a cultural critique. Medea’s “madness” in both the original Greek play and contemporary revisions can only be understood when we factor in Medea’s liminal intersecting positions as feminine Other *and* foreign Other, but as I observed in my analysis of Euripides’ original play and Cherríe Moraga’s Chicana revision of *Medea*, the characters’ gendered, ethnic, and/or sexualized identities carry different meanings depending on the historical context of the author and the play. Being a feminine Other in Chicano nationalist discourses has different implications and poses different challenges to women than does being a non-Greek, feminine Other in Greek patriarchal discourses, and the need to situate gender assignments in different historical contexts also applies to Indigenous Australian women in the modern era.

In this section of my thesis, I explore the intersectional politics of Indigenous Australian feminism in my analysis of Indigenous Australian playwright Wesley Enoch’s twenty-first century revision, *Black Medea*. In Enoch’s play, “madness” becomes the female protagonist’s necessary response to an impossible position wherein she is forced to choose between

assimilating into white, colonial Australia and abandoning any effort to survive as an Indigenous Australian in the modern world; “madness” allows her to choose neither by exposing the inadequacy of both options. I begin with a brief history of British colonization of Australia, then provide a description of Indigenous Australian theatrical traditions and their attempts to define the Indigenous person, a survey of Enoch’s own perspectives on the role of Indigenous theater, a background on Indigenous Australian feminism, and, finally, an analysis of Wesley Enoch’s *Black Medea* informed by facets of the play’s social and political contexts.

British Colonization of Australia

Eastern Australia was first colonized by British settlers in 1770, when Lieutenant James Cook “claimed possession of the east coast of Australia for the British town” (“Era 1”). West Australia was colonized in 1791 when “George Vancouver claimed the Albany region in the name of King George III” (“European Discovery”). In the early years of colonization, relations between the European settlers and the Indigenous inhabitants were “hospitable;” however, as it became clearer that the colonizers were disrupting the inhabitants’ way-of-life through acquisition of Indigenous land, these relations became “hostile” (“European Discovery”), as demonstrated by the subsequent reduction of Indigenous populations. Between 1788 and 1900, the Indigenous population of Australia was reduced by approximately 90% due to the introduction of new diseases and violent conflict with the Europeans (“Era 1”).

Many Indigenous peoples today have “wrestled with defining their identity” because “much of their traditional culture has been lost” (“Era 1”). In the early twentieth century, Indigenous Australians were expected to either die out naturally or assimilate into white Australia: “The government’s solution was to discontinue its policy of protection, which separated Indigenous people from white society by placing them on reserves and missions (land

that the colonial government designated for Indigenous peoples,) and to instead adopt an assimilationist approach” (“Era 3”). Reserves for Indigenous people were “reclaimed by governments for housing and mining” (“Era 3”) during the assimilation era, which reflects the growth of white corporate Australia and the expectation that Indigenous people simply “absorb” into this growing white corporatism. However, “it was difficult for Indigenous people to find work in the towns and cities due to the prevalent racism in wider society” (“Era 3”), which made assimilation efforts unsuccessful. Indigenous Australian theatrical traditions arise from the modern Indigenous Australian search for an identity. *Black Medea* by Wesley Enoch, published in 2007, is set in this context—in contemporary colonial Australia where Indigenous people struggle to define themselves against the pressure to assimilate.

Indigenous Australian Theatrical Traditions

In the context of Indigenous theater in neo-colonial Australian context, many Indigenous playwrights contend with the idea that they are “a lost and dying people incapable of surviving in the modern world” (Casey and Craigie 2). To push back against the threat of erasure that Indigenous peoples are subjected to in colonial Australia, writers and playwrights have used writing and theater to construct the (multiplicity of) identities of “modern Indigenous Australians” that directly counter the colonial idea that Indigenous Australians are dying out. Enoch is one of many Indigenous playwrights, who has used his art and the theater to give Indigenous peoples a place to speak for themselves instead of being spoken for in Australian colonial traditions.

One way that Indigenous Australians have spoken for themselves in the theater is by asserting that they are here to stay—they are not “dying out.” Maryrose Casey and Cathy Craigie

describe the theater as a site where Australian playwrights have continually pushed back against the idea that Indigenous voices are disappearing:

The representation of Indigenous people and stories has featured strongly and consistently in a theatrical tradition that dates back thousands of years before white occupation . . . Indigenous artists claimed performance spaces to demonstrate the humanity, history, and survival of Indigenous Australians (Casey and Craigie 2).

While Casey and Craigie mention long-standing theatrical traditions of Indigenous theater predating colonialism, they focus primarily on the politics of modern Indigenous Australian theater. Casey and Craigie unveil the various struggles and identities of Indigenous Australians featured in modern theater: Indigenous Australians are peoples of hybrid identities; the colonial government and policies continue to have a destructive impact on Indigenous women and children; Indigenous peoples must reconcile both the past and the present; and Indigenous Australians have a unique spiritual perspective on the connection between life and the land due to their peoples' ties to that land.

Modern productions that strive to give Indigenous peoples a voice in Australian society include Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nation member Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* (Casey and Craigie 3), Noongar writer Jack Davis' *The Dreamers* (3), and Muruwari descendent Jane Harrison's *Stolen* (4), all of whom come from different Indigenous backgrounds themselves and "[challenge] the frame of representation" (4) of Australian Indigenous peoples. Theatrical traditions within Indigenous Australian cultures reveal the multitude of identities of Australians, as they are not homogenous. However, each production has a common purpose: to bring the struggles and determined survival of Indigenous peoples into mainstream Australian media and demand that Indigenous peoples be represented. As Casey and Craigie demonstrate in the

examples provided, the theater has long been, and continues to be, a place where Indigenous Australian voices are heard. The question Casey and Craigie pose is this: How do modern Indigenous theatrical depict the “humanity, history, and survival of Indigenous Australians?” Drawing on Casey and Craigie, the question that this chapter poses is this: In *Black Medea*, how does Enoch depict the “humanity, history, and survival of Indigenous Australians?”

Wesley Enoch’s Theater

We may look to Enoch’s direct answers to this question. Like Casey and Craigie, he emphasizes the importance of understanding the multiplicity of identities in Indigenous traditions; in addition, he points to the dangers of over-idealizing the past and the promise of constructing a future-hopeful Indigenous identity. Enoch addresses many of these points in his speech titled “‘We Want hope’: The Power of Indigenous Arts in Australia Today,” which he delivered at the Beckett Theater at the CUB Malthouse in Melbourne for the Annual Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture. Enoch argues that “we are all an amalgam of experiences and projects which make up our history, that make us who we are” (5). By this, Enoch means that Indigenous peoples’ identities are formed by heritages and a common past, but they are also impacted by unique and individual experiences. Enoch draws on his mixed heritage as Noonccual, Gorenpul, Karnju, Filipino, Scottish, German, English, Spanish, Danish, and Irish, affirming that these histories shape him.

While Enoch notes that his ancestral history shapes him, he also asserts the importance of unique, individual experiences in the shaping of one’s identity. To demonstrate this idea, Enoch describes an experience with a theatrical production where one is “sitting in the theater after a show has finished still nailed to your seat because you don’t want the feeling to escape.” Enoch states, “those kind of things [memorable moments and experiences in the present] change you.”

Despite Enoch's assertion that he "believes in history" and that "we never get anywhere without inheritance or a legacy of some sort," he also warns that "the danger is seeing history with a generalized nostalgia: seeing the past a warmer, better time when we knew who we were and life was uncomplicated" (6). Nostalgia creates an unproductive and skewed idea of history, and thus distorts our identities and place within history.

Thus, Enoch values the developments of Indigenous theater in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s because "the nation celebrated a sense of who we [Indigenous Australians] were or who we were becoming" and it was "a time when the people of Australia invested in themselves" (7). Indigenous theater in this era helped Indigenous Australians claim their voices, avoided nostalgically depicting the past as a better time, and rejected a resigned attitude towards the present and future. Enoch goes on to say that he attempts to take this nuanced approach in his own work, stating that "the purpose of Indigenous theater is two-fold; a celebration of a community and the challenging of a community" (11). Additionally, he believes that the theater is "one of the few places we control our [Indigenous peoples'] own representation" (11). For Enoch, the challenge for contemporary Indigenous authors is to look to the future and construct a viable Indigenous identity and world where Indigenous peoples can be represented: "We need to look to our history and see the world as it could be again, not as it is now" (13). However, this does not mean that we should idealize the past: "I believe in history. Not to hold us back, but to make sure we have a future. I believe that theater has a purpose to imagine the world as it could be, to build humans, to create a communion" (14). This is precisely what Enoch does with Medea's madness in *Black Medea*: he acknowledges the past, but also imagines a space where Indigenous Australian peoples—particularly women—have hope for the future.

Before I begin to analyze how Medea's "madness" imagines an Indigenous identity and future in the text, I must situate Enoch and *Black Medea* within Indigenous Australian feminist frameworks. Enoch centers the perspective of an Indigenous woman who experiences gendered oppression, so it is necessary to invoke Indigenous Australian feminist conversations in a reading of his play. I refer to Indigenous Australian feminist Celeste Liddle, who usefully identifies these three perspectives: "When I am highlighting why I feel a specific Aboriginal feminism is necessary, I tend to point to three formative elements that structure this need: the white patriarchy, the black patriarchy and 'mainstream' [white] feminism" ("Intersectionality"). Liddle goes into more detail on why each of these three "elements" is relevant.

She is brief in her discussion of white patriarchy, stating that "as a point of oppression," the influence of white patriarchy on Indigenous women is "self-explanatory given its continuing historical legacy and political privilege." Although Liddle does not elaborate on the influence of white patriarchy in her essay, I highlight the role white patriarchy plays in my analysis of Enoch's play by discussing the impacts of white colonialism on Medea's husband, and by proxy, Medea. Generally speaking, white colonialism in Australia disenfranchises the Indigenous men working for a corporate economy controlled by white Australia, who, in turn, retaliate by asserting control over Indigenous women. Liddle seems to corroborate the reality of domestic abuse in her discussion of Indigenous feminism, noting that the "[victim blaming of Indigenous Australian women] is compounded by race to the point where Aboriginal women dying from domestic homicide at a rate ten times that of other women in Australia barely rates a mention" in conversations about gender equality in Australia ("Intersectionality"). Thus, domestic abuse and victim-blaming culture among Indigenous populations are components of the intersectional oppression of Indigenous women that Liddle attributes to both white and black patriarchy. The

domestic violence in Enoch's play appears to be an intentional plot point to draw attention to Indigenous feminist issues.

Liddle is critical of mainstream feminism, noting that she “feel[s] personally that the issue of race keeps [her] focused on community rather than individual advancement, and therefore [her] feminism reflects this [approach]” (Liddle). As Liddle suggests, it is imperative that Indigenous feminist struggles are not viewed as a means through which individual women within Indigenous Australian communities can advance social or economically, which is distinct from some white feminist traditions. An individualist approach facilitates the political erasure of Indigenous peoples more broadly. A communal approach instead of an individual approach becomes an important element in Enoch's play and in the feminist construction of Medea's “madness” as resistance, as Medea can empower herself only by connecting with other Indigenous women and embracing her Indigenous identity. This is precisely what distinguishes the feminist message in *Black Medea* from the mainstream individualist feminism that Liddle discusses. Enoch's vision for the future of Indigenous people, which he creates through the character and “madness” of Medea, relies on an acknowledgement of a shared Indigenous ethnic identity. As demonstrated, all three of Liddle's perspectives are needed as complementary components to a unified, critical reading of the play's meanings. Enoch's approach reflects Liddle's brand of intersectional feminism and rejects mainstream white individualist feminism.

Jason and White Australian Corporatism

Black Medea, written by Wesley Enoch and published in 2007, is an anti-colonial Indigenous Australian revision of Euripides' original Greek tragedy, *Medea*. In Enoch's retelling, Medea is a member of an unspecified Indigenous Australian tribe, and she is married to

Jason, who is also of Indigenous ancestry but has disconnected himself from his Indigenous background to pursue a career in mining. Medea and Jason have a son who is not named in the play. Jason is abusive towards Medea, and the play depicts a failing and toxic marriage that ends with Medea killing their son. Medea's act of infanticide is an expression of her madness, which functions as her resistance to being forced to choose between Indigenous assimilation to white Australia and a resigned outlook on the future of Indigenous peoples in modern Australia. Additionally, Medea's madness is a violent act of resistance towards the assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

To foreground the influence of white patriarchy in *Black Medea*, it is important to understand Jason's location and oppression in modern, colonial Australia. Jason is caught between two cultures: he desires to succeed in an economic and political system controlled by white people but still struggles with his Indigenous culture. The Chorus describes Jason as a "blackfella in a suit . . . working his way up the corporate ladder, a city black with his hair wavy, bleached with saltwater air . . . sweat marking his new shirt and his feet baking in his leather shoes," and "all the girls laugh at him" (66). Jason is drawn as an Indigenous Australian who attempts to succeed as a miner in modern, corporate Australia, but fails, as the Chorus notes when they narrate his musings: "He's thinking about how he can't close a deal, how he loses every job he gets by doing something stupid. Punching a man, not turning up, getting drunk" (70). Jason is clearly out of place, struggling financially, and humiliated by his inability to provide for his family as an Indigenous man in colonial Australia.

On top of his failed efforts to assimilate into white, corporate Australia, Jason also reveals the pressure he experiences as a man to provide for his family through his discussion of his father. In the first "Jason and Medea" scene of the play, Medea tells Jason that the family

needs money and asks him to reach out to his father: “MEDEA: All right, then. I’ll put the food on the table, I’ll pay the bills, I’ll buy the shoes, I’ll wear your fucking suit . . . Jason, talk to [your father.] Say it’s for his grandson” (63). In response, Jason refuses; he remembers his interactions with his father, recalling the humiliation he subjected him to by suggesting that a “real man” would bring in more money. Jason quotes his father in his conversation with Medea: “JASON: ‘You call yourself a man and can’t provide for your own family’” (63). Thus, he responds to Medea by stating that he is “not talking to that cunt” (63).

Enoch makes it clear that Jason’s failures stem from his position as an ethnic Other in white, colonial Australia by including sections where Jason longs for a home in an Indigenous community. The Chorus describes Jason as he contemplates a better life in rural Australia, where his Indigenous father grew up: “He’s thinking how simple it would be to live on the beach and eat fresh fish and prawns and mussels” (70). A simpler life away from the influence of white corporatism is not possible for Jason because, as the Chorus notes, he “sticks of chlorine” (70). He is disconnected from an Indigenous community and depends on his mining job to sustain his livelihood and secure the little income he has; he is trapped by the white, patriarchs of colonial Australia. Jason’s disenfranchisement by white, colonial patriarchs and his treatment of Medea reflect Little’s discussion of the white patriarchy, white colonialism, and their impacts on Indigenous women. Jason projects his frustrations, which are brought about by white colonialism, onto Medea, making her also a victim of white colonialism and Indigenous patriarchy simultaneously.

Medea’s Intersecting Oppression

Medea is thus disempowered through both the influence of white colonialism and black patriarchy through her marriage to Jason. On the one hand, Medea chooses to be with Jason

because of the opportunity for economic mobility in white colonial Australia. The Chorus explains how Jason and Medea originally got together, describing her ambitions and motivation for marrying Jason: “she has dreams of living in a big house with a garden, a place where sand doesn’t creep in under the door . . . she’s been promised to this fella with the right skin but she knows he’s never going to get her what she wants” (66). In the same passage, the Chorus notes that when Medea met Jason, she finally saw “her ticket out of there” (69). Medea is married to Jason *because of* the power of white, colonial companies in modern-day Australia, which offer the opportunity to escape her rural and poor Indigenous community.

However, Jason is economically immobile as an ethnic Other in white, colonial Australia, and he projects his frustrations onto Medea through physical and verbal abuse. Jason continually tells her to “shut up” (63-4), strikes her during a fight (64), becomes intimidating and throws furniture around her when he is drinking (64), and throws Medea to the ground (73). The white colonial institutions are partly responsible for Medea’s oppression because they create Jason’s rage, which is a reaction to his feelings of emasculation, and which he tries to assuage by abusing Medea. Although Medea tries to use the white patriarchy to her advantage, she is unable to do so because of her multi-layered disempowerment as an Indigenous woman. As Liddle notes in her essay, the marginalization of Indigenous women results partly from the high rates of domestic abuse that Indigenous women experience. Indigenous feminism thus focuses on the layered causes of domestic violence: the disempowerment of the men who inflict violence *and* women’s subordinate position within black patriarchy. Enoch exposes this politic through both his use of domestic violence in the play and Jason’s tendencies to blame Medea for his feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment.

Many Indigenous men cling to the power they have over the women in their communities and inflict their frustrations on Indigenous women, who are relatively powerless compared to the men. Enoch exemplifies this power dynamic by showing Jason blaming Medea for his problems; it is difficult for him to change his situation as a disenfranchised ethnic Other in white Australia, but he can assert his power over Medea. In the scene of the play titled “He’s Thinking,” Jason reflects the difficulty of moving up the white corporate ladder, then moves to Medea: “He’s thinking she should get out, leave him before she becomes just like his mother. How it’s her fault” (70). The next section shows Jason in dialogue with the Chorus, who continually asserts that Jason “does not need her” (70-1). In this dialogue, the Chorus echoes his own tendencies to blame Medea: “Leave her. She is the one causing the pain. She makes you carry the weight of her guilt. Her sin is piled high on your shoulders” (71). Jason does exactly that—he feels powerless, and instead of addressing the colonial systems that exploit him and resisting the erasure of Indigenous people by white patriarchy, he lashes out at Medea and demands that she leave him. Thus, Medea’s disenfranchisement results from compounded oppression from white colonialism and black patriarchal systems.

A second element of the black patriarchy surfaces in Enoch’s play: the pressure on Medea to marry. Medea, as discussed previously, could only escape the poverty of living as an Indigenous person in rural Australia if she married a man outside of her tribe—a man who is linked to corporate urban Australia and who could make money in the neo-colonial world. Medea’s other option is to marry within her tribe. The Chorus tells the audience about Medea and Jason’s early romance, noting that “she saw her ticket out of there, a man equal to her ambitions, a man to have children who would one day rule the world” (69). The Chorus describes Medea’s family’s response to her budding romance: “You got to imagine what her

family thought, how they told her she was promised to the other bloke, how they reminded her of who she was and where she came from” (69). Medea’s two options are to either marry Jason and escape her Indigenous background or to marry the man in the tribe and retain her Indigenous identity. Medea tells Jason that when she decided to marry him, an Indigenous man outside of her tribe, her community “turned up the bones of [her] ancestors” (72). She reminds Jason that she gave up her community for him: “You saw how angry my father was... you heard the wailing of my aunties” (72). When Jason orders Medea to leave, Medea is angry and tells Jason that she “gave up belonging somewhere,” that she “betrayed” her Indigenous family because she married him (72). Medea’s mobility as a woman is restricted because of societal pressure to marry—whether she marries somebody outside her tribe to compete with the elite economic status of white Australia or marries within her tribe out of obligation to her Indigenous community and roots.

Medea’s “Madness”

Medea eventually understands the dangerous and illusory implications of her ambition to succeed and have powerful children in urban Australia: it requires her to reject her Indigenous identity, which she realizes she does not want to do. However, she also is unprepared to submit to the patriarchal limits that her family and tribe try to subject her to. This double bind drives Medea to defy Jason and eventually kill her son, which is the act that expresses her madness. When Jason demands that Medea leave and marry the man that her family promised her to, she refuses and retaliates. Thus, she does not simply want to return to the life of an Indigenous woman who lives within confining patriarchal traditions, as her family demands of her.

However, Medea does not attempt to distance herself altogether from her Indigenous community. She desperately attempts to remind Jason that he loves her by invoking Indigenous

mythology: ‘I’ve known the spirits to come up through my feet and take my body when I’m dancing. That’s who you fell in love with’ (73). It is clear that Medea treasures her ties to her tribe, which Jason does not understand. Therefore, he mocks her invoking of the spirits and responds to her spiritual disclosure with ‘you’re going mad’ (73). Jason’s rejection of her roots represents the loss of the dearest part of his own Indigenous identity, brought about by his attempts to assimilate within white Australia. Ironically, their attempts to dismiss their native identities only result in their failure to assimilate, and they ultimately suffer a loss of a collective identity.

After Medea’s fight with Jason, she expresses further regret for choosing to leave her Indigenous roots behind for the potential to make a new life in white, colonial Australia. She vows to return to the identity that she rejected for Jason’s sake, admitting that she has ‘known the riches of the whiteman’s world,’ but that she has also been shown ‘the poverty of the spirit’ (74). She is no longer willing to betray her Indigenous ties as she had done for Jason and plans to return, as she tells a nameless Indigenous mythological spirit, which may be interpreted as the wind: ‘You have witnessed everything in this Land, you’ve been here long before Jason and Medea and you’ll be here long after what I do tonight . . . do not judge me, for tonight I am coming home, an outcast’ (74). Medea’s return home does not consist of falling back in line with what her family demands of her, but consists of ‘what [she does that night].’ Her return home is the murder of her son.

Medea’s madness, which is enacted through the murder of her son, stems from being stuck between ‘two worlds’ and defying them both. Enoch suggests that the two options Medea is presented with are not acceptable options for modern Australian Indigenous people to live out their Indigenous identities. Had Medea chosen to simply live her life according to the patriarchal

standards and traditions of her tribe, she would be engaging history with a “generalized nostalgia,” which Enoch describes as dangerous (6). Medea’s tribe’s definition of how an Indigenous person ought to live in the contemporary world includes abiding by antiquated tribal patriarchal traditions. Enoch would characterize this worldview as destructive because this understanding of an Indigenous identity suggests that Indigenous people belong only in the past. Accordingly, he characterizes Medea as an Indigenous woman who rejects her family’s “generalized nostalgic” perspective of the past to imply that this worldview is both unviable and internally oppressive; however, he also presents Medea’s alternative as unacceptable because it would lead to the erasure of a collective Indigenous identity. Thus, he generates the unresolvable conflict that leads to her “madness,” the murder of her son, and her tragic nemesis.

Medea’s and Jason’s son becomes the symbolic affirmation of the violent, Indigenous man who loses touch with a sense of identity—the Indigenous man who thinks his hope for the future is to slave away working for white corporate Australian companies, the Indigenous man who fails to succeed, the Indigenous man who inflicts that violence on women, and ultimately the Indigenous man who brings about the erasure of his own people in the modern world. Throughout the play, Jason alludes to his worry that his son will become like him; the Chorus tells Jason that he is becoming like his father: “you are becoming your father. You’ve learnt the lessons as your father did to his father, and you can’t see that you’re just the same . . . your hair, your smile, your shoulders, eyes, skin, limbs, breath light... And so the father becomes the son becomes the father becomes the son” (71). In that same dialogue, Jason notes that he loves his son and “want[s] a different life for him,” indicating that he does not want his son to become like him, a man “becoming his father” (71). Jason also describes a dream where he sees his father, then turns around and sees his son (75). The dream and Jason’s dialogue with the Chorus suggest

that Indigenous men are moving towards a toxic existence whereby they erase their own people and inflict violence on women. Thus, when Medea kills her son, she symbolically kills a future where Indigenous people reject their roots and bring about the erasure of their own people.

Medea's madness is where violence meets violence, as she resorts to a violent act in order to stop the genealogy of men who are violent towards women and bring about the violent eradication of their own people; Medea can only preserve an Indigenous identity through murdering her son because Indigenous communities are being violently erased through assimilation. This is why Medea frames his murder as a sacrifice to the land, which serves as imagery to invoke a shared Indigenous identity; she is resisting her son's assimilation:

Spirits, this is my son. I have failed him. He has never known his Land, never left a footprint. I have abandoned him to follow his father. I have kept him from his song and dances. I have denied him his family. Though he has tasted the spirit from my breast I have refused him his place in the Land (78-9).

In this soliloquy, Medea reveals that her son is hurt because he is an Indigenous Australian boy but has not known his roots due to the colonial efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples. Medea's son is losing touch with his Indigenous background, just as Jason had lost touch with his: "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" (79). When Jason discovers that she has killed their son, she explains that she "saved him from becoming [Jason]" (80). She kills him to put an end to the influence of colonialism of Indigenous men who lose touch with their spiritual roots, inflict pain on women, and disempower their entire communities.

An Indigenous Australian Legacy

Through Medea's murder of her son, Enoch underscores the importance of maintaining a sense of Indigenous identity in his Annual Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture; while Indigenous people should not romanticize the past, they also should not ignore the past altogether because "we never get anywhere without inheritance or a legacy of some sort" (Enoch 6). If Indigenous Australians try to deny their historical claims to the land and their people's collective memory, they are lost in white men's colonial Australia where they have no "legacy." This is why the play repeatedly invokes Indigenous spirituality and mythology on the sacredness of the Land. In his essay "Blending Greek with Aboriginal Australian Culture Elements in Artistic Expression," George Kanarakis describes various images and traditions that Indigenous cultural producers draw on to bring their Indigenous identities front-and-center in their works. Examples include the presence of Indigenous song and dance (425) and the "subjects derived from the natural environment" in visual arts (424).

Despite Kanarakis' observation that many Indigenous cultural producers invoke elements of multiculturalism in their works, such as "the blending of Greek and Aboriginal cultural elements" in Indigenous art that "reflects the wider multicultural Australian reality" (421), he notes that these blended elements are still packed with historically significant images and promote the modern survival of Australian Indigenous people: "this impact and cross-cultural blending . . . reveals how two ancient cultures and traditions . . . have come into contact in this country [Australia], acknowledging their historical legacies and highlighting that they have survived and continue to grow in his land" (428). Enoch, who blends Indigenous Australian spiritualities with mythological Greek traditions in his revision of Euripides' *Medea*, promotes the modern survival of Indigenous peoples through his strategic use of Indigenous symbols and imagery.

To underscore the cultural significance of Indigenous Australians, *Black Medea* incorporates elements of Indigenous music and dance, presents images of the desert and the sea, and invokes the powerful mythology of the land and the wind throughout his play, all of which symbolize the historic ties that Indigenous Australians have with the land and underscore the importance of maintaining an Indigenous identity rooted in those historic ties. Through these images, Enoch indicates that Medea's power is intertwined with her Indigenous identity and that Jason's loss of power stems from his disconnection from these spiritual and cultural sources of identity. In the scene "He's Thinking," Jason reflects on his failure to keep a job and succeed in white, corporate Australia, and reflects on stories about his father at sea: "his father would tell him stories of growing up eating fresh oysters" (70). Jason longs to reconnect to his Indigenous Australian roots, and although he "stinks of chlorine" and cannot return to an Indigenous identity himself, he indicates that he wants his son to reconnect with his roots: "He's [Jason] thinking how he should teach his son to swim" (70).

On the other hand, the community of Indigenous people strengthens Medea and provides her a sense of purpose. When Jason begins to fall in love with Medea, he initially sees her as "a woman to fascinate his city friends, a trophy bride who could help him along his way" (69). However, when Jason observes Medea with her Indigenous family, he begins to see her less as a "trophy bride" who could help him and more as a woman with her own power that stems from her strong Indigenous and communal ties: "[Medea's] father welcomed him [Jason] into their house and fed him kangaroo tail and bush yams and called him son . . . they shared a drink and talked about the Landscape of their lives . . . Jason watched the family dance and sing and felt the power of Medea" (69).

Medea is powerful when she is with her family and her community because she is in touch with her Indigenous roots. Medea herself indicates that her power comes from her Indigenous community when she dreams of connecting with her people—other Indigenous women—in the desert: “I dreamt I was staring into the desert and felt I would never be alone . . . I can see an ocean of women stretching back into the desert, stretching out to the horizon making the sand dark . . . standing facing me, looking to me” (66-7). The desert represents the power of history and community, and the women look to her because she has the power to shape the future of Indigenous people and women. Medea invokes the community of Indigenous peoples through her invocation of the land because she is empowered only if she can claim her Indigenous identity. Through this imagery, Enoch demonstrates that Medea can only create a constructive and hopeful identity for Indigenous women and people in the future by acknowledging her Indigenous roots—and not ignoring them like Jason—and her peoples’ shared history with the land.

The recurring image of the wind is perhaps Enoch’s most important invocation of Indigenous imagery because it violently interrupts the continuing paradigm of assimilation and erasure, just like Medea’s “madness” and murder of her son. Enoch’s use of the wind imagery throughout the play represents the continuum of Indigenous experience on the Australian continent—the wind symbolizes the past, present, and future of Indigenous people. This is why the play both opens and closes with sounds and references to the wind. In the opening of the play, “Medea Walks in the Desert,” she is listening to the wind as she sacrifices her son. This opening scene foreshadows the politics of the play: Medea sacrifices her son to the land because he symbolizes the death of Indigenous Australian peoples. If the wind represents the future of

Indigenous peoples, then the destructiveness and erasure of Indigenous peoples that Jason *and* his son embody must be sacrificed to the wind.

Jason, on the other hand, despises the wind because the wind threatens his very existence, which he indicates in the first dialogue of the play: “This fucking wind . . . I can hear it. Blowing like in the sails of a ship. Pushing me around . . . this fucking wind. It haunts me” (62-3). If Jason and his son represent the death of Indigenous peoples at the hands of white colonial Australia and the wind represents the survival, then the two are necessarily at odds with one another. For the wind to continue—or the survival of Indigenous Australians—Jason *and* his son, who is becoming like Jason, must die. Jason attempts to assimilate into white, colonial Australia, but the wind aggressively reminds him that he is an Indigenous person and that he has failed to assimilate.

Medea’s madness serves the same purpose that the wind serves; when Medea kills her son, she kills the legacy of failed Indigenous assimilation into white Australia and the consequential erasure of Indigenous peoples, ensuring the survival of her people. Medea does what must be done to promote the continuum of Indigenous experiences—she resorts to violent and attention-grabbing tactics to preserve an Indigenous identity under the threat of assimilation. Her act of madness and murder is the violent wake-up call to Indigenous peoples who are abandoning their Indigenous roots to assimilate into white Australia, just as the wind is the violent wake-up call that haunts Jason; the function of Medea’s madness and the persistent presence of the wind are intricately connected. In her act of madness and joining with the wind, Medea becomes the future and the viability of Indigenous survival into the future, which is why at the very end of the play, “MEDEA disappears and becomes the wind” (81).

Through Medea's "madness," the murder of her son, and the symbolic persistence of the wind, Enoch dramatically argues that an Indigenous identity consists of many elements: acknowledging a collective and shared history with the land, not resigning to the nostalgic idea that Indigenous people only exist in the past, pushing back against the violence against and disempowerment of Indigenous women, and embracing both the history of Indigenous people and the future of Indigenous people in Australia. Indigenous Australians must look to a future where they do not simply try to assimilate into white Australia lest their identities are erased. Attempts to assimilate lead to colonial erasure and the oppression of Indigenous men. Indigenous men retaliate by asserting their power over Indigenous women, which constitutes the double-layered disempowerment of Indigenous women. Indigenous Australians must band together to empower their entire communities and not simply seek to find individual success as Jason did—they are likely to fail and forward the colonial agenda to erase Indigenous Australian culture and identity. However, they cannot simply retreat into the past and patriarchal traditions, as Medea's tribe attempts to do by promising Medea to another man in their tribe. They must instead look to the past, present, *and* the future—hence the significance of the wind and Medea's "madness"—to create a hopeful future that is viable for both the men *and* women of Indigenous Australian communities.

Conclusion

Medea, the female protagonist, embodies exclusionary politics in Euripides' play as well as its contemporary revisions. It is necessary to interpret Medea's behavior within an intersectional feminist framework to understand how Medea experiences multi-fold oppression. In each play, Medea is marginalized because of her status as gendered, ethnic, and/or sexualized Other in a particular nation-space, and is thus exiled as a result of multiple, intersecting axes of oppression. Thus, Medea must navigate "home" and "nation" as gendered, racialized, and/or sexualized spaces.

Gender, race, sexuality, and nation impact Medea differently in each play and influence her behavior accordingly. To effectively subvert the exclusionary definitions of identity, one must take their specific contexts into account. Although all three plays highlight the exclusionary politics of nation, gender, race, and/or sexuality, they each respond to dramatically different historical, social, and political contexts. Euripides' play must be read within the context of 4th century BCE Greece; Moraga's play must be read within the context of post-1960's Chicano nationalist movement; and Enoch's play must be read within the context of settler colonialism in contemporary Australia. Applying an intersectional feminist lens to each play allows the audience to recognize different meanings of Medea's actions and situate her "madness" within multiple, intersecting oppressive structures. In effect, intersectional feminist readings of each play open up new, transformative ways of thinking about feminist resistance to gendered and racial oppression.

When read through an intersectional feminist lens, Medea's "madness" and infanticide evolves into something more than a pathological feminine trait—patriarchal discourse's way of interpreting feminine behavior. An intersectional feminist reading of Euripides' play interprets

madness as feminist resistance to the tradition of silencing women within Greek patriarchy and as a means of deconstructing exclusionary Greek notions of family; Moraga's play builds on this intersectional feminist reading by depicting Medea's madness as a way of deconstructing the hetero-patriarchal Chicano nationalism and reimagining a decolonial feminist space for Chicano/a women and queer communities; finally, Enoch's play develops an intersectional feminist reading of Euripides' *Medea* by re-interpreting Medea's madness in relation to the struggles, resilience, and survival of Indigenous Australians, particularly Indigenous women, in a settler-colonial society. Further analyses of Medea's feminist resistance—in the original Greek play and many subsequent revisions—must incorporate decolonial, anti-nationalist, and anti-racist frameworks. Doing so will help readers understand the implications of Medea's madness and resistance more fully.

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