

Decolonizing Travel Narratives: A Feminist Perspective in Cate Kennedy's *Sing and Don't Cry*

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Abstract

This study examines Cate Kennedy's *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005) as a postcolonial female travel narrative, with a particular focus on how cross-cultural encounters subvert and reform colonial ideologies. The study uses qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach to examine the influence of direct engagement with Mexican culture on Kennedy's conception of the Self and Other. The paper draws upon a postcolonial framework, including Orientalism (Said, 2003), Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), and Hybridity (Bhabha, 2004), to explore how cross-cultural encounters contest dominant colonial attitudes. This paper uncovers different themes embedded within the narrative, including respect for the culture and traditions of the Other, the amplification of marginalized voices, and travel as a quest for identity to explore how direct encounters with Mexican culture influences her perspective on her homeland, Australia. *Sing and Don't Cry* demonstrates how postcolonial female travel narratives can transcend colonial and Eurocentric conventions into a more comprehensive and rich discourse in postcolonial travel literature. This study contributes to a greater appreciation of the female perspective in the travel writing genre.

Keywords: postcolonial travel writing, gender, Cate Kennedy, Mexico, Australia

1. Introduction

Traditional travel writing has historically reflected and reinforced colonial ideologies, that are based on the construction of the Other through exoticization and cultural superiority. Postcolonial female travel narratives negotiate the legacy of colonial travel writing by providing alternative representations that highlight cultural respect, self-reflection, rather than dominance and hierarchy. *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005), by Australian travel writer Cate Kennedy, is an example of a postcolonial female travel narrative documenting her two-and-a-half years of engagement with Mexican culture. The Mexican experience becomes the foundation of Kennedy's reflections on her travelogue *Sing and Don't Cry*. This paper argues that Kennedy's narrative exemplifies the postcolonial female travelogue, which departs significantly from traditional colonial travel writing ideologies, by eliminating hierarchical binaries such as *superior Self/inferior Other*. Kennedy depicts a small Mexican peasant farming community, highlighting its inhabitants' joyful and optimistic attitudes. Using postcolonial theories, including Orientalism (Said, 2003), Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), and Hybridity (Bhabha, 2004), the paper demonstrates how Kennedy's narrative explores themes related to cultural representation, voice, and identity showing how direct engagement with Mexican culture influences the Kennedy's perspective as a postcolonial female travel writer. As an Australian traveler, Kennedy experiences a re-evaluation of her national and cultural identity, a shift that results from her deep encounter with the Mexican community. This journey leads to a sense of alienation from her homeland, Australia. Thus, the travel experience is not only an exploration of external landscapes, but also a transformative journey of self-discovery.

2. Method

The paper adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach in examining *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005) using postcolonial theories. This analysis consists of two phases: the first is descriptive, identifying Kennedy's self representation and her representation of others; the second is analytical, critically examining these portrayals through postcolonial theories concerning the Self and the Other. This study explores how Kennedy disrupts entrenched colonial narratives through her depiction of Mexican society and illustrates how her interactions with Mexican culture shift her perspectives. The analysis also examines how cross-cultural experiences shape travelers' identities. This analytical framework allows for a thorough investigation of the key aspects of postcolonial travel narratives, as exemplified in Kennedy's account of her journey to Mexico. This methodological structure enables a focused exploration of how Kennedy negotiates, resists, and reconfigures colonial ideologies in her travel narrative.

The study focuses on analyzing Kennedy's narrative techniques for negotiating colonial ideologies, particularly those related to cultural representation, power, and identity formation. This study employs fundamental postcolonial theories in exploring the legacy of colonial discourse in travel narratives: Orientalism (Said, 2003), which provides a lens for exploring the West's stereotypical representation of the

Other to justify colonial domination over so-called inferior races; Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), which explores the traditional attitude of silencing marginalized voices within the colonial discourse; and Hybridity (Bhabha, 2004), which describes the influence of cross-cultural interactions on identity through the creation of what he calls a hybrid identity in the Third Space, presenting a challenge to the notion of stable cultural identity.

The main objective of postcolonial theories is to explore the influence of colonial legacies and traditions on literary production. Rana (2021) states that postcolonialism seeks to reveal the systems of political and economic power during the colonial period (p. 46). It plays a critical role in analyzing travel narratives, a genre historically complicit in supporting colonial ideologies through exoticized depictions of non-Western communities. Nevertheless, the postcolonial travel narratives expose and counter exoticized, Eurocentric representations. Postcolonialism is a movement against colonial legacies that aims to highlight the consequences of colonialism and reflect the voices of colonized communities (Shakun, Kolievatov, Olkhovik, Goletc, & Shcherbyna, 2024, p. 204). Thus, postcolonialism highlights the impact of colonizing cultures through attempts to challenge colonial legacies with the representation of other cultures.

The paper is structured as follows: First, this study analyzes *Sing and Don't Cry* through the lens of *Orientalism* (Said, 2003), particularly in relation to the Western construction of the Other. Said (2003) contends that Western literature constructs an inferior and exotic East in contrast to a superior West as a means of justifying and legitimizing colonial expansion. Thus, according to Said (2003), inferior and less-civilized communities are portrayed as urgently needing Western guidance and support. This study applies Said's (2003) concept of *Orientalism* to examine Kennedy's representation of Mexican culture, resistance to or the imitation of colonial stereotypes. This section aims to assess whether *Sing and Don't Cry* challenges or conforms to Eurocentric frameworks in its representation of the Other.

Second, the paper examines *Sing and Don't Cry*'s active engagement of the voices of Mexican women and communities and provides them with a space to express their voices. This technique aligns with Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), a theory that reveals the silencing of marginalized voices in colonial discourse. Spivak (1988) questions the subaltern's ability to articulate their perspectives, arguing that they are often denied both the means and the opportunity for self-representation. Instead, their voices are often mediated by dominant representatives. This section investigates whether Kennedy's narrative portrays local Mexican subjects as subjects with agency and voice or whether their voices remain mediated through the author's perspective.

Third, this study uses Hybridity Theory (Bhabha, 2004) to explore the transformation of Kennedy's identity resulting from direct engagement with members of the local Mexican community. In *Sing and Don't Cry*, Kennedy experiences a profound shift in self-understanding, exemplified by a state of dissatisfaction with Western concepts of productivity and the adoption of a more Mexican worldview. Bhabha argues that identity is subject to change as a result of cultural interaction. Hybridity Theory is crucial for challenging dominant narratives and binary oppositions, such as Colonizer/Colonized and Self/Other.

As Bhabha (2004) explains:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (p. 3).

Bhabha (2004) declares that the colonial encounter produces not just oppression but also shared cultural spaces, which he calls "cultures of postcolonial contra-modernity that resist assimilation and offer new forms of meaning" (p. 9). Bhabha's concept of the Third Space is central to cultural transformation and the redefinition of colonial subjectivities. He defines it as:

These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood singular or communal that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (pp. 1–2).

Bhabha posits that the Third Space challenges the widespread concepts of cultural purity, unchangeability, and homogeneity. He also believes that cultural identities are negotiated through social and cultural interactions. A hybrid space is a transformative zone that challenges traditional narrative and reconfigures meaning. Consequently, identity is subject to a continuous process of negotiation, rather than a static construction. Kennedy's reconstructed identity results from direct interactions with Mexican individuals. The third section explores how Kennedy's identity as an Australian subject transforms through active interaction with local Mexicans. Thus, travel represents more than a physical movement over space, it is a transformative experience in which the traveler's identity evolves within a Third Space of Hybridity.

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach to examine Kennedy's views as a postcolonial female travel writer, focusing on colonial ideologies. It employs textual analysis to identify instances in Kennedy's travel narrative about Mexico trip that engage with colonial discourse, particularly in depicting the Self and the Other. Collectively, *Orientalism* (Said, 2003), Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), and Hybridity (Bhabha, 2004) produce a comprehensive framework that for analyzing the study's central objective: to analyze how Kennedy, in *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005), negotiates, disrupts, and subverts traditional colonial ideologies. These theories explore concepts such as the representation of the Other, the amplification of marginalized and silenced voices, and identity transformation resulting from cultural engagement. Through these concepts, the study critically examines how colonial discourse is negotiated and enables an in-depth reading of *Sing and Don't Cry* as an example of postcolonial female travel writing.

3. Literature Review

Throughout history, travel narratives have served as primary literary form through which cultural encounters have been documented,

interpreted, and shaped. Rooted in personal observations, travel narratives construct perceptions of the Other from the traveler's perspective. Lisle (2006) defines travel narratives as a first-person narrative in which the observer reflects on the Other through the interaction between the "eye" and the "I" (p. 40). She emphasizes how travelers' ideologies, values, and beliefs are reflected in the cultural representation process. Similarly, Blanton (2002) argues that travel narratives often revolve around tensions between travelers' internal beliefs and the external challenges they encounter, resulting in narratives that exhibit local experiences while highlighting universal themes (p. 5). As such, a travel narrative both records experience and constructs cultural perceptions through a subjective lens. The interactions between the Self and the Other are articulated through the traveler's personal ideologies, and biases, which subsequently influence the reader's perception of other cultures.

Over the course of history, travel writing has played a significant role in serving the imperialist agenda by reinforcing the British Empire's colonial ideologies. Travelers in the colonial era often documented British exploration and military operations for European readership in ways that reinforced European beliefs and racial construction particularly related to racialized stereotypes. In colonial travel narratives, non-European communities were often perceived through biased lenses. Literary examples such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899/2007), and Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (Burton, 1855/2006) portrayed non-European communities as exotic, inferior, and irrational objects. This stereotypical representation of the Other was an ideological apparatus justifying colonial expansion over other territories. In *Orientalism*, Said (2003) explores the binary opposition of Western literature's representation of the East, which is based on a logical, civilized West against an irrational, uncivilized East. Similarly, Pratt (1992) contends that travel writing represents an ideological method for expanding the British Empire by reinforcing colonial attitudes. Moreover, she argues that travel writing ensured the sustainability of the British Empire by constructing a knowledge system that supported imperial authority (1992, p. 6).

However, postcolonial women's travel writing undergoes notable changes through its departure from conventional Eurocentric and colonial frameworks. Postcolonial women writers attempt to subvert and decolonize the genre of travel narratives by employing various techniques that disrupt the colonial attitudes embedded in the genre. Bassnett (2002, p. 237) states that late twentieth-century women's travel often highlights the relationship between the traveler and the cultures encountered, signifying a shift away from conventional Eurocentric perspectives. Mills (1993) critically analyzes gender dynamics in the context of travel narratives, particularly during the colonization period. Mills conducts a comprehensive analysis of several female travel narratives of the colonial era, highlighting the dual functions of both reinforcing and resisting imperial beliefs. Drawing on postcolonial theory, she explores how gender shapes colonial discourse, especially in the representations of the Other. She demonstrates the intersections between gender, travel, and colonialism. Her work contributes significantly to understanding the influence of female travel writers on the travel narrative genre.

Postcolonial female travel writing redefines the genre from a colonial tool to a platform for cultural critique. As scholarship has shown, while colonial travel narratives often reinforce imperial power structures, contemporary female travel writers frequently seek to decenter the colonial gaze, amplify marginalized voices, and explore the complexities of cross-cultural encounters. This study builds on that tradition by analyzing Cate Kennedy's *Sing and Don't Cry* through a postcolonial lens, examining its treatment of cultural representation, subaltern voices, and the transformative impact of cross-cultural encounters on the construction of the writer's identity.

4. Discussion and Findings

Traditional colonial conventions are subverted through various narrative strategies employed by postcolonial travel writer Cate Kennedy in *Sing and Don't Cry*. This section examines three main analytical dimensions: the representation of the Self and Other, the amplification of marginalized voices, and identity transformation because of direct cultural interaction. These themes align respectively with the major aspects of postcolonial theory, specifically Orientalism (Said, 2003), Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988), and Hybridity (Bhabha, 2004). In *Sing and Don't Cry*, Kennedy reconfigures the colonial ideologies rooted in the travel narrative tradition. Notions such as Eurocentric superiority, the silencing of marginalized others, and the fixed nature of identity are subverted within the narrative by adopting an engaging, respectful, and self-reflexive approach. Thus, Kennedy disrupts the colonial legacy and fosters a new postcolonial perspective.

In *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005), Kennedy reconfigures the conventional colonial representation of the Other by offering a respectful portrayal of the Mexican community. This representational shift reflects a broader postcolonial intervention in the travel narrative in which the Western author confronts and re-evaluates pre-established biases. Drawing on *Orientalism* (Said, 2003), which critiques the tendency of Western literature to represent non-Western societies as exotic, inferior, and irrational, Kennedy resists such binaries through a nuanced depiction of Mexican life.

Kennedy constructs a vivid portrayal of various aspects of Mexican life. Early in the narrative, Kennedy confronts her own Eurocentric conceptions when she realizes that, despite widespread poverty, Mexicans prioritize fiestas and pilgrimages alongside education and healthcare. As Kennedy (2005) declares, "I smile when I heard the last two, and that is my first error in understanding. I am newly arrived, so I don't see yet how a fiesta could be as crucial as education, or a pilgrimage as necessary as medicine" (p. 9). This admission is more than a cultural misunderstanding; it signals the beginning of Kennedy's deconstruction of Western hierarchies of necessity. Her phrase "my first error" invites readers into a process of unlearning, in which community and joy are redefined as forms of survival rather than indulgence. Despite financial limitations, the resilience and optimism of the Mexican community stand in sharp contrast to the often-hectic achievement-oriented lives of people in Western societies. The value Mexicans place on spiritual and community life contrasts with Kennedy's pre-existing beliefs about poverty and necessity.

Cultural engagement is highlighted in Kennedy's description of her own linguistic and social dislocation. This engagement marks her departure from the colonial trope of the Western traveler as an omniscient observer. At the beginning of her journey, Kennedy experiences a sense of alienation due to the limited communication with the Mexicans, as expressed in her concern, "How can I live here? How will I ever express myself?" (p. 20). This initial impression highlights Kennedy's anxiety about establishing meaningful communication with the local people only through observation alone. Kennedy realizes the importance of having a deeper involvement with Mexicans to comprehend their surroundings, stating "I'm about to learn, though, that it's impossible to remain a bystander for long" (p. 24). Most importantly, Kennedy's job at the microcredit cooperative bank requires more direct verbal communication than silent observation alone. As a result, Kennedy undertakes extensive Spanish language classes to bridge the gap and establish direct communication with the locals. Despite this, Kennedy continues to be perceived as an outsider by the local community, "It's hard not to feel a bit like an amateur anthropologist, observing these vast cultural eccentricities. They are so strange, so fervent, and I am so much of a sectarian outsider" (p. 24).

The gradual transformation from Kennedy's perspective represents a postcolonial tendency to abandon the position of an external observer and become an active participant in Mexican culture. By doing so, Kennedy decenters the authority of Western travelers and repositions herself as a subject who favors cultural and ethical representation over colonial mastery and control. Thus, instead of perceiving the Mexican community through a distant lens, Kennedy engages in cultural exchange and dialogue.

Kennedy's confrontation of serious issues related to the Mexican community diverges from the colonial attitudes often found in travel narratives, which frame Western contributions to supposedly inferior communities as benevolent. Kennedy draws attention to the destructive consequences of globalization on rural Mexican communities, particularly the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Kennedy shows how such neoliberal reforms demolish communal structures and deepen economic discrepancies, stating, "His 'neo-liberal project' in the late eighties had struck at the heart of everything rural Mexicans stood for-including the 'land and liberty' their grandparents had fought and died for in the Mexican Revolution" (p. 36).

Kennedy demonstrates the lived experiences of rural poverty, highlighting the systemic inequalities that affect the lives of the marginalized Other. Kennedy's depiction of everyday Mexican life highlights the inadequate infrastructure and limited access to the essential services:

Hardly any of the houses have indoor plumbing, although they have basic electricity. Nobody has a phone, the small corner shops in each town are the only places you make or receive a phone call. Word of mouth is the only way to spread news or changes of plan (p. 37).

Kennedy's exploration of historical and economic circumstances corresponds with Said's (2003) argument that Orientalism is not only a literary discourse, but also a project that reinforces the structure of power and systems of wealth accumulation. In representing the difficult situations of Mexicans, Kennedy avoids exoticizing them. Instead, she documents these living conditions in a way that contextualizes their difficulties. The emphasis on poverty and social issues, such as the loss of electricity and the migration of fathers to the United States, while mothers are left behind to support their children, underscores the structural challenges confronting the Mexican community. Through this, Kennedy challenges the structural forces that produce and sustain such hard economic and social situations: "It's all ours, thanks to someone else. Who are we kidding, telling ourselves that nothing we have is borrowed?" (p. 158). With the portrayal of the economic struggles of the Mexican Other, Kennedy demonstrates that travel writing should extend beyond geographical description of landscapes, to include a critical examination of the economic and political challenges faced by other cultures. According to Hulme (2002), contemporary travel writing often addresses global issues, reflecting the broader context of a destination (p. 9). Kennedy's narrative demonstrates this attitude through the subversion of colonial traditions. Kennedy's contribution lies in reinforcing the role of the Western traveler as a witness, rather than a detached, superior narrator.

While Kennedy's representation of the Other subverts the colonial convention of the representation of the Self and Other, the narrative moves further through the active amplification of traditionally excluded voices. This shift in engaging subalterns' positions *Sing and Don't Cry* within a broader postcolonial effort to amplify silenced and marginalized voices.

Sing and Don't Cry represents Kennedy's rejection of the colonial notion of silencing local voices. Kennedy's amplification of marginalized Mexicans aligns with Spivak's (1988) postcolonial theory, which emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging voices and perspectives that have been silenced within the dominant Western discourse. Spivak's (1988) central question, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* explores an important issue related to the silencing of marginalized voices in colonial discourse. In *Sing and Don't Cry*, Kennedy provides a literary space that reflects the voices of Mexicans, thus challenging the colonial attitude that privileges travelers' perspectives over the local population. Through this strategy, Kennedy deconstructs Eurocentric authority and engages effectively in postcolonial discourse by granting traditionally marginalized others a voice.

Kennedy's facilitation of creative community spaces, such as sewing and painting classes, functions as a postcolonial strategy to amplify subaltern voices particularly those of Mexican women whose lived experiences challenge Western assumptions. However, Kennedy's role in structuring these activities also raises questions about narrative and institutional authority. Although she aims to empower, the very act of "providing a platform" reinforces her position as a mediator inviting the postcolonial question of whether subaltern voices can ever emerge on their own terms when filtered through the traveler's narrative. Although Kennedy's efforts aim to empower, they risk reinforcing colonial hierarchies by placing her in control of how and when subaltern voices are expressed. The amplification of

marginalized voices is evident through community services. Kennedy functions as a participant in such a way by establishing sewing and painting classes, which foster an active environment for direct interaction with Mexican women. One instance in which Kennedy observes a significant difference in the perspectives of Western and Mexican women occurs when a Mexican woman expressed her disagreement with Western women's obsession with body image:

'Somebody told me that in the rich countries, the girls, the teenage girls, starve themselves to get thin.' I glance around the faces, looking at me with concern. 'Yes, that is true,' I say. 'Why, though?' 'Ah ... they're worried about getting fat.' Small, wry twists of smiles. Everyone is too polite to point out that here, people are worried about getting too thin. 'No, well ... the thing is, this person said sometimes they starve themselves until they die. Surely not?' I hesitate. 'I'm afraid that's true too.' 'Cati! The poor things. Why would they do that?' I have no idea what to answer. I look up at her, a sinewy old woman in a worn rebozo who looks like she's fought for every mouthful she's ever got. 'I don't know. Why do you think they do?' I say. She smooths her sewing thoughtfully, shakes her head. 'I think they are just not hungry enough,' she says. (Kennedy, 2005, p. 140).

Direct communication with Mexican women exemplifies Kennedy's constant attempt to amplify marginalized perspectives. By providing these marginalized female voices with a platform to express their opinions, Kennedy reflects Subaltern Theory (Spivak, 1988) which emphasizes giving the subaltern an opportunity to reflect on their voices within the Western context.

Another example that supports the amplification of Mexican voices is a depiction of Mexicans' impressions returning from a Western country. Kennedy reports:

I missed my culture, they say finally, making an eloquent Mediterranean hand gesture, holding something imaginary, clutching it, shaking the hand for emphasis. I missed this. They sweep the hand around, grinning ruefully, and despite the roaming chooks and dust and houses made of rubble I have a glimmer of what they mean" (p.110).

This incident reflects the emotional impact of cultural displacement, as expressed by the returning Mexicans. Kennedy underscores their enduring pride and sense of belonging to Mexican society, despite economic hardship.

Thus, Kennedy confronts the prevailing attitude of silencing marginalized others and amplifies their voices by using language as a medium of cross-cultural understanding to convey cultural values. One such example is the comparison between the Australian and Mexican way of greeting someone: "What do you do?" Despite being an ordinary question in any Western conversation, Kennedy found it offensive from a Mexican cultural perspective "they want to know what you are, not what you do" (p.55). This cultural sensibility continues throughout the narrative.

Furthermore, Kennedy demonstrates her ability to understand and analyze the differences between English and Spanish over time. With a sense of wit, Kennedy reflects that she lives in a culture that compels her to speak in the present tense. (p.75). Likewise, she compares the etymology and linguistics in English and Spanish when she says, "if you doubt it, consider this: the word for 'wait' in Spanish is the same as the word for 'hope' Etymologically, that is really all you need to know. What are you doing here? Well...hoping." (p. 75). This humorous reflection stands out as a compelling aspect of the difference between the English and Spanish languages in the sense of the present and future is one of the most interesting parts of this book. It moves surface-level description towards a linguistic engagement that reveals cultural values.

These reflections indicate Kennedy's willingness to engage effectively with linguistic and cultural differences, thus reinforcing a rejection of the colonial attitude of the omniscient traveler. By positioning herself as a listener and learner, Kennedy rejects reshaping local experiences through a Eurocentric lens and allows marginalized cultural expressions to emerge. *Sing and Don't Cry* is not only a reflective journey but a meaningful act of engagement with local knowledge system. Thus, Kennedy challenges the representational constraints highlighted by Spivak and offers an ethical, reciprocal model of postcolonial travel writing.

However, while Kennedy's engagement with subaltern voices demonstrates a clear departure from colonial silencing, her narrative reveals underlying tensions. Despite her efforts to support subaltern voices, Kennedy's attempts are limited. Her position as a foreign observer reinforces a hierarchy she seeks to resist. Her authority becomes apparent when she conveys others' voices on their behalf. For instance, her remark about Mexicans asking, "what are you?" instead of "what do you do" (p. 55) reflects her own creation of cultural difference, which may oversimplify complex realities. Similarly, when she describes how Mexicans feel after returning from abroad (p. 110), she risks speaking *for* them rather than letting their voices stand on their own. Her ability to acquire the language, lead projects, and find employment through microcredit highlights the economic and educational advantages she has advantages that are not available to many of the people around her. Such moments underscore a fundamental postcolonial dilemma: Can solidarity exist without reinscribing representational authority and systemic imbalance?

While previous sections have examined Kennedy's deconstruction of the Eurocentric representation of the Other and her ongoing effort to foreground subaltern agency, the following section explores the implications of direct engagement with Mexican culture on Kennedy's identity. Drawing on Bhabha's (2004) theory of Hybridity and the Third Space, we turn our focus to Kennedy's transformation of her subjectivity as an Australian subject because of her immersion in Mexican culture. Travel plays a central role in shaping and reconstructing identity. Thus, travel not only serves as a means of external observation but also as a self-examining and reconstructive process. Kennedy illustrates this change in *Sing and Don't Cry*.

The Mexican experience exposed Kennedy to a cultural context that provoked a profound shift in her self-perception. Huggan (2000, p. 4)

argues that travel writing provides travelers with insights that enable them to confront the norms of their own society by subjecting them to critical analysis. Wolff (2020, p. 125) states: "It is interesting... to consider how this travel was construed and constructed, both by the travelers themselves and by the cultures they left and returned to". Direct engagement with Mexican culture stimulated a reconfiguration of Kennedy's beliefs. Thus, she experiences a complex interplay between her former self and the identity shaped by her immersion in Mexican society.

Bhabha's (2004) Theory of Hybridity provides a comprehensive explanation of the changes that have occurred from Kennedy's perspective as a result of her direct engagement with Mexican society. As she engages deeply in the local culture, Kennedy's identity as an Australian traveler is disturbed and reshaped. Bhabha argues for the instability of identity and its vulnerability to change through cultural exchanges. Bhabha's concept of the Third Space is a vital place where cultural meanings are actively renegotiated and rearticulated. In this hybrid space, traditional binaries, such as the Self and the Other, are destabilized, creating different possibilities for cultural understanding. A clear example of this idea is seen in her critique of the American Dream, a symbol of economic prosperity for Mexicans. Whereas the "other side" stands for the land of hope and opportunity for many Mexicans, Kennedy complicates such perceptions by highlighting the exploitative nature of Western tourism. Kennedy criticizes the wealthy tourists who "don't even check their change when you bring it at a restaurant, ...and give a begging child coins without even looking at him" (p.110). This moment marks a shift in Kennedy's role from a passive observer to a critical participant in the Mexican scene. In Bhabha's terms, Kennedy inhabits a Third Space, where her identity is marked by instability as a result of her dissatisfaction with the prevailing socioeconomic situation of the local Mexicans and the conduct of her fellow Westerners.

This transformation continues in her effort to distinguish between tourist and traveler identity. This theme is discussed by Huggan (2000, p. 3) who argues that travelers often disassociate themselves from mere tourists as a means of self-distinction, viewing themselves as cultural inquirers rather than exploitative visitors, and believing they are positive contributors rather than silent observers. Similarly, Kennedy identifies herself as someone who actively engages in and responds to the circumstances of the local people she encounters. Furthermore, her awareness of the contradiction inherent in her position as both an external visitor and a privileged Westerner emphasizes the complexity of her hybrid identity. Yet, her transformative experience is shaped by race, class, and national privilege. As a white, middle-class Australian, Kennedy has the freedom to enter and exit this "Third Space" at will an option not available to many of the Mexicans she encounters. This raises important questions about who gets to experience cultural hybridity as empowerment. Kennedy refuses to assume the role of a neutral observer; rather, she identifies the ethical tensions embedded within the narrative. Her self-reflexivity aligns with Bhabha's concept of Hybridity, in which identity is formed through the continuous negotiation of cultural ambiguities, rather than through detached observation.

However, while Kennedy's hybrid identity reflects a disruption of cultural binaries, it remains shaped by unequal structures of power that determine who can access and benefit from such hybridity. Her capacity to inhabit the Third Space to move between cultural codes, to choose engagement, and ultimately to return home marks a form of mobility unavailable to many of the Mexicans she encounters. While she reflects critically on Western productivity and cultural estrangement, her position remains materially distinct from those whose cultural displacement is involuntary or economically constrained. As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) argue, an intersectional approach reveals how power circulates through layered social categories, even within transformative encounters (p. 797). Kennedy's experience and her portrayal of Mexican women are shaped not only by cultural difference but also by intersecting structures of race, class, and gender. As a white, middle-class Australian, she has access to mobility, resources and representational authority not available to the women she engages with. While her narrative attempts solidarity, it also reveals how privilege shapes the lens through which Mexican women's lives are mediated. This intersectional awareness underscores that marginalization cannot be treated as a singular category, but must be understood through overlapping social hierarchies.

Kennedy's identity transformation becomes most apparent upon her return to her homeland, Australia. Wolff (2020) believes that travelers are often changed by their experiences abroad to the extent that they feel strange in their homelands (p. 125). Similarly, Kennedy's return to her familiar environment is marked by a sense of alienation and disorientation, and she feels estranged in her own society. Everything around her seems different, as though she were now a foreigner in a once-familiar land. She continues to compare every feature she encounters, including churches, public transportation, and even supermarkets. Kennedy feels out of place at home as her perspective on life has changed. Her sense of difference after returning transforms all members of Australian society into "others." She perceives herself as strange, even within her community. Kennedy (2005) illustrates this idea through her first conversation with her neighbors after returning from Mexico:

'Well....God, like another universe. Fantastic. I can hardly...'

'Good on ya. How does it feel at home?'

'Well, to tell you the truth it's sort of hard to adjust... it was really hard to leave after such a long time...'

'Must be good, though, to be home safe and sound in good old Aussieland?'

They stare at me already nodding, willing me, it seems, to answer yes, to confirm that it's a jungle out there, that I kissed the tarmac as I arrived, prostrate with gratitude and relief. They want to hear all about it, in fact, but they haven't got time right now. We must get together, they say, and have a proper talk sometime (Kennedy, 2005, pp. 280-281).

Kennedy's response suggests her ambivalence about engaging with her community. The Mexican experience redefined her relationship with her home and disturbed her sense of belonging.

Kennedy's hybrid identity is apparent in another instance related to her objection to Western obsessions with productivity. Kennedy adopts a Mexican sense of time that values the present moment, and she becomes furious upon hearing 'what's next?' This question represents Western capitalist ideas. She contemplates this question as follows:

It's a question I hear perhaps ten times a day, and it never stops grating. Partly because it suddenly seems so invasive, so evident of a constant compulsive judgment based on defining your identity through some jobs and the restless need to keep focused on the future, no time to waste on reflection or readjustment. (Kennedy, 2005, p. 285).

Kennedy critiques a core aspect of Western identity the identification of the self through achievement and materialistic gains. Such discomfort with a fundamental Western concept indicates alternative ways of thinking related to values such as rest and reflection, and concepts that are more associated with Mexican values.

Bhabha's (2004) argument that hybrid identity is a site of continuous negotiation and contestation is evident in Kennedy's internal conflict upon her return to Australia. Kennedy no longer identifies with her pre-travel identity, nor can she fully adopt the worldview she encountered in Mexico. Instead, Kennedy lives in a Third Space shaped by cross-cultural engagement with Mexican society. Kennedy's remark, "They have questions, but they don't like my answers" (Kennedy, 2005, p. 284), reflects a sense of dissonance with her home community.

Sing and Don't Cry is a travel book that illustrates how travel reshapes the writer's identity. Travel is not merely an external journey into unfamiliar spaces but also profoundly reshapes the traveler's sense of self. By occupying the Third Space, Kennedy becomes both a witness and participant in the process of identity reconstruction. Thus, *Sing and Don't Cry* becomes a site of postcolonial agency one that invites readers to consider the possibilities of Hybridity and identity reconstruction.

Although *Sing and Don't Cry* offers a compelling account of cross-cultural engagement and reveals a deep effort to subvert colonial ideologies, it is also important to consider the broader context from which the narrative emerges. As a white, middle-class Australian woman, Kennedy possesses the ability to travel, document and interpret cultural experiences. Thus, she is writing within a literary tradition that is shaped by colonial legacies. Critics such as Mohanty (1988), Mills (1993), and Ahmed (2000) draw attention to the need to examine how power operates even within the seemingly empathetic texts. Therefore, the study acknowledges Kennedy's anti-colonial attitudes while simultaneously exploring the ways the narrative is situated within systems of racial, national, and class-based privilege. Instead of discrediting Kennedy's account, this perspective enriches the analysis by highlighting the complexities of representation in the postcolonial female travel narratives.

5. Conclusion

This study examined *Sing and Don't Cry* (2005) by Cate Kennedy as an important contribution to postcolonial female travel writing. Through the application of postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, the study demonstrated how Kennedy subverted colonial ideologies that have historically dominated the travel narrative. Themes including respectful representation of the Other, amplification of silenced voices, and transformative effect of traveling on the traveler's identity reveal her effort to challenge colonial legacies. Thus, the text is a powerful example of postcolonial travel writing's ability to transcend conventional genre boundaries of the genre and offering a compelling narrative that effectively engages the reader within Kennedy's Mexican experience. While Kennedy's narrative advances the postcolonial travel writing genre through its ethical engagement and self-reflexivity, it simultaneously illustrates its limitations. The text reveals how postcolonial empathy can operate alongside persistent structures of privilege. Kennedy's critique of colonial attitudes and her alignment with subaltern voices does not entirely dissolve the systemic advantages she carries as a white, Western subject. This tension highlights the importance of holding space for both decolonizing efforts and recognizing how inherited privilege operates within the genre. While Kennedy expands the ethical scope of postcolonial female travel writing, her efforts at empathy and engagement coexist with the structural privileges she carries underscoring the need for ongoing critique within the genre. Future research might explore comparative analysis of other female travel writers to explore broader patterns in identity, representation, and voice.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Asma Sakit Alshammari solely conceived, designed, researched, wrote, and revised the manuscript. All aspects of the work were carried out independently.

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