DIVERSE ABORIGINAL MOTHERHOODS: CHALLENGING CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE 'UNFIT' M(OTHER)

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GMAR	Grandmother Against Removals
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Observance Committee
NISATSIC	National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
UN	United Nations

ABSTRACT

In Australia, public policies, colonialist discourses and racist media depictions have produced negative stereotypes about Aboriginal mothers as 'unfit', dysfunctional and lacking in ability to mother. These imaginings of Aboriginal motherhood have been universalising, rendering invisible the diversity and complexities of Aboriginal mothering experiences. This research draws on ethnographic and participatory research methods to explore dominant constructions of Aboriginal mothers and how these have influenced and been challenged by the contributors to this study. Through my engagement with Aboriginal mothers, the centring of their voices and observing their ways of interacting, this thesis considers the influence of patriarchal and colonialist discourses on Aboriginal women's meanings, practices and experiences of motherhood. In this thesis, I challenge how Aboriginal motherhood has been socially constructed and responded to by the state, arguing that Aboriginal motherhood from within a patriarchal and colonialist framework has been constructed as both 'other' and inferior.

This thesis demonstrates that in Australia there continues to be a persistent deficit framing and problematisation of Aboriginal motherhoods that is shaped by the continuation of colonial discourses and policies. In contrast to this, Aboriginal mothers in this study are shown to practice and experience mothering in ways that are influenced by their diverse histories and experiences, which have all in different ways been influenced by continuing processes of a patriarchal and colonising society. In this thesis I argue that negative constructions of Aboriginal mothers are shaped by patriarchal colonialist ideologies that have supported processes of white dominance through discrediting Aboriginal mothers. By challenging deficit notions of Aboriginal mothering, and making visible the privileging of white hegemonic knowledges, the research shows that motherhoods may be conceptualised, experienced and practised in diverse ways, beyond white Western hegemonic understandings.

To resist hegemonic understandings, this thesis destabilises notions of a singular motherhood identity, concluding that Aboriginal women's mothering identities are

shaped in complex ways through diverse historical experiences, relational ontologies of care, as well as complex and varied engagements with colonialist control. These findings point to the need to centre Aboriginal women's diverse narratives about motherhoods; they have implications for social science, human services, social work, public policy and program development. This thesis is of acute importance in the field of child protection, where decisions to intervene and/or remove children currently occur through the application of deficient frameworks.

DECLARATION

I declare that:

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, are clearly acknowledged.

Amy Parkes
.....
Name

[redacted]
.....
Signature

9 September 2019
.....
Date

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PREFACE

As a starting point for this thesis, I begin with a preface to introduce and position myself as a researcher. While I reflexively consider my white privilege in greater detail in the methodology (Chapter 5), it is important for me to declare upfront my position as a white female researcher. I acknowledge that multiple social identities influence how I see the world and inevitably create subjectivity in this research. My gender, ethnicity, age, social class and life experiences have shaped my interpretations and the writing contained within this thesis.

In 1978 I was born into a middle-class family living in South Australia. My father migrated to Australia from England, and my mother from the Netherlands during the post-war period, making me a first-generation Australian. On the back of some considerable challenges in life, I became a mother in my late twenties. I can recall the feelings of euphoria throughout my pregnancy and would dedicate significant time to 'nesting' while ruminating about being a good mother. However, as a sole parent I found that striving to meet good mothering standards is suffocating and the killer of a joyful mothering experience. In writing this thesis, I am privileged to share the narratives of some Aboriginal mothers whose ways of mothering have invoked my sense of a far greater mothering purpose.

My decision to undertake research with Aboriginal Australian mothers was made with some caution, for fear of further subjecting Aboriginal people to a damaging white gaze. It is my understanding that white privilege is perpetuated in Australia because of white people's failure to challenge the racial and gendered hierarchies that colonialism has produced. Therefore, the rationale for my contribution in this space is that I am challenging sites of dominance throughout this thesis. I confront white privilege in this thesis through a critical analysis of my own position, experiences and insights and how they played out through the research process. In 2012 I spoke with a Ngarrindjeri leader who urged me to consider the strength of Aboriginal mothers against the many challenges they faced. This message kept coming back to me throughout the next year as I carried out Honours research with young Aboriginal people across urban, regional and remote Australia, and had

the chance to speak with a number of young mothers. One mother in particular was living in bleak third world conditions, yet expressed to me her sense of happiness as she was together with her children and family. My experiences and conversations with mothers I spoke to challenged my assumptions about Aboriginal motherhood and caused me to reflect more deeply upon constructions of mothering.

The way in which I have been taught to understand motherhood in my own family is also important for me to acknowledge. My late grandfather, a fundamentalist Christian and avid letter writer, once wrote to a government minister exclaiming:

> It is a national tragedy, when mothers, whose greatest virtue should be looking after their own children, should leave them in the care of others.

The construction of mothers who share care with others as a 'national tragedy' is deeply embedded in my family and is an idea that I, as a sole mother, resist. I therefore acknowledge that judgements of good and bad mothering have been central to my own life, and that I am on my own journey of resistance.

1. Introduction

Motherhood is a concept that is fundamental in many ways to women's experiences of life. It is a changing concept with no firm definition that is often imbued with expectations and different interpretations. It is a concept that needs to be considered when exploring processes of biological, social and cultural reproduction, the construction of gender roles, family and the division of labour, child psychology and development philosophies. Social inequalities associated with gender, race and class intersect in the lives of women as mothers. In Australia's patriarchal and colonialist society, social inequalities have produced privileges and disadvantages in ways that have uniquely shaped the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal mothers. Analysis and critique of white Western ideologies and frameworks is significant to resisting structural and institutional inequality. This thesis considers how patriarchal and colonialist ideologies and discourses have shaped constructions of Aboriginal motherhood. This research positions Aboriginal mothers' experiences as diverse and, by taking this position, challenges dominant ways that Aboriginal motherhood is constructed in Australian culture and society.

As a non-Indigenous researcher exploring this topic, there has been a requirement for me to acknowledge my position as a child of the coloniser and to recognise the privileges that this has given me and how these have then shaped my understanding of the world. Throughout the thesis, I aim to critique and challenge my own position of dominance and the dominant ideologies that intersect with my ensuing interpretations. As such, I have reversed the gaze to my own positioning in the research through a critical and reflexive methodology, to be explicit about my whiteness, and the intersectionality of my position. Using critical self-reflection and reflexivity I have become more cognisant of the levels of dominance in my position, both as a white woman and researcher, and the partiality of my situatedness in relation to the Aboriginal contributors of this study.

I then posed the following research question:' What are Aboriginal Australian women's diverse experiences of mothering?' This question was explored within a

context of understanding the influence of a patriarchal and colonial state on Aboriginal constructions of motherhood. In order to answer the research question, I engaged with Aboriginal women belonging to a 'Granny's Group'. This involved myself as the researcher participating in joint activities with the group for a duration of three years. While six women constituted the core contributors to this research, many others associated with the group also influenced my understandings and interpretations. The women are Aboriginal elders, and all are mothers, grandmothers and even great-grandmothers. Due to the age of the study cohort, it might be asked why this thesis focuses broadly on 'mothering' rather than on the more specific role played by grandmothers. This is because while the boundaries between child–mother–grandmother exist as description, within the experience of these women the beginning and end of mothering is less distinct and there is significant fluidity in terms of who is caring for whom. The assumption that motherhood is confined to the biological mother and exists within a defined period of time, that begins with a child's birth and ends with them leaving home, is challenged throughout this thesis.

Current literature focusing on the contemporary lives of Aboriginal mothers is concentrated in the fields of health sciences, such as midwifery (Adams et al. 2018; Dietsch et al. 2011; Kildea et al. 2018; Kildea & Wardaguga 2009). Aboriginal motherhood is also touched on in the field of social work, where family violence (Baldry & McCausland 2009; Wendt & Baker 2013) and child protection (Featherstone 2016; Long & Sephton 2011; Ryan 2011) are central. 'Closing the Gap' is the current relevant Australian policy framework for problems experienced by Aboriginal people and communities. This policy focuses heavily on measuring Indigenous disadvantage, where it is often assumed that the 'gap' resides solely within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As Altman has argued, this leads to an emphasis on Indigenous deficits rather than strengths (Altman 2009). This deficit framing involves a focus on Aboriginal mothers' disadvantages or 'problems' and can fail to capture positive and well-functioning experiences of mothering, further contributing to negative constructions of Aboriginal motherhood (see Featherstone 2016). This research aims to resist deficit framing

and the problematisation of Aboriginal communities and motherhood/s within public discourse and academia by centring the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal mothers.

Throughout this thesis, literature on Aboriginal women and mothers is critically reviewed, with the purpose of identifying how patriarchal and colonialist ideologies and discourses have shaped constructions of motherhood and, specifically, Aboriginal motherhood in Australia. Previous research on Aboriginal Australian mothering (Cutcher & Milroy 2010) has highlighted the misrepresentation of Aboriginal mothers in policy and media discourses associated with, for example, maternity allowance. In Moore and Riley's (2010) exploration of Aboriginal mothering they explore the diverse ways of being an Aboriginal mother, with kinship highlighted as central to contemporary understandings. In this thesis, I also critique dominant representations of the 'good mother' and centre Aboriginal mothering experiences. However, I build on this work through a deep analysis of the perspectives of Aboriginal mothers and explore the diversity and varied meanings of Aboriginal mothering practices. This thesis widens the scope of current understandings through an emphasis on the diversity of and complexity within motherhoods, from the perspectives of Aboriginal mothers.

Theoretical and methodological overview

The thesis draws on postcolonial intersectional feminist theorising in order to examine ways in which hegemonic notions of motherhood are implicated in the stereotyping and devaluing of Aboriginal mothers' experiences and identities. The research methodology is qualitative and drew from ethnographic research methods that involved engaging and listening to Aboriginal mother's stories and reflections about being mothered as a child, their own experiences as mothers, and their experiences as grandmothers. Fieldwork, participant observation, interviews and social mapping were undertaken between 2015 and 2018. Using this approach, I examine racial and gendered hierarchies in Australia so that the operation of power in the lives of Aboriginal mothers can be more readily seen, which then enables their voices to be better contextualised.

Notes about terminology

> …language… is not a neutral channel for its portrayal or depiction…it is a political device that is often a contributing force to racism and the perpetuation of colonial violence. (McGloin 2014, p. 156)

Using respectful terminology is important in this research space, with the language used to describe Aboriginal people, women and mothers having the power to harm and insult. Although understandings of what is or is not appropriate terminology is not static and can change over time, I have considered my use of terminology within this thesis in an attempt to resist rather than reinforce colonialist discourses (see McGloin & Carlson 2013). In line with feedback from the contributors to this study, the terms 'Aboriginal', 'Aboriginal peoples' or 'Aboriginal mothers' were identified as appropriate. No Torres Strait Islander people were involved in this research. The terms (Indigenous or Indigenous Australian) were used when citing the work or direct quotations of others and in an international context. This thesis uses the term 'Aboriginal' to name the First Peoples of Australia and people who are of Aboriginal descent. Where possible I have also attempted to be more specific and include reference to Aboriginal peoples' specific cultural group/s or nations.

I have used the term 'invasion' throughout this thesis where possible in place of settlement. I do so purposefully. The use of the term 'settlement' reflects colonialist political agendas that remain alive in this country and continue to deny Indigenous people sovereign rights and recognition as the First Peoples of Australia. A thorough explanation of the politics of this terminology is discussed by early historian Ann McGrath (1995 p. xxvii) who acknowledges the 'difficulties in choosing the correct words'. She explains the powerful way in which both 'invasion' or 'settlement' convey particular political agendas and beliefs about how Australia was founded and considered that an emphasis on colonial power was a more significant focus. Furthermore, McGrath resisted the dichotomy that invasion vs. settlement presents and argued that political correctness might amplify or minimise what actually happened. She asks:

> Why is it always posited as invasion or settlement? Why not invasion and settlement? Or settlement and invasion? (p. xxviii)

My decision to use the term invasion instead of settlement where possible throughout this thesis is indeed political and reflects my belief that the British invaded the land and removed power from Aboriginal people. More than two decades on from McGrath's contribution, Indigenous peoples are still not acknowledged as the original inhabitants of Australia and it remains enshrined in founding documents that before British arrival the land was empty. The notion of settlement perpetuates an untruth, that I resist within this thesis through choice of terminology.

I use the term 'postcolonial' throughout this thesis to engage with theoretical frameworks and debates that have relevance to this research. In Chapter 4, I further explore the term as I aim to decolonise and deconstruct the colonialist politics associated with the term (Schutte 2007; Smith 1999). Part of my theoretical critique is to question the 'post' in the term to emphasise that the processes of colonisation are still continuing. Following a decolonising framework, I emphasise the power of the 'post' in postcolonial and its operation as a colonialist tool to reinforce the idea that colonial oppression remains in the past.

Thesis structure and overview

This thesis is structured according to the following format. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the initial invasion and a detailed examination of historical processes of colonisation through time. It focuses specifically on state control of Aboriginal mothers and associated state actions impacting on Aboriginal women, including their representation as mothers. Chapter 3 builds on this by delving deeper into the ideologies behind colonialist actions and explores how patriarchal and colonialist assumptions have shaped constructions of Aboriginal motherhood. This chapter also explores Indigenous constructions of motherhood within the literature, how they operate and continue to resist dominant Western ideals.

In Chapter 4 I unpack postcolonial feminist intersectionality and relate it to the focus of this thesis. Chapter 5 describes the methodological approach and methods used, particularly focusing attention on my own positioning and its impact on the research. In Chapter 6 I elaborate on the research context. I explore the dynamics

and relationships within the Granny's Group to convey a deeper impression of the research setting.

Chapter 7 further develops an understanding of the complexity of the women's lives and begins to explore the different ways in which mothering is understood and experienced. In Chapter 8 I build on this exploration of the subjectivities of Aboriginal women's stories of mothering. I examine women's narratives in relation to practices and perceptions of multiple mothering and discuss how ontologies of care shape the women's realities and ways of being. Chapter 9 discusses the way in which mothering relates to histories of grief and loss. It explores the historical impact of trauma on mothering. This chapter highlights that Western meanings of protecting and nurturing fail to fully capture the experiences of women in this study.

In Chapter 10, I conclude the thesis by providing a summary of the main findings in response to the research question. I outline the new knowledge developed in conjunction with the women and present recommendations for the human service sector and its workers. I conclude with possible implications and future directions for social science research more broadly.

2. State control and Aboriginal mothering

Introduction

Aboriginal mothering cannot be researched in Australia without acknowledging the invasion of the country, the history of colonisation and the related systemic state-sanctioned oppression of Aboriginal families and their cultural practices. Through acts of child removal, restrictions over rights to care for and teach children and widespread campaigns of vilification, state policies have focused specifically on Aboriginal mothers and have contributed to the breakdown of Aboriginal communities. In this chapter, I discuss the historical and contemporary relationships between the Australian colonial state, Aboriginal communities, women and mothers. I begin this discussion with attention to the invasion of Australia and the multiple injustices faced by Aboriginal peoples in this colonialist context. This chapter discusses past policies in order to highlight the state's historical attempts to control Aboriginal mothers. This is a complicated policy and cultural space, and capturing the intricacies, regional variations and variable effects of policies across the nation is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I provide a brief contextualisation in order to then focus specifically on the ways in which policies have shaped Aboriginal motherhoods. I argue that state control operates in a contemporary sphere through the construction of stereotypes, negative discourses and child protection policies and practices. The state is discussed as a coercive power that has shaped and influenced Aboriginal women's lives and their mothering practices.

Colonial invasions worldwide

Across the world, colonial invasions of Indigenous peoples have had considerable disempowering and long-term effects. By the 1930s, almost 85 per cent of the world was occupied and economically exploited by a colonial empire, contributing to the genocide and oppression of colonised peoples (Wallaschek 2015). Maaka and Andersen (2006, p. 7) conjure up the vast international spread of colonisation and note that 'Indigenous people collectively constitute a global mosaic of peoples who, in spite of their diversity, share a common experience of colonization'.

Colonisation (or invasions) served to uphold the privilege and wealth of colonial nations, with the implementation of colonialist policies that violated the human rights of people living in these subjugated countries. Indigenous peoples across the globe have suffered immensely from the effects of colonisation, with the dispossession of their land and restrictions over freedoms significantly impacting upon their capacities for self-determination (AHRC 2018). State colonialist policies include removing children from their families, stealing lands and resources, banning the expression of cultural or religious identities, controlling movement, slavery, and acts of genocide. Indigenous peoples across the globe continue to struggle for rights related to land, political voice, economic opportunity and cultural recognition (Maaka & Anderson 2006).

The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the UN in 2007 but was initially rejected by Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States due to legal concerns. Although those countries later accepted the declaration as a non-legally-binding document, they retain practices and policies that preserve the colonial status quo. A broad understanding of the effects of colonisation can be drawn from examples around the world; however, as Maori academic Smith (2012) emphasises, conflict, resistances and the making of colonial settlements has occurred with local nuance. Australia has unique features in relation to the way in which it was settled. Australian colonisation was distinct from other colonial settlements around the world as it was established as a penal colony in response to overflowing British prisons (Frow 2000; Rickard 2017; Stratton 2006). Another notable feature was that taking the land was justified by the British based on the concept of *terra nullius*, where the land was represented as empty and belonging to no-one. This enabled the British to avoid the requirement of negotiating treaties or any form of agreement with Aboriginal peoples (Wiessner 1999). This denial of sovereignty and imposition of British law has meant that the struggle for land rights and human rights are uniquely entwined in the Australian context. The experiences (and activism) of Aboriginal people and mothers therefore occurs in a context of colonial state

control and political rule, where administrative, legal, military and state institutions exercise considerable power and authority (Weber 1919).

Dispossession and the establishment of state control

State control of Aboriginal people and mothers is deeply embedded in Australia's colonialist history, which features dispossession from land, a denial of citizenship, of social justice and basic human rights. State control in the lives of Aboriginal people began with the British invasion of the land in 1788 on the false claim of *terra nullius* referred to above (Collingwood-Whittick 2000; Stokes 2004). A period of frontier conflict between the British and Aboriginal people extended until around the mid-1800s (Connor 2002; McGregor 1997). White racial ideology was used to justify the invasion of lands and ongoing efforts to replace Aboriginal people with a 'finer white race' (Woolmington, cited in Moran 2005, p. 172). Colonialist discourses of Aboriginal inferiority stereotyped Aboriginal people as primitive, savage and uncivilised. Characteristics of 'treachery, laziness, mental inferiority and general barbarity' were attributed to Aboriginal people, effectively constructing them as 'conquered subjects', 'wards' holding only 'slave status' (Eckermann, Dowd, Chong et. al 2010, p. 17). These depictions of Aboriginal people were dehumanising, positioning them as non-people and non-citizens. For example, in a 1929 report of the Royal Commission on the Constitution of the Commonwealth, there is a chapter called 'Aborigines, Fauna and Flora, Fisheries and Forestry', which represents Aboriginal people as not fully human (Byrnand 2015). Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton was recently quoted as saying that while Aboriginal people were not officially classified by the colonial state as fauna, their treatment by the state was nonetheless akin to that of animals (Das 2018).

The invasion

Over the 140-year frontier period (1788–1928), historians put forward varying chronologies and thematic accounts of frontier conflict (Rogers & Bain 2016). In McGrath's (1995a, xxv) book *Contested ground*, she describes the 'first colony-by-colony, state-by-state history of white–Aboriginal relations' and points out considerable variations that cannot all be covered in this thesis. She argues that

due to the size of the Australian continent, invasion did not occur at a specific point in time but rather occurred progressively in different ways, at different times and places (McGrath 1995a). While the literature acknowledges that invasion and the dispossession of land occurred progressively and differently in different regions of Australia, colonialist constructions of Aboriginality are consistent in their negative stereotyping. The takeover of Australian land by the British is denoted by Prout and Howitt (2009, p. 399) as 'an extended campaign of spatial dispossession and subjugation'. Prout (2009) considers spatial mobilities in Yamatji Country in Western Australia, arguing that Europeans made assumptions about the spatial practices of Aboriginal Australian people, and misinterpreted their lifestyles as meaningless 'wandering' (i.e. 'going walkabout'). Mobile lifestyles were seen as inferior to a 'settled' lifestyle and consequently Aboriginal people were viewed as reflecting characteristics of 'laziness, instability, vagrancy, poverty, and non-productivity' (Prout & Howitt 2009, p. 399). It was through misinformed but powerful colonialist narratives such as these that Aboriginal people were continually positioned as inferior, supporting claims that Aboriginal society was 'backwards' and 'uncivilised' (see also Hamilton 1987; Young & Doohan 1989).

Indigenous Australian academics have emphasised the unique meaning and significance of Aboriginal people's relationship with Country (Fredericks 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2003a; Morgan 2008; Watson 2008). Bronwyn Fredericks (2010, p. 11), who belongs to the Murri people of Queensland, talks about the meaning of Country and explains,

> Country… means place of origin in spiritual, cultural and literal terms. It refers to a specific clan, tribal group or nation of Aboriginal people and encompasses all the knowledge, cultural norms, values, stories and resources within that particular area — that particular Indigenous place.

Ambelin Kwaymullina (2008), a Palkyu woman from the Pilbara region in the northern parts of Western Australia, suggests that Country does not just denote the place where people are from, but reflects a synergy between people and place. People and places are interdependent and for many Indigenous peoples, representative of who they are — their identity (Fredericks 2010). For Indigenous peoples, having a sense of place and belonging extends beyond mere land

'ownership' (Moreton-Robinson 2003a, p. 31), as is implied through British colonialist perspectives. It is associated with a connection to land that is intricately tied with being and becoming. Therefore, it is not simply the dispossession of land and its resources but also fundamental elements of being human that have been eroded for Aboriginal peoples through the historical effects of colonisation and related government policies.

Colonialist constructions of Aboriginality have been critical to justifying dispossession of land and resources. These constructions have also been utilised to rationalise systemic state control of Aboriginal peoples and communities. For example, the belief that the Aboriginal population was inferior and would inevitably die out, informed protectionist policy and legitimised the segregation of Aboriginal people to reserves and missions (Behrendt 2010). Grimshaw and Nelson (2001, p. 306) suggest Aboriginal people in these segregated environments endured 'a life of surveillance and regulation'. Forcing diverse communities of Aboriginal people to live on reserves and missions, with the cultural disconnection and disenfranchisement this entailed, also had a significant impact on Aboriginal mothers' experiences of mothering.

While invasion and European settlement occurred in different ways across Australia, McGrath (1995a) has pointed to disempowering experiences that Aboriginal people are likely to share, as they were all controlled and governed through state legislation and policies. The broader objectives of the colonial state are reflected in overlapping and oscillating policy eras, with the specific beginning and end of each policy era 'in reality' being more difficult to define. In their book *Binan Goonj: Bridging cultures in Aboriginal health*, Eckermann et al. (2010), argue that past policy eras have not necessarily ended, with the effects and influence of government policies being evident in the lives of Aboriginal people today. Through a chronology of policy, they provide an overview of government interaction with Aboriginal peoples, largely representative of the experiences of those residing in the eastern states of Australia. They highlight that from 1788 to the 1890s, the situation was one best described as a frontier, with guerrilla warfare occurring between Indigenous people and the British (Eckermann et al. 2010). There were no

policies in these earlier years, but instead they describe 'piecemeal, missionary-inspired approaches within a general climate of neglect and elimination' (Eckermann et al. 2010, p. 21). After this time, they discuss more explicit eras in relation to specific policies and legislation. While there is variation in how these eras are described and defined in the literature, Eckermann et al. (2010) have provided a useful guide, broadly defining them as: protection/segregation (1890s–1950s); assimilation (1950s–1960s); integration (1967–1972); self-determination (1972–1975); self-management (1975–1996); and reconciliation (1996 to the present).

Protectionist policies 1890s–1950s

Early protectionist policies devised by the state were explicitly aimed at controlling Aboriginal people. They were the 'first official, legally sanctioned' policies that contained all-encompassing measures of control, with laws to ensure that Aboriginal people had no civil rights and were under the complete control of colonial state rule (Eckermann et al. 2010, p. 21). After persistent pursuits of extermination and land takeover, the state now considered the Aboriginal population as weakened enough to impose control in new ways. It was at this time that the Australian states inaugurated a 'Chief Protector of Aborigines' who was granted legal guardianship of all Aboriginal and 'part-Aboriginal' children (de Hoog & Sherwood 1979; Eckermann et al. 2010). These new controls removed all Aboriginal mothers' rights in relation to their children.

Assimilation policies 1950s–1960s

Assimilation policies were associated with the idea of assimilating Aboriginal people into white society, often by removing children from their families. Assimilation claimed to be based on notions of citizenship and equality; however, in reality it was another process of 'repressive erasure…where the state seeks to erase a particular past either by force and violence or by using dominant cultural forms to present a particular master narrative while editing out others' (Haebich 2011, p. 1035). Haebich (2002, p. 62; 2008) describes the assimilation era as 'a powerful act of national imagining' by white colonialists. Prout and Howitt (2009, p. 400) argue that the idea of assimilation was strengthened through a change in

'colonial conscience', coinciding with the devastation of World War 11. Eckermann et al. (2010) discuss a shift in attitudes at this time from explicit exclusion (the segregation of the protectionist era) to a discourse where Aboriginal peoples were viewed as having a 'choice' to be like white Australians — that is, they could choose to receive the benefits, rights and privileges afforded to white Australians if they denied their Aboriginal history, culture and perspectives. Eckermann et al. (2010) argue, however, that this was not a social choice, but rather a legal one. For example, to receive any proposed benefits by the state and be considered 'white' enough, Aboriginal people were required to sign 'exemption certificates' (1943–1969) that allowed them to leave reserves but denied them the right to return to visit family and friends. For Aboriginal mothers, these 'choices' were coerced, because a failure to cooperate placed their children at risk of removal. During the various policy eras discussed above, Aboriginal people were not actually considered to be citizens of the nation and it was not until 1967 that after a referendum was held, Aboriginal people were allowed to be counted in the census and acknowledge their citizenship (Attwood & Markus 2007).

Self-determination policies 1972–1975

From the 1970s, state policies controlling Aboriginal Australians rhetorically moved away from more explicit expressions of state control towards a more rights-based language of 'Indigenous self-determination'. Under the Whitlam Labor government, from the late 1960s, integrationist policies and the land rights movement created a space for the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the political sphere. While there was a significant increase in expenditure on Indigenous affairs stemming from this period, as Hollinsworth (2006) notes, around three-quarters of this funding was paid towards non-Indigenous Australian workers and services, continuing the history of white privilege in the management and control over the lives of Aboriginal people.

More recently, Toohey (2008) has reflected on the Howard Coalition Government's initiation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in 2007, which was in response to Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle 'Little Children are Sacred' – the Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of

Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (Anderson & Wild 2007). He argues that the current era is one of intervention and punishment, which I discuss further at the end of this chapter. Contemporary controlling government interventions such as the NTER resonate with invasion and indicate reoccurring controlling state policies over time.

Aboriginal women and the colonial state

In Australia post-1967, the voices of Aboriginal women activists, such as Marcia Langton and Bobbi Sykes, have increasingly gained traction (Conor 2016). This is significant because despite the considerable contributions by anthropologist Dianne Barwick on Koorie women, along with Fay Gale's edited collection exploring the role of women in Aboriginal societies, the literature on Aboriginal women reveals 'a space divested of individual women in the white imagination, which was then supplanted by types, tropes, obfuscations and sometimes outright lies' (Conor 2016, p. 27). Actively engaging with the voices of Aboriginal women is therefore important, as is examining any interpretation of Aboriginal women by white scholars and interpreters. Conor (2016, p. 27) describes non-Indigenous interpretations as a 'supplanted imagining', one which has been conjured through misogynistic and racialised colonialist impressions.

Before turning to the issues for Aboriginal mothers, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between women and the colonial state is complex and disempowering, imbued with intersecting power dynamics associated with gender, race and class. As Pettman (1996) and Connell (1990) have both described, state power is racialised and gendered across the world. These scholars argue that the masculinist nature of the state works to privilege and normalise dominant white male interests and that these interests are upheld through legislation and policy which control both the public and private spheres (Connell 1987, 1990, 2005; Kimmel & Ferber 2018; Pettman 1996). The state is therefore argued to have a significant effect on the exclusion of women (and mothers) within society.

Early Australian feminist author Pettman (1996, p. 9) has pointed out that the concept of 'the state' is understood differently around the world and suggests that

it is not 'monolithic, uniform or unitary', but rather that the state exercises power across a range of 'sites, institutions, operations and functions' with variability. While variability is noted between the ways different states operate, Pettman (1996) suggests there is a commonality in relation to the way overall state power produces dependence by women on the state, in a way which is far more pronounced than it is for men. She claims that women's relationship with the state tends to be universal; for example, that 'state discourse renders women invisible', 'women's experiences of citizenship, the labour market and state violence are different from men's', and that the state is reliant upon 'women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labour' (Pettman 1996, pp. 14–15). However, while women experience the state in different ways from men, intersectional theorists argue for the importance of not simply exploring gender but rather considering how gender, race and class intersect in women's lives (Collins 2006; Crenshaw 1991; Ferree 2018; Grzanka & Grzanka 2018; May 2015; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006).

In a discussion that is relevant to this thesis, Pettman (1996, p. 12) discusses colonial and postcolonial relations in terms of gender. She points out that although colonialist power is gendered, not all women have experienced the inequality imposed by the colonialist regime in the same way. While the treatment of men and women may vary, there is significant variation that exists among women, and this is particularly significant for minority women. UK authors Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Campling 's (1989) intersectional framework outlines the relationship between women and the state, and the way in which the role of women is determined through constructions of motherhood. Feminist authors have suggested that women are understood as reproducing the state, with the state constructing women in terms of their capacity to reproduce citizens and workers, as well as reproducing cultural and ethnic boundaries (Franzway 2016; Yuval-Davis et al. 1989). In this sense, women are seen as being mothers of the nation, responsible for socialising children in ways that mirror dominance and strengthen state power (Yuval-Davis et al. 1989). For minority women who do fit with the colonialist epitomised imagery of 'mother', their experience of motherhood is therefore one of marginalisation.

However, while such marginalisation is evident, Indigenous Canadian authors such as Lavell-Harvard and Anderson (2014, p. 1) argue that Indigenous mothers are also 'mothers of the nations' through their resistances. They highlight the strengths of Indigenous mothers and their resistances to established orders of dominance and state power, through direct activism such as constitutional challenges and human rights demonstrations. They also point to the way Indigenous mothers teach their children to reconnect with the land and 'the ways of our ancestors', to contribute to the 'continued survival of our people' (Lavell-Harvard & Anderson 2014, p. 1). While Indigenous motherhood has been imbued with negative discourse by colonial state powers, Indigenous women have continued to resist the associated oppression by forging their own identities as strong and capable women (Lavell-Harvard & Lavell 2006).

Patriarchal and colonialist representations of Aboriginal women

Despite resistances, colonialist and patriarchal beliefs about women have contributed to the control and objectification of Aboriginal women's bodies. Aboriginal Australian academic and activist Jackie Huggins (1987, p. 9) has described the sexual exploitation and powerlessness experienced by Aboriginal women within a patriarchal society, where 'White men controlled the law, the police, courts, government, church and prisons'. The subordination of Aboriginal women and mothers to serve the 'honourable' intentions of colonisation occurred through the sexual exploitation of women and girls (Behrendt 2000; Haskins 2004; Jensz 2010; McGrath 1984, 1995b; McGrath & Stevenson 1996), state policies of child removal (Murphy 2011; Read 1981; Seran 2015), the institutionalisation of children in Christianising orphanages and missions (Choo 2001; Edwards 2015; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; Jensz 2012), and through limiting the employment of Aboriginal women to domestic labour (Haskins 2001; Huggins 1987; Walden 1995).

Numerous authors have discussed the negative constructions of Australian Aboriginal women within colonial Australian society. They are described as 'sexually deviant', 'promiscuous' or 'immoral' within colonialist discourses (Behrendt 2000, 2005; Goodall 1995; Haskins 2004; Jensz 2010; Lydon 2005;

McGrath 1984; Mitchell 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2000b; Richardson 1993). This construction of the nature of Aboriginal women underpinned a purposeful attempt by colonists to defend their violation of Aboriginal women through sexual abuse and rape (Gilman 1992; Moreton-Robinson 2000a). As Larissa Behrendt (2005) has emphasised, these discourses and the associated abuse that they legitimate have had a significant impact on many Aboriginal women's sense of worth. When considering Aboriginal women and the law, Behrendt has discussed how colonialist conceptions of Aboriginal women as 'easy sexual sport' generated a belief that they were to blame for their experiences of sexual assault (Behrendt 2005, p. 250). Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000a) also explains how for many Aboriginal women who had children with a white father, the mother and children would rarely be supported, either emotionally or financially. Aboriginal single mothers who had children fathered by white men were victimised by public perceptions which emphasised notions of promiscuity, and these discourses were used to justify absence and abandonment by white fathers. These discourses have privileged the rights of white men, with this gendered violence working as a tool of racism and colonialism (Smith 2012). The state has also been complicit in this violence through its failure to protect Aboriginal women from sexual abuse and exploitation. As Huggins (1987, p. 9) notes, there was 'nowhere Aboriginal women could turn for protection'.

Indigenous Australian academic Corrinne Sullivan (2017) provides another perspective, suggesting that Indigenous women have been represented through historical discourses in diverse ways. She argues that Aboriginal women have been constructed both as objects of desire and simultaneously as bodies to be feared by the colonial state. White men were prohibited from marrying Aboriginal women, and there was a fear of producing a mixed-race child. This is what Sullivan describes as a tension 'between sexual desire and racial disgust' (Sullivan 2017, p. 406). Her contribution challenges popular discourses of colonial 'exploitation and victimhood' as she argues for the need to shift the lens to women's agency. She states that 'despite limited opportunities, Aboriginal women used their sexuality to bargain for greater independence… the women were integral economic providers

for their communities' (Sullivan 2017, p. 1). This suggests Aboriginal women respond to oppression in diverse ways, with some women utilising their sexuality to achieve some level of autonomy, giving them access to resources that they would have otherwise gone without. As Holmes and Mcrae-Williams (2012) have also argued, in the context of homeless Indigenous women in the Northern Territory, transactional sex can be understood as intersecting in complex ways with the expression of their agency and their continuing oppression. These academics point to the way in which Aboriginal women use their agency within contexts of oppression.

There is a wider and related debate in the literature about how different social positions and identity categories shape Aboriginal women's experiences of oppression. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) emphasises that there are intersections between gender, class and race that have contributed to the oppression of Indigenous people in complex and layered ways. However, Jackie Huggins (1994), as well as others such as Reed (2002), argue that Aboriginal women have been particularly oppressed due to their race rather than simply their gender. The intersections between these processes of oppression are further explored in Chapter 4 and their relevance to this research is elaborated there. It is also important to consider how Aboriginal women were positioned pre-invasion and in pre-colonial culture.

Above all, it is essential to acknowledge that most of the literature on this topic has been written from the perspective of the colonisers. Much of the historical and anthropological literature that has attempted to capture the lived reality of pre- and post-invasion for Aboriginal women is inherently shaped by Western and/or colonialist assumptions of non-Indigenous authors. Examples of these authors are Bell (1980, 2002), Berndt (1950a, 1965, 1983), Hamilton (1981a, 1986) and Gale (1974, 1983, 1989). Bell (2002) argues that Aboriginal women became less powerful in the colonialist regime compared to within their own societies, pre-invasion. Bell (2002) suggests that institutions founded on patriarchal ideals, such as the establishment of Aboriginal settlements, had a debilitating effect on women who struggled to unite their power in these environments, which privileged men. In the context of

Canada, Barker (2008) describes how the Christianising and civilising missions greatly devalued Indian women within Indian society through ideological impositions that situated women as subservient to men. In the Australian context, Bell (2002) has suggested that Aboriginal men were looked upon by colonisers more favourably when compared to women, as more competent in terms of doing business and as more deserving of political advantage than women. Fay Gale (1983) spoke with Aboriginal women across Australia and noted that the domestication of women's roles and the work of men outside the home were disadvantaging for women. Aboriginal women she spoke to were troubled about the erosion of their own and other Aboriginal women's positions in their communities. Aboriginal men, not women, were called upon to fill tokenistic leadership roles by the colonisers. Gale (1983) states that throughout the 1960s and 1970s Aboriginal men were groomed for, and used by, the developing white colonialist institutions. For example, Aboriginal men were used as mediators during the white man's negotiations over land, which was challenging for Aboriginal women whose traditional ownership of, and spiritual connections to land were of vast importance but were disregarded in these consultations. As Gale (1983, p. 3) explains, 'European negotiators bring only half the team—the male half', pointing to the way in which a patriarchal society removed power from Aboriginal women by undermining their authority and ignoring their voices.

A general assumption, evident in colonists' observations, was that Aboriginal women were violently dominated by their men and that Aboriginal men held little regard for women. Quoting Lutheran missionary Meyer (1846, cited in Grimshaw and May 1994, p. 103), this positioning of Aboriginal women as inferior to men was captured as:

> The man, regarding them more as slaves than in any other light, employs them in every possible way to his own advantage. They are obliged to get him shell-fish, roots and eatable plants.

Rather than reflecting a reality, this quote points to how the role of Aboriginal women was interpreted by Western scholars, which reflected their own gendered cultural assumptions. For example, the gendered labour roles in traditional food

gathering practices where women gathered plant/vegetable foods and men hunted meat, was interpreted through the lens of an established Western dichotomy where men were seen as dominant and women as submissive. In a discussion of traditional gender relations, Fay Gale (1990, p. 383) explains why Aboriginal women have always been portrayed as secondary to men:

> Most early ethnographers and historians were males and concentrated on Aboriginal men. For them it was not possible even to contemplate Aboriginal women in any role that was not extremely subservient to males. As a result, all of the early written records about Australia have been coloured by the cultural bias of the male observers.

Conor (2016) draws similar conclusions, suggesting that early anthropological contributions have predominantly entailed the views of white men, resulting in a depiction of Aboriginal men's lives as the primary focus. She notes an emphasis placed on men's ceremonies and traditions, suggesting that this same romanticism of tradition was not extended to women. Male colonialist assumptions were that women's traditions were inferior to those of men, or were not even registered—but simply made invisible. These interpretations point to the way in which early anthropological writings assumed a patriarchal gendered hierarchy as universal and applying this to Aboriginal men and women.

While much of the literature reflective of colonialist imaginings of Aboriginal women has depicted Aboriginal women and mothers as unfortunate and submissive (Conor 2016), there are some authors who provide different interpretations of the role of women. Tonkinson (2000) concludes that the post-invasion situation favoured Aboriginal women, who experienced increasing autonomy due to opportunities for education and domestic employment. Seminal anthropologists Berndt and Berndt (1981) have described the role of women from a different angle, suggesting that Aboriginal women were essential to negotiations with colonisers, and their role in mediation gave them further chances to improve their status, within a limiting context of colonial oppression. Gale (1983) also acknowledges, like Tonkinson (2000), that Aboriginal men's frequent relocation from ancestral lands for work caused dislocation, yet she avoids entering into a debate about whether Aboriginal men were more or less oppressed than women.

She concludes that dislocation and coercion in relation to living in foreign ways had an immense impact on both men and women. However, Gale (1990) points to gender and race intersecting in Aboriginal women's lives through the misconstruction of their roles, relegation of their social position and sexual exploitation. She states,

> The relegation of Aboriginal women to an insignificant position in traditional society meant that unrealistic views penetrated all future Aboriginal-white relations. Aboriginal women were treated not only as inferior to Europeans because of their race, but even as inferior to Aboriginal males. They were to be used, or misused, raped or ignored as circumstances dictated (Gale 1990, p. 382).

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000a) has, importantly, shed light on colonialist and gendered power relations. She argues that the oppression of Aboriginal women occurred not only because of oppressive white men and their institutions, but because white women also contributed to the subordination of Aboriginal women:

> White women participated in gendered racial oppression by deploying the subject position [middle-class white woman] both unconsciously and consciously, informed by an ideology of true white womanhood, which positioned Indigenous women as less feminine, less human and less spiritual than themselves. Although the morphology of colonialism has changed, it persists in discursive and cultural practices (Moreton-Robinson 2000a, p. 24).

The literature above points to the variety of ways Aboriginal women have been depicted, shifting from dominated to independent subjects. However, it can be concluded that gendered and racialised inequalities were underpinned by unequal power relations that institutionalised divisions, not only between men and women, but between different groups of women.

The colonialist gaze and white women's superiority

Colonial scholars have misunderstood Aboriginal culture and pre-colonial society, influencing continued misinterpretations of Aboriginal women's social position in both traditional and post-invasion society. In an exploration of settler impressions of Aboriginal women, Liz Conor (2016) analyses the colonial archives to reflect upon early settler-colonial thinking. She discusses accounts of Aboriginal women being constructed largely by white men. She tells of how Aboriginal women were de-identified by early settlers, with their names and any other identifying

information entirely removed or replaced with generic racial slurs and name-calling such as 'gins' and 'lubras'. In the settler-colonial period, Connor (2016) argues that it was largely white men who were responsible for the construction of Aboriginal women's gender and sexuality. In this way, white men were seeking to debase Aboriginal women as a way of strengthening colonialist patriarchal power (Greer 2018).

From the 1930s, the emergence of women anthropologists such as Phyllis Kaberry and Olive Pink saw the development of female colonialist perspectives on the lives of Aboriginal women. A gender bias within previous anthropological contributions was realised with Phyllis Kaberry's (1939) contribution, *Aboriginal woman: sacred and profane*. Connor (2016) shows how, by considering the role of women in relation to rituals, the performance of ceremonies and land, Kaberry was able to influence a revision of earlier thinking about the role of Aboriginal women and lead research in new directions. Significant influences in this area can also be found in the work of anthropologists Bell (1980, 2002), Berndt, CH (1950a, 1965, 1983), Hamilton (1981a, 1986), Ellis and Barwick (1989), Reay (1963) and Gale (1974, 1983, 1989). Aboriginal women have been discussed within this literature in ways that emphasise their significance within Aboriginal societies and cultures. Yet, while a feminist lens was brought to the discussion through the work of these anthropologists, it is still important to acknowledge that these female scholars were white women, and this is likely to have influenced their interpretations.

White, middle-class, female anthropologists have highlighted how Aboriginal women did not fit the outdated and highly gendered ideas of white men. They began to describe Aboriginal women in ways that were supportive of white feminist agendas. For example, Faye Gale (1990) has highlighted the important roles of influence and the responsibilities of women across many domains of Aboriginal life. Catherine Berndt (1983) discussed Aboriginal women's ceremonial lives as valuable and unique to the stability of community life. She pointed out that while Aboriginal men and women had their own secret-sacred ceremonies that were tightly restricted by gender, women's practices were mainly open-sacred, which meant that they were welcoming to everybody, including children. Phyllis

Kaberry (1939, ix), talks about birth corroborees[1] as an example of Aboriginal women's ceremonial lives. Here, Kaberry emphasises women's freedom and choice:

> [Aboriginal woman] is a complex social personality, having her own prerogatives, duties, problems, beliefs, rituals and point of view… and at the same time exercising a certain freedom of choice in matters affecting her own interests and desires.

Annette Hamilton (1981a) was an anthropologist who worked closely with Aboriginal women. From 1968 to 1985 she carried out fieldwork in the Northern Territory and Southern Australia, making this the subject of her book *Nature and nurture: Child-rearing in North Central Arnhem Land* (1981). Hamilton (1981b) challenges notions of the passive Aboriginal woman and instead writes of the power and rights of Aboriginal women:

> On a number of counts, Aboriginal women are believed to have power: the power to produce food and children, to withstand hardships, to make autonomous decisions about their labour; they are seen as vigorous and energetic, rather than delicate or passive, and within their own spheres individual women can have influence and authority, and even personal ascendency over others (p. 74)

Faye Gale (1990) has also argued that Aboriginal women were traditionally independent in terms of the important role they played in the economy, suggesting that Aboriginal women would often supply most of the family's food and, as such, were revered for their food gathering skills. Further, Berndt, CH (1983, p. 14) rules out myths around traditional subservient domestic roles:

> It is important to remember that Aboriginal women could be economically independent, self-supporting as far as food-getting was concerned. Women did not have to rely on men (husbands, fathers, brothers and so on) for a livelihood.

With a focus on qualities such as freedom, independence from men, labour participation and authority, in combination with child-rearing, this anthropological literature is revealing of feminist perspectives. These were all important issues that began to emerge and simultaneously resonated with

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[1] *Corroboree* is a term used by certain groups of Aboriginal people (not all) to denote ceremonies. For some it may be seen as a 'white' appropriation. Some people understand that the term was first used by early European invaders who adapted the word from the Aboriginal word *Caribberie*.

women's broader fight for gender equality. However, the imagining of Aboriginal women from the perspective of white feminist middle-class women has been criticised by Aboriginal feminist scholars such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000a).

Anthropological and ethnographic contributions about Aboriginal women, including those from female researchers, have shaped representations of the 'traditional' Aboriginal woman and mother. According to Moreton-Robinson (2000a, p. 75), an attempt to outline what comprises the 'traditional' is often the focus of non-Aboriginal scholars who have attempted to classify and denote certain alleged attributes, layering these onto Aboriginal people. Depictions of 'traditional' or 'traditionally-oriented' Aboriginal women are argued by Moreton-Robinson to have inundated much of the anthropological literature over the last century. The representation of 'traditional' Aboriginal women is portrayed within a pre-colonial context, where contact with Europeans has been limited, or where women are regarded as having been able to maintain, to some extent, their culture and demonstrate the practice of ancient customs. Examples of scholars who have contributed to the development of knowledges that position Aboriginal people as 'traditional' include some of those I have previously discussed, including Phyllis Kaberry (1936), Hamilton (1980), Catherine Berndt (1950a; 1974), Dianne Bell (1993), as well as a number of other authors such as Merlan (1986; 1988), Gillian Cowlishaw (1978) and Burbank (1988). This reference to what is considered 'traditional' can be problematic, as it does not represent the different meanings of the term that are held by different Aboriginal peoples. Moreton-Robinson (2000a, p. 75) has highlighted the way in which white women's interpretations have divisively constructed Aboriginal women's identities as either traditional or contemporary:

> …white middle-class women anthropologist representations create a binary opposition of 'traditional' versus 'contemporary' Indigenous women which privileges certain groups of Indigenous women as culturally and racially authentic and positions the rest as racially and culturally contaminated.

The term 'traditional' has therefore been used as a discursive tool to convey and attribute certain assumed qualities about Aboriginal women and mothers.

Arguably, no-one 'group' of Aboriginal women is any more 'authentic' than any other, and it is therefore important to consider the influence of European Australians over the construction and interpretation of Aboriginal women's identities and lives. Of chief importance is the absence of Aboriginal women's voices in the construction of their own identities within academic spaces and in Australian society more broadly.

Surveillance of Aboriginal mothers through colonial state policies

In this section, I discuss the exploitation of Aboriginal mothers and the multifaceted effects of the colonialist gaze and colonialist policies on Aboriginal mothers, because of their relevance to contemporary experiences of Aboriginal mothering. I explore the ways that the state exercises power to reinforce its dominance through policies and discourses that position Aboriginal mothering as inferior, and construct good mothering as white, Western and middle-class. As Choo (2001, p. 82) has argued, policy interventions by the colonial state have impacted upon Aboriginal women's mothering roles, which have been historically constructed in ways that have rendered them both 'invisible and subordinate'. In this section, I reflect upon the role of the state and its agents (such as the church) in exercising state power by galvanising the intense public scrutiny and surveillance of Aboriginal mothers to justify child removal. Controlling state policies are discussed as shaping everyday practices and past and present experiences of Aboriginal mothering. A review of contemporary discourses and recent interventions suggest a new stolen generation and history repeating.

The exploitation of Aboriginal mothers

Since invasion, Aboriginal mothers have been exploited in domestic service (Haskins 2001; Huggins 1987; Walden 1995) and their children forcibly removed to be raised in 'white ways', through Christianising institutions. Today, Aboriginal women, mothers and grandmothers recall being victims of this practice as children, and being trained as domestic servants (Haskins 2001, 2004, 2009; Huggins 1987, 1995; Robinson 2003). Aboriginal mothers may have internalised a 'colonialist' sense of themselves as mothers (Jebb & Haebich 1992; Sykes 1975). One

of the ways in which we see that Aboriginal women have been exploited is through their demotion into particular spheres of domestic labour. For example, as Jebb and Haebich (1992, p. 25) explain, although Aboriginal women were capable hunters and gatherers and had been observed on stations to be capable horse riders, policies influenced sex roles over time, so that colonialist ideas of 'suitable work' for white women were transferred to Aboriginal women who were then relegated to the domestic sphere.

It has been suggested that mimicry is 'one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge' (Bhabha 1984, p. 126). As Bhabha defines it 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1984, p. 126). So, while Aboriginal mothers were repeatedly shown, both explicitly and implicitly, how to be as mothers and trained in white ways, they would ultimately never truly embody whiteness. The colonialist discourse of mimicry operates with the ambivalence of being almost but not quite 'white', as it repeatedly produces 'slippages' and 'differences' that then function to reject the colonial subject (Bhabha 1984, p. 126). The representation of the colonised as an incomplete vision of whiteness purposefully positions Aboriginal motherhood as incomplete through discourses of mimicry that produce both similarity and otherness, 'resemblance and menace' (Bhabha 1984, p. 127) that can undermine colonialist power. Representations of colonial subjects as being 'almost the same but not white' (Bhabha 1984, p. 130) made it impossible for Aboriginal women to ever transcend their representation as 'the 'underclass', including in their roles as mothers. This devaluation of Aboriginal women within the Australian work force continues to be evident today, with research indicating that Aboriginal women continue to experience the greatest disadvantage in comparison with non-Indigenous Australians and Indigenous men (Gray & Lohoar 2012). This is another example of the challenges that Aboriginal mothers face in their negotiation of mothering experiences.

During the settlement era, with 38 white men to every white woman, Aboriginal women were frequently exposed to acts of sexual violence, exploitation and

dispossession from their families and enslavement by white men (Pettman 1992). Reporting on Richard Evans (1975) 'Harlots and Helots', Jebb and Haebich (1992, p. 28) find 'a litany of rape, abduction and exploitation justified by racism and greed'. As Evans (1975, p. 106) states, 'The rape and subjugation of Aboriginal women was a key feature in European/Aboriginal sexual relations'. This called into question dominant beliefs relating to a 'morally permissive Aboriginal society' and the idea that Aboriginal women were happy to be having sex with white men, as long as they had 'food, liquor or tobacco' (Jebb & Haebich 1992, p. 28). While colonisers took issue with 'Aboriginal men's ownership of women, polygamy, child brides, women's profanity, male violence to Aboriginal women and, importantly, Aboriginal women's often mentioned promiscuity' (Jebb & Haebich 1992, p. 30), they themselves were unable to construct Aboriginal women as more than lustful, sexual objects. European men wanting to marry or desiring an Aboriginal woman were met with disgust, often resulting in the further denigration and exploitation of Aboriginal women, as the men, as described by Evans, psychologically struggled with this 'inwardly…racial conundrum' (Evans 1975, p. 109).

The sexism and racism of the colonial past operates and persists in the colonial present, with representations of the 'available' Aboriginal woman still prolific. Aboriginal women's reproduction has been targeted for control and surveillance by the state ever since colonisation because control of it was seen as critical to breeding out Aboriginality. The reproductive capacities of Aboriginal women were targeted in various ways. Moreton-Robinson (2000a, p. 171) discusses the sterilisation of Aboriginal women through the use of otherwise banned medications; thus white reproduction was encouraged while Aboriginal reproduction was restricted and discouraged. For example, in the 1970s, Aboriginal women were coerced to accept the low-cost birth control medication Depo Provera that was widely distributed by Indigenous medical services, even though it was not approved as a contraception in Australia and proved ineffective (Moreton-Robinson 2000a). Aboriginal women's reproductive capacities have therefore continued to be controlled and manipulated in multiple ways in (post)-colonial Australia.

Representing motherhood through colonial state discourses

As I have previously discussed, gendered and racialised power relations are reflected in the ways in which the state has controlled Aboriginal mothers' lives. In this section, I will now consider how the imaginings of Aboriginal mothers as inferior have influenced state policies that shaped mother's everyday lives.

The power and responsibilities of Indigenous mothers potentially compromises male power within patriarchal society and represents a threat to the patriarchal state. Lavell-Harvard and Anderson (2014) suggest that the experience of Indigenous mothers across the dominant imagery of motherhood represents a hegemonic image of 'the good mother', as racialised and classed (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010, p. 5). This imagery supports and reinforces the idea that there is one way of being a mother for the benefit of the one Australian nation. This is a denial by the state of the multiple Indigenous nations that existed before it (and remain invisible to it), influencing singular conceptualisations of nationhood and motherhood. A singular conception of mothers as nurturers and reproducers for 'our nation' can be contrasted with Indigenous understandings of motherhood in an Australia comprised of many nations. For example, in the Canadian context, as Lavell-Harvard and Anderson (2014, p. 3) state: 'Arising out of our role as mothers, as givers of life, the role of Indigenous women is to care for … and nurture our nations'.

Within Indigenous ways of understanding, the term nation is plural (e.g. nations) and mothers play a significant role in shaping the decision making that influences people and nations. Lavell-Harvard and Anderson (2014) suggest that while the experience of Indigenous mothers across the globe is extremely diverse, Indigenous women are generally regarded as compromising the patriarchal order. They argue that the state has responded by denigrating and dehumanising Indigenous motherhoods to reduce their power – labelling them as 'backward' (Lavell-Harvard & Anderson 2014, p. 2). While the state has attempted to control Indigenous mothers through the imposition of colonialist ways, institutionalisation and the removal of children, mothers have maintained

> …a long tradition of 'keeping up appearances' as a strategic form of resistance… and work to maintain a façade of normalcy in order to evade the always vigilant gaze of the larger society (Lavell-Harvard & Anderson 2014, p. 2).

This expression of resistance to attempts by the state to control how mothering is practised also highlights the ways in which the state exercises power and filters into the everyday experiences of Aboriginal mothering. The state perceives and controls Indigenous women through the intersection of both gendered and racialised power. In Australia, Aboriginal mothers have been cast out as the 'other' and positioned as a threat because they do not mirror the state's singular conceptualisation of a white Australian motherhood. The racial positioning of Aboriginal mothers as less than white Australian mothers, as 'unfit' and 'bad' mothers, points to the complex and varied ways in which state power operates in the lives of women (Moore & Riley 2010), creating circumstances that have increased the dependence of Aboriginal people on the state (Maddison 2008; Atkinson 2002). Agents of the state (such as policy makers and service providers) have positioned Aboriginal mothers as inferior due to perceiving them based on the dominant discourses in circulation, ensuring the dominance of a white version of motherhood. Maddison (2008) emphasises the link between dependency and colonisation with the erosion of Aboriginal autonomy essential to ensuring white dominance. She provides the example of the Northern Territory Intervention (NTER) where Aboriginal autonomy was undermined by the state placing restrictions over access to welfare and alcohol, by enforcing mandatory health checks for Aboriginal children, and by taking land back. These measures that removed Aboriginal rights to their land speaks to the persistence of unequal power between Aboriginal people and the state. These measures resemble protectionist legislation which, as Atkinson (2002, p. 67) explains, 'enforced dependency', 'gave power to people who used their power abusively', and 'tore families apart'. Aboriginal people have been positioned by the state as problematic and in need of 'intervention', which reinforces a sense of powerlessness, making it challenging for Aboriginal mothers to reclaim their autonomy.

The state has intervened in Aboriginal mothers' lives in ways that have constantly evolved and changed, depending on dominant political agendas. However, while the policy strategies employed by the state may have changed, colonialist representations of the 'other' at the heart of colonialist discourses are inclined towards being fixed and rigid in nature (see Bhabba 1983; Foucault 1984; McLintock 1995; Said 1978). Dibyesh Anand (2007, p. 23) analysed Western colonialist representations of 'the other' and posits:

> A critical political analysis of the Western imagination of the Other involves a recognition at two levels—the practices of essentializing and stereotyping that provide the backbone as well as various strategies (such as infantilization, eroticization, debasement, idealization, and self-affirmation) that put flesh to the imagined Other.

Anand (2007) notes that stereotypes are reductive in that they present complex groups or cultures in a singular and simplified predetermined imagery (see also Hall 1997). This can be seen in colonialist discourses about the 'Other' in Australia, where Aboriginal people have been represented as less then human, primitive, cannibals and immature (Eckermann et al. 2010; Goodall 1995). These representations have played a significant role in fabricating Aboriginal women's lives, with implications for how they are constructed as mothers (Conor 2016). Conor conveys how unqualified 'evidence' was repeated persistently over time, through state imagery and print media, and has significantly contributed to the stereotyping of Aboriginal women and mothers. She explains that 'the figure of the Aboriginal mother… has been critical to the development, enactment and enforcement of all state policies directed at Aboriginal Australians' (Conor 2016, p. 161). As an example of this, she discusses the reoccurring focus on infanticide, which she suggests was used to position Aboriginal mothers as 'savage' and unfit mothers. She explains that claims of savagery were used by the state to call for the interrogation and surveillance of Aboriginal mothers. The role of the state is also discussed by Hollinsworth (2006, p. 70), who has pointed out that an emphasis was placed on Aboriginal women as living in misery and in 'pitiful conditions'. These discourses were used to justify interventions such as the removal of children from their families.

Since invasion, state perceptions and stereotypes of Aboriginal mothers as inferior reveals the colonisers' beliefs in their own superiority. Aboriginal people (including mothers) were widely associated with attributes of inferiority, laziness and 'barbarity' (Eckermann et al. 2010, p. 16). These powerful discourses reflected assumptions that Aboriginal mothers were racially inferior to British or 'white' mothers. In doing so, the state powerfully reinforced discursive representations about white, Western superiority, thereby strengthening its own power.

Removal of children: The Stolen Generations

While the removal of children from Aboriginal mothers by the state is also discussed by Cull (2006) and Lavell-Harvard (2006) in the Canadian context, this thesis focuses on the Australian context. In Australia, the Stolen Generations refers to the state-sanctioned systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families into public institutions and missions across Australia (HREOC 1997; Hunter 2008). For Aboriginal mothers, the restrictions to and surveillance of their motherhood is maintained through controlling state policies and the agents of the state (the church, governments and welfare agencies) that were (and still are) involved in the removal of Aboriginal children. Colonial state policies in Australia specifically targeted Aboriginal mothers through the legislated kidnapping of Aboriginal children (Elder 2009; Paisley 1997; Rudd 2008; Terszak 2016). As previously discussed, segregationist policies displaced Aboriginal people by forcing them off their land onto state-designated missions and government reserves. While the intention of the state was to 'smooth the dying pillow' of an assumed 'dying race' (HREOC 1997, p. 28), sexual exchanges between white men and Aboriginal women resulted in growing numbers of 'half-caste' children (Dominello 2018). The removal of these children by the state has had profound disempowering effects on Aboriginal families and communities.

Different policy eras are noted as having different implications for Aboriginal mothers depending on how they were categorised by the state. For example, as Pennycook (2002, p. 21) states, there were different intentions behind the protectionist and assimilationist policies. She argues that while 'protection' was intentioned for 'true Aborigines' with state development of segregated reserves,

assimilation on the other hand was for Aboriginal people who had been colonially defined as 'half-castes', 'quadroons' or 'octoroons'. This illustrates the way in which the state has defined Aboriginality through race and bloodlines. As Pennycook (2002, p. 22) suggests, historical racist constructs of Aboriginal people depict and shape pure/traditional or impure/modern/hybrid dichotomies. Aboriginal people and children were defined according to racial categorisation, with 'true Aborigines' needing to be segregated, and 'half-castes' needing to be 'civilized, educated and cared for' by the state (Pennycook 2002, p. 22). While all Aboriginal people were cast as 'other', Aboriginal children categorised as having 'some whiteness' in their blood were particularly vulnerable to state intervention. Aboriginal mothers had no legal rights to these children and lived under continuing fear that their children would be removed (Anderson & Wild 2007; Atkinson 2002). Aboriginal mothers were targeted according to how their children's blood quantum was defined by the state. The removal of 'half-caste' children from Aboriginal mothers, to be cared for by white families or state institutions demonstrates the role of the state in constructing the idea that Aboriginal motherhood is less than white motherhood. These racist discourses also suggest that Aboriginal children were not worthy of any state intervention unless they possessed some whiteness.

In response to this perceived threat to white racial purity in Australia, Aboriginal protectionist and assimilation legislation and policies were enacted in state jurisdictions, commencing with the Victorian *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869* and the *Aborigines Act 1905* in Western Australia. This legislation resulted in the systematic removal of up to 100,000 Aboriginal children from their families into public institutions and missions across Australia. However, drawing accurate conclusions about the numbers of children who were removed has been hampered by many factors, including destroyed records, incomplete records, manipulated records or a failure to make any record at all in the first instance (HREOC 1997; Murphy 2011; Panagoda 2013). Despite such complications and the varied intensity with which removals occurred at different times across different regions, it is estimated that between 1910 and 1970 'between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and their

communities' across Australia (HREOC 1997, p. 37). Children were placed with either church-led missions, government settlements or foster care arrangements (Bretherton & Mellor 2006; Healey 2009).

Aboriginal 'half-caste' children were removed from their mothers and families because they were seen to have more promise, owing to their whiteness. Thus, the determination that a child had some European blood defined them as superior, bestowing them with a place in Australian society — 'albeit a very lowly one' (HREOC 1997, p. 29). Ongoing attempts to break down Aboriginal communities and families have therefore particularly focused on Aboriginal mothers and children, with the state constructing Aboriginal mothers as dysfunctional and 'unfit' to care for their children. Memories of removal have been captured by Samson and Baines (1988), who retell the stories of Nyungar elders who tried to protect their young by blackening pale-skin faces, hiding babies in the bush, and teaching the youngsters to 'scatter and hide' when authorities came.

The *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), produced by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) that followed from the National Inquiry into the Forcible Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (1995–1997), documents the experiences of Aboriginal families, mothers and their children who were removed. Mothers and children who have lived through policies of removal experience multifaceted effects from being stolen. According to Atkinson (2002), Aboriginal mothers and children in colonised countries have historically lived in fear of the state, contributing to intergenerational trauma and distress that continues to the present day. These racist state interventions were justified through anti-Aboriginal motherhood discourses and pro-white Australia sentiments, with legislation designed to enforce the assimilation of Aboriginal Australian children into white culture (Moreton-Robinson 2000a). Governments of the time insisted that 'educating' children in white 'care', through placements with white families or in white institutions, was a warranted and commendable action. However, today, these 'Stolen Generation/s' of children provide harrowing accounts of abuse and suffering.

For Aboriginal mothers, the fear of having their mothering scrutinised, the knowledge that their motherhood was still regarded as substandard and the risk that their children could be removed at any time has not altered. The demonisation of Aboriginal mothers and the removal of children has disrupted Aboriginal family structures, unsettled social worlds and caused profound grief and lasting sorrow. These effects are vividly expressed in film media such as *Kanyini* (Hogan & Randall 2008), narrated by Bob Randall, who is a traditional owner of Uluru and who was taken from his mother as a child. He expresses the importance of connectedness and describes its multifaceted nature for Aboriginal people, referring to the loss of connectedness that has occurred through being stolen and describing the pain and suffering this has caused to Aboriginal peoples. Intergenerational grief and loss have occurred through removal as children, destroying the sense of belonging to land or 'country', family, community, and disrupting traditional knowledges, spirituality and belief systems — with ripple effects across Aboriginal communities. Randall's film emphasises the role of the state and the church as being imposed on the lives of Aboriginal mothers in ways that have profoundly affected their 'Kanyini' — their sense of connectedness.

Insights from children who were removed draw attention to loving emotional bonds and care, rather than supposed neglect (HREOC 1997, p. 246):

> We all adored our mother. She was petite, with long black hair down to her waist. Her skin was soft and chocolate in colour, her big brown velvet eyes were always full of love for all of her children. She was a very outgoing caring woman, extremely clean in her home and kept herself and all we children immaculate in appearance. She was always there for us, her arms wide to comfort us when we were unhappy (Confidential evidence 332, Queensland).

The effects of being removed from parents who 'loved you' and being sent to an orphanage on 'another planet' was profound:

> Even though at home you might be a bit poor, you mightn't have much on the table, but you know you had your parents that loved you. Then you're thrown into a place. It's like going to another planet. (Confidential evidence 323, Tasmania).

Although these excerpts tell a different story about Aboriginal children feeling loved despite experiencing poverty, they were, in fact, removed because their mothers were deemed by the state to be harmful to their own children.

The removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers and families was extremely harmful to the children, robbing them of the ability to bond and form attachments with family and caregivers, and as having devastating consequences by depriving children of acceptance and love (Ryan 2011). This has had enduring consequences for future generations of Aboriginal Australian mothers, whose confidence to care for and be mothers to their children has been eroded (Ryan 2011, p. 192). This point has also been made by Yeo (2003), who has indicated that experiences of removal have been damaging to the maintenance of secure attachments for many Aboriginal peoples, illustrating that state policies of removal have affected Aboriginal mothers and communities in profound ways.

Furthermore, discourses of 'racial purity' that were used as a colonialist pretext to separate Aboriginal children from their mothers asserted that this separation was 'in the best interests of the child'. The rhetoric was that the children would simply forget, they would not remember their pasts and that removal would benefit them in the long run. White people considered that they were helping Aboriginal people to 'get better' and improve themselves by aiding their transformation into more civilised (white) beings (Wheeler 2006, p. 129). Evidence of the callousness of removal can be found in the perspective of an 'Aboriginal protector' from the early 20th century, with one excerpt in the *Bringing them Home* report, showing the historical mercilessness towards mothers (HREOC 1997, p. 276):

> I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief may be at the time. They soon forget their offspring (James Isdell, WA travelling protector, 1909).

The term 'offspring' used in this comment reflects state and other public discourses that historically reduced Aboriginal mothers to the status of animals. The distressing ways in which removal occurred is described by Haebich (2000), who noted that mothers had no right of appeal. She explains that removal would

occur suddenly, without notification, and that this traumatic event has produced intergenerational fear of the state.

Once they were removed, Aboriginal children under the age of 16 became essentially owned or under the guardianship of the Chief Protector of Aborigines (HREOC 1997, p. 103). For the daughters of Aboriginal mothers, the future was narrowly prescribed by the expectation that they would be trained as housekeepers and domestics, taught white ways and become devout Christians (Huggins 1987). Women had become enslaved to a new white world order, one that contained a racialised and gendered hierarchy of man over woman, white over black. Once they turned 16 years of age, it was expected that the young women could be released into the white community, hopefully marry a white man and mother his children (Wheeler 2006), thereby producing whiter offspring. In Haskins' (2001, p. 13) discussion of domestic service work, she describes the situation not as assimilation, but as the 'containment, incarceration, and consignment' of Aboriginal women into 'oblivion'.

As Haskins (2001) explained, Aboriginal motherhood was specifically targeted from the early 1900s, with policies at the time focusing on young prepubescent girls, who were firmly positioned as the solution to the supposed Aboriginal 'problem'. Policy stated that young Aboriginal girls over 14 years of age should be removed from reserves and relocated to 'state indentures' with white families (Haskins 2001, p. 17). Haskins' (1998; 2001) work has highlighted that for each Aboriginal woman removed for service, there was a white family directly embroiled in this version of gendered colonialism. Reflecting upon the contributions of Aboriginal writers James Miller (1985) and Marjorie Woodrow (1990), Haskins (2001, p. 19) comments:

> Girls in Cootamundra Home were actually told to look forward to the prospect of producing a fairer child, who would then produce an even fairer child, at the same time as they were taught to fear and despise Aboriginal men — basically, being exhorted to effect their own disappearance.

Powerful discourses circulated throughout the segregationist and assimilationist policy eras that positioned the white man as good and the Aboriginal man as fearsome and aggressive (McLintock 1995; Watson 2009). This points to the way in

which colonialist and patriarchal messages stereotyped Aboriginal men in ways that influenced Aboriginal women's relationships with them. A fear of Aboriginal men was generated by demonising them (see Watson 2005, 2007, 2009). As Indigenous academic Irene Watson has argued, the state invested in the construction of an illusion that Aboriginal male violence towards Aboriginal women was inherent in Aboriginal culture (Watson 2009). When discussing the role of the state and the persistence of violence towards women, Franzway (2016) argues that violence occurs to the extent that the state permits it. It is noticeable that Aboriginal women's rights as citizens were not protected when they continued to disproportionately experience violence towards them, including by the state. Although Franzway (2016) has argued that the state can play a significant role in improving the lives of women, it was through womanhood, motherhood and reproduction that Aboriginal women were used as a colonialist mechanism to reinforce white male privilege.

Aboriginal women were therefore expected to submissively participate in the phasing out of their own race and culture in a period that strategically focused on 'breeding out the colour' and making Australia white (McGregor 2002). As one Aboriginal woman recounts (HREOC 1997, p. 157):

> Because the system would make sure that no-one would marry an Aborigine person anyhow. And then my children would automatically be fairer, quarter-caste, and then the next generation would be white and we would be bred out. I remember when she was discussing this with my foster people, I remember thinking — because I had no concept of what it all meant — I remember thinking, 'That's a good idea, because all the Aborigines are poor.'
> (Confidential evidence 613, New South Wales)

In the above excerpt, the power of the state and its agents (e.g. 'foster people') is documented as systemically influencing the thinking of Aboriginal people. This type of indoctrination occurs in the social context of unquestioned classed, racialised and gendered inequality. The systematic separation of Aboriginal mothers from their children and the state promotion of 'racial purity' has caused profound social disruption, destabilising Aboriginal motherhoods and creating a disconnection from historical and cultural mothering practices and knowledges (White 2010; Moreton-Robinson 2000a). The influence of government

interventions in mother's lives has been pervasive, with the state imposing itself not only through child removal, but also through the broad construction of Aboriginal women and mothers as inferior. As I will discuss next, Aboriginal mothers have experienced persecution not only through the state but also through churches imposing controls over their mothering. Colonial policies also shaped how religious organisations interpreted, constructed and engaged with Aboriginal peoples.

Church and state collaborations

In the protection and segregation policy eras from the 1890s to the 1950s, the value of Aboriginal motherhood was being undermined by the state in collaboration with the church. Government authorities forced Aboriginal people to live on missions run by church groups, and as such, control by the state and the church in the lives of Aboriginal people became normalised (Eckermann et al. 2010). As Christina Twomey (2002) has described, focusing on Port Phillip (Melbourne, Victoria), in the era of protection, 'civilising' of the 'Other' was carried out by disrupting children's relationships with their parents and indoctrinating Aboriginal families with Christian values. These interventions have reinforced the idea that Christianity is the superior faith, that Western parenting practices are more civilised ways of parenting, and that Aboriginal mothers are not capable, and not to be trusted with the rearing of their own children.

Discourses of superiority and the exertion of control over Aboriginal mothers extended from the state to the church in the era of assimilation. During this period, the state recruited 'respected' white men and women, including those in the churches, to be a part of its intervention in Aboriginal families. As Eckermann et al. (2010) argues, settlements, missions and reserves were established into the 1940s and while the churches had begun the civilising mission in the protectionist era, assimilation was the era of intensive training. As Francesca Bartlett (1999) described, white Christian women became righteous role models by training Aboriginal women as their 'national duty'. These white, middle-class women were referred to by Anne Summers (1975) as 'God's police', a name derived from their willingness to uphold colonialist morals, which included embracing the nuclear

family, and imparting normative ideas associated with race, class and gender that reinforced colonial power. Women who did not fit within this category were stereotyped as 'damned whores' (e.g. convict women), and from this perspective, women were both colonisers and colonised (Summers 1975). White men were colonising Aboriginal land, while white, middle-class women were colonising women who did not conform to social norms. Colonial discourses about hygiene and cleanliness were widespread, with white women constructed as being superior to Aboriginal women in this regard and thus seen as suitable hygiene instructors. From Bartlett's (1999) analysis, white women played a significant role in policies and legislation that have constructed white women's femininity as superior.

This discussion has highlighted that white women have also oppressed Aboriginal mothers, acting as an extension of white men's superiority and helping to create discourses and material practices that reinforce racial difference. In particular, through their role in 'training' Aboriginal women as an arm of the state, white women were actively involved in indoctrinating Aboriginal mothers into the belief that their mothering ways were substandard. Thus, white women also operated as an apparatus of the state and the church, actively reinforcing white superiority in motherhood.

A new 'Stolen Generations'

Throughout this chapter, I have built up, layer by layer, a picture of the historical policies and the colonialist constructions of Aboriginal peoples and the discourses and assumptions that they have been founded on or influenced by. I have also highlighted throughout, and particularly in above sections, how state-sanctioned child removal flowed from these views and has been a prevalent historical practice with profound and complex implications for Aboriginal mothering. However, the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their mothers by child protection authorities is ongoing and continues into the contemporary era. Hence, Aboriginal mothers in Australian society remain subjected to disproportionate levels of state surveillance and control even today. A number of authors have echoed concerns over a 'new stolen generation', with a growing number of Aboriginal mothers still

separated from their children through government policy (Cunneen 1997; Tilbury 2009). There have been alarming increases in the number of Aboriginal children being removed who live in 'out of home' care, under state care and protection orders, as well as significant increases in Aboriginal children separated from their families through juvenile justice sentencing (Cunneen & Libesman 2000, 2002; Dodson 2007; Libesman 2006). Recent data indicates that Aboriginal children are seven times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be subjects of substantiated reports of harm (AIHW 2018). In the South Australian Government report *A fresh start* (Government of South Australia 2016), which was a response to the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission, *The life they deserve* (Nyland 2016), it was noted that Aboriginal children are significantly over-represented in child protection, with approximately one-third of children in out-of-home care being Aboriginal, and ten times more likely to come into contact with the child protection system than non-Aboriginal children. These statistics are of great concern given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples account for only 3.3% of the total population in Australia (ABS 2016). When considering the over-representation of Aboriginal children in state care, Douglas and Walsh (2013) have emphasised the entrenched nature of child removals and described the situation as one of 'intergenerational removal'. They interviewed lawyers working within the child protection system and found that surveillance and intervention in Aboriginal families commonly occurred in families with a historical relationship with the state (Douglas & Walsh 2013).

Elsewhere in the literature, links have been made between the removal of Aboriginal children, the criminal justice system and past state policies. As Cunneen (1997, p. 2) explains, the high number of Aboriginal children in custody 'effectively amounts to a new practice of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from their families'. Cunneen (1997) draws upon the findings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (NISATSIC) (HREOC 1997), pointing out persistent attempts to alert governments about the role that contemporary juvenile justice systems play in relation to the reproduction of past

policies of removal. He claims that the government's failure to acknowledge this concern is 'reflective of a systemic denial of Indigenous rights' (Cunneen 1997, p. 16).

While the systemic removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers continues, the 'Stolen Generations' often sits in the public imagination as a practice of the past. In 2008, the 'National Apology to the Stolen Generations' by the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd invoked a sense that we have now entered a new era in relation to state policies and interventions in Aboriginal mothers' lives. Despite this rhetorical turn, the state continues to intervene in mothers' lives by positioning itself as the protector of their children. As Tilbury (2009) argues, this is happening in ways for Aboriginal children that are far more 'intrusive' compared to the non-Indigenous population. Aboriginal mothers and their children have experienced the trauma of separation in the past, which continues with the excessive rates of child removal today. The surveillance and regulation of Aboriginal motherhood therefore does not appear to have abated. As well, current state interventions of child removal compound the grief and trauma experienced by Aboriginal mothers, and the colonial past and contemporary state practices continue to shape the lives of Aboriginal mothers.

Furthermore, Douglas and Walsh (2010) have suggested that in Australia, a fifth generation of Aboriginal children are being removed. They particularly emphasise the threat that this poses for Aboriginal women experiencing domestic violence, who are unlikely to contact services for help because of the very real fear that this will result in removal of their children. This is a significant consideration. The consequences of past violence have been long-lasting, and the wider issue of Aboriginal family violence cannot be separated from the effects of the violent invasion of Australia, and the intergenerational effect of powerlessness owing to dispossession of land, injustice and inequalities (Atkinson 1990; Atkinson, Nelson & Atkinson 2010; Wendt & Zannettino 2015). As well, it has been suggested that, since invasion, the introduction and presence of drugs and alcohol in society has meant that Aboriginal cultures have undergone a range of significant and detrimental transformations, including the incidence of domestic abuse and

violence (Cummins 1993). This points to the complex challenges that Aboriginal women and mothers continue to endure. Today, Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to experience injury or death from violence, with 69 percent of these attacks being perpetrated by a partner (Cox, Young & Bairnsfather-Scott 2009, p. 152). Given their relationship with state authorities, reporting an assault can be more frightening for Aboriginal women than the experience of abuse (Cummings 1993, p. 5). Cummings (1993, p. 5) suggests:

> Women not only fear for their own safety within their own community but are terrified of the police interrogation where everything from sexual history to whether they are fit mothers or not is brought out into the open. Reporting is sometimes more terrifying than the actual assault.

This highlights how surveillance of their mothering and colonial state control continues in the lives of Aboriginal women and children. New forms of state-sanctioned control of Aboriginal people continues to stereotype and misrepresent Aboriginal mothering and demonise Aboriginal men, such as in the previously mentioned Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) that occurred without community consultation, imposing a number of 'emergency measures' including the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (see Beacroft & Poole 2008). When reflecting upon the racial discrimination in the response and the labelling of Aboriginal families as neglectful of their children, Toohey (2008, p. 2) states:

> The initial effect… was to accuse remote-area Aborigines en masse of failing to provide their children with these fundamental protections and human rights… It is hard to find another example, recent or past, of one race being so singled out for failing to nurture its children…

However, as I have shown, throughout history Aboriginal mothers have been persistently singled out in this way. The contemporary NTER is useful in specifically illustrating the influence of the media in authorising state intervention and how this breach of human rights continues. As Marcia Langton (2008) has articulated, the intervention was made possible because of the combined effect of the media and the state, arguing the significant role of journalists in raising public consciousness. Proudfoot & Habibis (2015) have been critical of media commentary about the NTER, claiming it represented a simplistic portrayal of Aboriginal communities and overwhelmingly stereotyped them in negative ways. Mick

Dodson (2007), a prominent human rights advocate and member of the Yawuru people, wrote about the 'heavy-handed and hasty' actions of the federal government as part of the NTER, describing them as militant in nature, and as striking fear in the people of the Stolen Generations. He points to the way in which the government and media reports highlighted child sexual abuse as a matter of urgent action for government to undertake, together with Aboriginal communities. However, with the government ignoring the report's recommendation to engage with communities, and with the exclusion of Aboriginal involvement from decision making, a sense of being under the complete control of an authoritarian government was reinforced. As Adam Cresswell reported in *The Australian* on 6 May 2011, one author of the report, Pat Anderson, described the intervention as 'based on ignorance and prejudice' stating 'the whole intervention was almost literally designed on the back of an envelope, over two or three days'. In the interim report to the Chief Minister, Anderson and Wild (2007, p. 5) had emphasised that the sexual abuse of children was

> …not restricted to those of Aboriginal descent, nor committed only by those of Aboriginal descent, nor to just the Northern Territory. The phenomenon knows no racial, age or gender borders. It is a national and international problem.

This raises questions about endemic racial prejudice within the political institutions that carried out the intervention.

In contrast, recent research by Bundjalung academic Gerald Featherstone (2016) has considered the characteristics of well-functioning Aboriginal families in the context of Brisbane, Queensland. In his study, Featherstone (2016) asked questions about what makes a well-functioning Aboriginal family. He focused his research on families that were described as such by their communities, as a way of exploring these concepts, contributing to alternative, positive accounts of Aboriginal families. Also informed by his work as a social worker in child protection, he argues that 'policies of assimilation, segregation and child removal have continued under the guise of child protection, albeit unintentionally' (Featherstone 2016, p. 152). A significant point Featherstone highlights is the way the state maintains ideological dominance and stability through its institutions. He argues that this is

illustrated in the different ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous children are evaluated within the child protection system, with non-Indigenous children being more likely to be evaluated as not needing protection. Reflecting upon this, he highlights discourses of 'white innocence' and the 'problematic 'other'' which reinforce the continued positioning of Aboriginal families as dysfunctional and inferior (Featherstone 2016, p. 152).

Despite self-determination (1972-1975), self-management (1975–1996) and reconciliation (1996 to present) policy rhetoric, it is clear that in the present day, many Aboriginal mothers remain excluded to a large extent from exercising control over their lives and the lives of their children. In much the same way as in the past, mothers continue to live under the shadow of Australian Government policies, which undermine their civil rights as caring and protective mothers. Of particular concern is the systemic removal of children under the guise of child protection and juvenile justice that continues to disrupt Aboriginal mothering and further complicate the relationship between the state and Aboriginal mothers, reinforcing the fearful sense of being under surveillance.

Media stereotypes and social control

As discussed in relation to the NTER, the persistence of state control in the lives of Aboriginal women and mothers occurs in the context of particular media misrepresentations of Aboriginal mothering. State control of Aboriginal communities was actively supported in the past by colonialist discourses in the media of the time, and it continues to be supported today through stereotypes and negative media representations of Aboriginal mothers. Stereotypes in public discourse and media in Australia have represented a singular and toxic imagery of Aboriginal mothers, concealing the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal motherhood. The construction of Aboriginal mothers as deplorable is echoed in Canadian women's experiences, where Cull (2006, p. 141) explains that the 'non-empirical' and unspoken view is that Aboriginal mothers are 'unfit'. In the Australian context, Malin, Campbell and Agius (1996) and Yeo (2003) have also discussed the way in which Aboriginal Australian child-rearing and nurturing

practices are often negatively judged by non-Aboriginal people. In this section, I explore the impact of media representations on Aboriginal mothers, as well as the role of the stereotypes and the media in shaping state policy directions.

Media stereotyping of Aboriginal women and mothers first occurred in the context of racialised and sexualised observations by white men in the early settler period (Conor 2016). In the more contemporary context, Cutcher and Milroy (2010, p. 154) have examined the misrepresentation of Indigenous mothers in the media in relation to maternity allowance and noted that Aboriginal mothers are usually perceived as 'neglected and neglectful'. Examples of the framing of Aboriginal women in this way can be seen in the Australian media (such as the *Northern Territory News*), with its broad sweeping headlines such as 'Aboriginal girls want birth control stopped so they can get baby bonus' (Weiss 2013). On closer inspection, it becomes obvious that the headline has sensationalised a minor comment made by a young local mother who mentioned that pregnancies in other communities may sometimes be motivated by the government baby bonus. What is interesting is how the headline fails to encapsulate the more dominant aspects of the article, which reports the perspectives of protective mothers and grandmothers who discuss imposing birth control on young girls in their communities to help reduce unwanted pregnancies. Sensational media misrepresentations continue to reflect colonialist perceptions that discredit Aboriginal women and mothers. Negative discourses about Aboriginal mothers have persisted over time and re-emerged when Aboriginal women were granted the right to receive a single-parent welfare payment in the 1980s. As Moreton-Robinson (2000a, p. 166) explains, the same colonialist rhetoric resurfaced from governments and within the media, with many mothers accused of having children to gain welfare payments and branded as 'unfit' mothers. This indicates the way in which negative media representations of Aboriginal mothers can influence state decision-making and subsequent intervention in mothers' lives.

When examining representations of Aboriginal people in Canadian news media, Robert Harding (2006) argued that discourses have been constant over the last century and a half and that social issues are framed in ways that reflect colonial

times. Aboriginal people are represented 'in ways that protect dominant interests and signify Aboriginal people as a threat' (Harding 2006, p. 205). In Australia, the discourse of welfare dependency is central to negative portrayals of Aboriginal mothers. For example, former Australian politician and journalist Gary Johns (2014) provides a confronting commentary that makes the link between contraception and welfare benefits. While he initially conveys that his position is aimed at all parents of 'bad character', his article only uses examples of Aboriginal families. His argument is that if you are poor and in the receipt of government benefits, you are unable to be a good mother. He goes on to make suggestions that bear a resemblance to ideas of compulsory sterilisation:

> … some cultures breed strife. Governments cannot always fix it. Compulsory contraception for those on benefits would help crack intergenerational reproduction of strife. (*The Australian*, 30 December 2014)

Continuing this racist commentary, in 2015, on national television, he labelled Aboriginal mothers as 'cash cows' who have children to obtain government benefits. This shows how the mainstream media plays a significant role in the continued sensationalisation and demonisation of Aboriginal women's sexuality and motherhood. The surveillance and control of Aboriginal women's reproductive capacities illustrates how racism and sexism intersect in media representations of Aboriginal women. Larissa Behrendt has argued that Aboriginal men have been, to some extent, buffered from sexually derogatory insults, explaining:

> While behaviour and treatment of Aboriginal men is often contextualised within the process of colonisation, no context is provided for the colonial attitudes that have seen the sexuality of Aboriginal women demeaned, devalued and degraded. (Behrendt 2000, p. 364)

Negative media representations degrade Aboriginal mothers and shape their everyday experiences of mothering and the ways in which they are judged in everyday life. Yet, sociocultural values and nurturing practices of mothering are rarely considered in these representations. Aboriginal mothering practices have been blamed and held responsible for their children's experiences of disadvantage. Furthermore, their circumstances of material disadvantage have influenced their portrayal as dysfunctional mothers. Marcia Langton (2008, p. 1) has drawn

attention to the way in which the 'everyday suffering of Aboriginal children and women' commonly emerges in debates within Australian discourse and media as 'visual and intellectual pornography'. She draws on Jean Baudrillard's (2006) arguments about the humiliation of prisoners being treated as 'war porn' in the media, and concludes that this 'Aboriginal reality show' is something from which Aboriginal people are not at liberty to escape, 'forever condemned to perform to attract crowds' (Langton 2008). A more recent example of condemnation can be seen in media discussions following Marcia Langton's appearance on ABC television speaking out about Aboriginal family violence in 2016. The media reported on Marcia Langton, Josephine Cashman and Jacinta Price's (2016) request for a national taskforce to examine a 'crisis' of Indigenous family violence. These women were described as 'outspoken Indigenous women' and as well-known Aboriginal leaders. While the women as leaders expressed a sense of urgency and a frustration at not being heard, the media (for example *The West Australian*) reported on the discussion using headlines such as 'Violent Indigenous men play the cultural card' (Weare 2016).

Australian academic Lisa Slater (2008) has also written about the effect of monolithic media representations of Aboriginal children. Like Langton, she argues that disadvantage in Aboriginal communities has become a public spectacle, one which constructs Aboriginal children and young people through a deficit lens, denying young people the right to complex and diverse identities. Slater (2008) examined the way in which public discourses stemming from the NTER and other events in rural and remote Aboriginal Australian communities have been responsible for the monolithic construction of Aboriginal children as 'docile, cowering, vulnerable bodies, which need to be protected by the state' (Slater 2008, p. 1). This passive narrative of dysfunction impacts on the way in which Aboriginal children are imagined and seen as living in the world. In her paper 'Aurukun, we're happy, strong people', Slater (2008) discusses a research project where Aurukun children were given the opportunity for self-representation through storytelling and film. For example, she argues that by authoring a film to an audience outside of Aurukun, this provided a space for young people to resist dominant

representations of their community as dysfunctional. She stated: 'They express (self) determination, joy and sensitivity; not volatility or inertia as the dominant discourse prescribes' (Slater 2008, pp. 9–10).

I have argued that the mainstream media and the state operate together to influence public imagination and silence diverse self-representations of Aboriginal mothers and their children. Media representations of Aboriginal communities as dysfunctional are not questioned in public debates, inferring that 'no dialogue is required' (Slater 2008, p. 11). This raises significant questions about the relationship between the state and the media in relation to interventions in the lives of Aboriginal people.

Conclusion

From initial invasion and through policy eras of colonisation up until the present day, this chapter has described how Aboriginal women have been constructed, imagined and controlled by the colonial state. A brief contextualisation of invasion, protectionism, assimilation and self-determination eras was provided. The chapter then explored in more depth how patriarchal and colonialist ideologies influenced and provided justification for state control of Aboriginal peoples, with particular reference to Aboriginal women and mothers. Building on this, the specific relationship between Aboriginal women and state policies was explored and emphasis was placed on the intergenerational state-sanctioned removal of children from their mothers. Throughout the chapter, the relationship between colonialist ideologies, racial stereotypes, the media and the state has been discussed in terms of constructions of Aboriginal motherhood and how these have been and are used to validate government policy approaches and interventions. In conclusion, it is argued that state control of Aboriginal motherhood continues through contemporary child removal practices and that the effects of state control are intergenerational. This chapter has primarily explored the ways in which the colonialist state has controlled and exploited Aboriginal women. In the next chapter, I build on this discussion to show how patriarchy and feminism influence understandings of mothering. Through a more theoretical exploration of

constructions of mothers and motherhoods, I will provide insight into the dominant ideologies and assumptions that surround and impact on Aboriginal women's lived experiences of mothering.

3. Western patriarchal notions of motherhood

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the way in which colonial state interventions and historical discourses in Australia have influenced constructions and negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, with a particular focus on mothers. I have shown that the 'Aboriginal woman' is usually represented as a generalised or singular subject, inferior to the white woman and less than a good mother. The previous chapter also outlined the role of the state as a controlling patriarchal force and authority in Aboriginal people's lives. This chapter builds on this by exploring in greater depth how gendered hegemonic ideology operates to influence and coerce women and mothers more generally. I show how the Westernised 'patriarchal gaze' has normalised and reinforced particular motherhood ideals that are associated with constructions of 'good mothering'. I also reflect on motherhoods that resist these dominant discourses, examining Aboriginal women's resistance and activism in defining and creating a space for themselves.

The patriarchal gaze

Notions of mothering and motherhood are underpinned by patriarchal discourses and ideologies that influence gendered values and meanings. To understand what it might be like for mothers living under a system of patriarchy, it is necessary to understand that patriarchy extends beyond the dominance of men over women, to a way of thinking and being that saturates a society completely (Miles 2014; Rothman 2016). As seminal feminist author Sylvia Walby (1989, p. 227) explains: 'Patriarchy can take different forms; it is not a universalistic notion'. The way in which patriarchy manifests in Aboriginal mothers' lives is related to historical contexts, state control and associated gendered ideologies. As McLaren (2003, p. 79) has argued, 'Ideology permeates all of social life' and involves how sense and meaning are produced in the lives of individuals and groups through ideas, beliefs and values. Dominant patriarchal ideologies shape beliefs and values that are shared among people and are subsequently recounted as being 'the truth' about a subject. Examples of patriarchal beliefs are that 'Men are generally more capable of

holding positions of authority than women, or that women should be more passive or housebound' (McLaren 2003, p. 79). When examining the social construction of mothering, Glenn (2016, p. 9) explains that the dominant ideology of mothering is representative of the 'view of a dominant group; it attempts to justify this domination over other groups, often by making the existing order inevitable'. These beliefs and values are constructed as normative and 'common sense' owing to socialisation and dominant messages communicated through avenues such as the media, schools, and the family (McLaren 2003, p. 81). The Western, white, patriarchal gaze affects all mothers but has particularly profound implications for Aboriginal mothers.

The concepts of social power and hegemony are important to understanding how one culture attains dominance over another. As McLaren (2009, p. 76) explains, a dominant culture is able to secure power over subordinate groups, not only through explicit and direct force, but 'primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures'. In Stoddart's (2007) critical review of theories of knowledge and power, he points to the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci builds on Marxist theory by developing and extending the concept of hegemonic ideologies to include different processes of social power. Gramsci (1992, p. 137) differentiates between coercion and hegemony, suggesting that coercion most often involves the state and has the potential for inflicting violence or punishment on those who fail to compliantly partake in capitalist production. Gramsci (1996) argues that this kind of direct coercion only occurs in 'exceptional circumstances' and that, in contrast, hegemonic power is passively coercive. According to Gramsci (1996), hegemonic power is the prevailing social power, produced and disseminated through societal institutions such as the family, church, schools, and media. It is through these social institutions that hegemonic power is able to coerce individuals to adopt social values and norms, even despite individual awareness of this manipulation. Therefore, Gramsci (1992, 1996) concluded that hegemonic power involves an interplay between both cultural and material dimensions, with everyday practices implicated in its creation. Drawing on the analysis in the previous chapter, it is clear that Aboriginal communities

have had to contend with both coercive and hegemonic power. Of particular relevance to this thesis are the ways in which social institutions, such as the state, church, welfare, education systems and the media, have shaped constructions of motherhood and, in particular, Aboriginal motherhood. Through the invasion of Australia and ongoing policy interventions from that time onwards, as outlined in the previous chapter, a mix of direct violence, brute force, and coercion has helped to reinforce cultural hegemony for Aboriginal communities. Thus, dominant Western constructions of motherhood have been established as the norm, causing other motherhoods to be marginalised. Next I will elaborate how dominant ideologies associated with patriarchy, the nuclear family and the church intertwine and conflict, in shaping both past and present understandings of mothering. Reflecting on this, I consider the ways in which women and mothers are viewed through a patriarchal gaze and the implications of this in relation to the social position of women and mothers.

Western patriarchal ideologies of motherhood

In the Western world, mothering is undertaken within a patriarchal society that positions men and women within unequal gender power relations. A basic definition of patriarchy is offered by Sylvia Walby (1989, p. 214), as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'. To understand how gendered structures of power have developed in the Western world, Freiburger (2010) refers to the pre-industrial period, when public and private realms tended to overlap and be less distinct and when, although specific tasks were gendered, men, women and children worked together across home and work. This point is also made by Mack-Canty and Wright (2012), who have described the pre-industrial period as a 'rural time' where families would often work together communally based on seasonal need. Walby's definition of patriarchy is therefore particularly relevant to British and other industrialised historical contexts because, from the mid-nineteenth century, there was a significant change in social structures and practices, with the shift away from agricultural work towards manufacturing jobs in the cities.

The capitalist structuring of the economy has contributed to gendered divisions between home and work, with industrialisation noted as significantly influencing family structures (Gillespie 2010a). In contrast to the past, by the 1900s, 80 per cent of the workforce was male, indicating that Western industrialisation reinforced the work sphere as masculine and the home sphere as feminine (Freiburger 2010). While pre-industrial families tended to be larger and involved extended family structures, changes in the mode of production were more suited to small, isolated and mobile nuclear family units (Gillespie 2010a). The nuclear or 'traditional' family unit remains defined in the literature as a family structure that comprises a male father/economic provider and female mother/full-time housewife (Treas 2017). Dow (2016) and Landry (2000) have drawn attention to associations between the traditional nuclear family and the evolution of a growing middle-class. For this segment of the population, beliefs and ideals had begun to develop, with a father's competence and ability to find work to support his family increasingly tied to his manhood, and women's femininity increasingly confined to the home (Landry 2000). Landry (2000) explains that a 'cult of domesticity' was engrained more broadly through this period, and while the confinement of women to the home was complementary to the lifestyles of only a small segment of the population (the white middle and upper class), it meant that there were substantial pressures on working-class families to follow suit. Landry (2000) has also argued that the 'traditional family' has exploited both men and women. The working-class man's wage was insufficient to adequately support the family, just as a woman's confinement to the home and domesticity suppressed other capacities she might have (Landry 2000). As Silva (1996, p. 3) explains:

> Conventional histories of women in Western cultures have presented the glorification of domestic womanhood and motherhood as a counterpart to both the deterioration of middle-class women's public power and the degradation of working-class women's living conditions as a consequence of industrialization.

The strain on working-class families to conform to new societal values about family, with their immense economic burden, was additionally reinforced through Christian ideology, with the church purporting acceptance of family ideals as sanctioned by God (Landry 2000). The dominant understanding of the 'traditional

family' as a nuclear family is therefore, in historical terms, a relatively new phenomenon. Hegemonic motherhood ideals that position women as nurturers and men as providers are formed in response to capitalist changes in Western societies. As well, intersecting patriarchal and colonialist ideologies have served to strengthen nuclear family structures. Beliefs about nuclear families reinforce assumptions that the biological mother is the primary carer of her children, is married to the children's biological father and that mothering is incompatible with employment (Hays 1996; O'Reilly 2010b; Porter 2010). As Sharon Hays (1996) has shown, individualistic nuclear families have contributed to the shaping of contemporary intensive mothering discourses that are complementary to the patriarchal positioning of the father as breadwinner, which is in turn tied to essentialist constructions of men's responsibility as economic providers and women's as mothers. I will return to these assumptions about 'natural' gender roles later in this chapter in the discussion about 'good mother ideologies'.

Central to the maintenance of male domination and patriarchy is the relationship between mother and child. The portrayal of motherhood as naturally occurring and instinctive is rooted in patriarchal ideologies that fix notions of womanhood and reproduction while denying women's identity beyond that of motherhood (Glenn 2016; Goodwin & Huppatz 2010; O' Reilly 2004a). The idea of the male 'seed' is also conceptually important to patriarchal constructions of the family. Rothman explains that it is through the man's (irreplaceable) seed and the impregnation of a woman's (replaceable) body that a man is able to expand his control (Rothman 2016; Wignall 2012). Despite the fact that not all women become mothers, since the nineteenth century, mothering has been reasoned as synonymous with womanhood and suggested to constitute a woman's prime identity (Ardenell 2000; O'Reilly 2006, 2007, 2008). Hence, since the Industrial Revolution in Western patriarchal societies, ideas about womanhood and motherhood have had highly gendered and classed dimensions, which shape the lives of all mothers. This gendered hierarchy is instituted through the normative understandings of the family as nuclear, where women's role is primarily bound to motherhood. Importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, this gendered hierarchy also influences

how Aboriginal women have been constructed and understood in Australian political and social contexts.

The helping professions

Patriarchal influences are often evident in discourses of the helping professions. As Glenn (2016, p. 9) argues, in the 1920s and 1930s psychoanalytic theories reinforced the idea that it was a woman's instinctive desire to want a child, contributing to the normalisation of this belief. Thus, women who did not want children were seen as unwomanly (Glenn 2016; Morell 1994; O'Reilly 2004; Rich et al. 2011). With motherhood being held up as primary to womanhood, Porter (2010) argues that maternal power has fluctuated since the 19th century, when mothers were sentimentally revered and birth control was rarely encouraged. Vincent (2010) has also pointed out the reinforcement of particular child-rearing styles, such as a focus on routine, compliance and the regulation of babies and young children. Porter (2010) has argued that the impact of the rising status of science and 'experts' — for example, medicine in relation to child welfare, and psychology in relation to child development — has provided a body of expertise on motherhood that has decreased women's autonomy. She explains that while in the late 19th and early part of the 20th century mothers had greater agency and were seen as capable of making expert decisions in relation to their children's health, the rise of the medical profession resulted in more hospital births, which increased the power of doctors. Medical practitioners were positioned as providers of expert knowledge, and competent and caring mothers were constructed as those who behaved compliantly and were obedient learners. Additionally, for Aboriginal mothers in Australia, their health status and access to health care has been undermined, as they are compelled to access health care within a system based on dominant ideals that rarely account for Indigenous perspectives on health and mothering. As Browne and Fiske (2001, p. 128) write, reflecting on the situation for Aboriginal people in Canada, inequality within the health system is symptomatic of a 'complex interplay of historical, socioeconomic and political conditions', significantly impacting health care access. Academics have indicated that racism is at the heart of inadequate health care outcomes for Aboriginal people today

(Anderson 2002; Eades 2000; Henry et al. 2004; Larson et al. 2007), and that racism has led to the 'colonisation' of Aboriginal birthing knowledges and practices (Adams et al. 2018).

Theories of child development have significantly influenced how we understand motherhood, constructing specific practices of normative mothering. These normative constructions have been Western in orientation and as such have not captured cultural diversity within mothering. In the 1950s and 1960s, child development research became increasingly influential and asserted the significance of attachment and maternal bonding (see for example, John Bowlby's work). Vincent (2010) and Hattery (2001) have also indicated prevalent conceptualisations of mothering throughout this period based on maternal devotion and child-centred practices. Glenn (2016) suggests that most research positioned the mother (preferably biological) as the primary caregiver, reinforcing a belief that biological mothering was superior and in the best interests of the child. There was an assertion that children raised in this way would have a positive self-concept and strong interpersonal capacities, with increasing pressures on mothers to not only become mothers but to perform motherhood correctly. These Western understandings stand in contrast to cultures that raise children within extended families and point to the boundaries that this creates between women and mothers. Nancy Chodorow (1989, p. 89) has written about the fantasy of the perfect mother in Western cultural constructs:

> Both nineteenth-century cultural ideology about motherhood and post-Freudian psychology theory blame mothers for any failings in their children and idealize possible maternal perfection. Blaming the mother, a major theme in feminist writings, has a long social history.

The historical construction of Western motherhood shows that all mothers have been subjected to a range of societal and institutional pressures that have aimed to control mothering practices and persuade them to behave in ways that follow dominant ideals. These ideals reflect institutionalised patriarchal beliefs that have historically worked to control and subordinate mothers by attempting to confine their role to reproduction within the private sphere (Chodorow 1978, 1989; O'Reilly

2008, 2010; Rich 1977; Ruddick 1980). However, the perspectives of Aboriginal mothers are invisible in these accounts.

Welfare and human service systems have also influenced the way in which motherhood has been defined, revealing the influence of social class on mothering experiences. For example, women within charitable and humanitarian organisations have influenced responses to and constructions of motherhood, when these organisations are largely orchestrated by white middle- and upper-class mothers who have focused their attention on helping poorer white mothers. Through this work, higher-class mothers have played a role in constructing what a good mother should be, with the result that definitions of 'good mothering' are based on Western and middle-class notions (Bueskens 2018; O'Reilly 2016, Smart 1996).

Feminist resistance

Critics of Western feminism have also emphasised that it was white feminists from the middle and upper classes who reimagined motherhood (Collins 2016; Moreton-Robinson 2000a). Amber Kinser (2010a) argues that feminists have made significant and enduring efforts to gain women's physical rights to their bodies, including their reproductive rights. This is different from nineteenth century thinking, which assumed that women could not reproduce and undertake mothering while also being intellectual and educated, positing the two conceptions as fundamentally contradictory. Kinser (2010a) argues that these beliefs were responsible for confining mothers within the sphere of home, by suggesting the idea that combining intellectual endeavour with mothering would be harmful to children. Feminist activists also reflected white middle-class norms that associated the need for education and employment with working-class women. Many middle-class women rejected paid work, believing that it would harm their children, and views such as this helped to ensure that a mother's commitment was only to child-rearing, dulling any aspirations for education, employment or independence. However, Kinser also refers to women's resistance to male control, noting a rise in feminist voices in the 19th century. In particular, she details how married women

called for 'voluntary motherhood', which she argues was about women's push for the right to 'abstain from sexual relations… to limit the number of resulting pregnancies and births' (Kinser 2010a, p. 399).

Traditional Western feminisms have also challenged the patriarchal gaze on women and mothers, with feminist rewritings of motherhood disputing the essentialising idea that motherhood is a natural condition (Leahy 2019; O'Reilly 2010b). Feminists have long argued that it is the patriarchal articulations of sexual differences and gendered roles that position women as reproducers/nurturers, and men as providers/breadwinners (see for example, Chodorow 1978; De Beauvoir 1988; Smart 1996). Within this understanding, male and female roles are claimed to be complementary, reinforcing the subordination of women within the family and society. According to Glenn (2016, p. 9), an understanding of motherhood as biologically determined 'locks women into biological reproduction', regulating women's identities, and controlling women in society. Chris Kynaston (1996, p. 225) also argues that an ideology of naturalism supports patriarchy and the exploitation of women, and that by 'presenting the patriarchal status quo as natural — and thereby inevitable — naturalism insidiously conceals the […] exploitation of women'. An understanding of motherhood as 'natural', 'instinctive' and 'intuitive' can therefore be regarded as an ideological myth stemming from unconscious and unchallenged patriarchal assumptions (Johnston & Swanson 2003). Reflecting upon this, I explore the way in which motherhood has been historically constructed over time, and the social and cultural conditions that have influenced its meaning.

Feminist re-envisioning of motherhood and mothering

While motherhood has been understood within patriarchal discourses as biologically determined, seminal feminist motherhood scholars, including Adrienne Rich (1977), Nancy Chodorow (1978; 1989) and Sarah Ruddick (1980) have challenged the notion of natural motherhood. Adrienne Rich (1977), Carol Smart (1996) and Elizabeth Silva (1996) focus on broader aspects of unequal power relations that shape mothering. These scholars have contributed knowledge towards resistance in different ways. For example, in her book *The reproduction of*

mothering, Nancy Chodorow challenged biological explanations by suggesting that bodily 'drives', whether they be reproductive, sexual or aggressive, are personally created, and are psychological processes as opposed to being biologically predetermined. Reflecting on this seminal work she has later stated:

> Biological mothering — pregnancy, childbirth, the felt reproductive drive — is filtered and created through the prism of the intrapsychic and intersubjective reproduction of mothering. This is true for women who make the whole range of conscious and unconscious choices, or whose choices are made for them, about becoming a mother. (Chodorow 2000, p. 345)

On the other hand, Sara Ruddick (1980) presents the idea that maternal thinking arises from the practice of child-caring, as she states: 'Biological parenting is neither necessary nor sufficient' (Ruddick 1980, p. 346). For Ruddick, motherhood is not reproductive but instead demands conscious activity and the performing of social practices that lead to maternal thinking.

Pioneering maternal scholar Adrienne Rich (1977) distinguished between two meanings of motherhood: motherhood in terms of a woman's relationship with reproduction and children, and motherhood as a legal and social institution. She argues that the institution of motherhood operates to keep women under the control of men, suggesting that it 'exonerates men from fatherhood' while public and private divisions of labour have imprisoned women (Rich 1977, p. 2). She furthers the debate by stating that motherhood as an institution has 'ghettoized and degraded female potentialities' (Rich 1977, p. 2). Other academics have continued to reflect upon the notion of motherhood as an institution. For example, D'Arcy Randall (2010) argues that 'motherhood as institution' highlights the exploitation of a patriarchal institution', while 'motherhood as experience offers mothers room to conceive of an empowered and empowering motherhood experience. Hence, while motherhood is controlled by state institutions, there is also a level of agency for women in relation to mothering. Feminist sociologist Carol Smart (1996) has deconstructed the notion of natural mothering and argued for a social–constructionist analysis of motherhood. She asserts that while there has been a great deal of attention paid to the social conditions of motherhood, there has been little attention to motherhood as an institution. Despite feminist

rewritings, Smart (1996, p. 37) remarks on the persistence of ideas of natural motherhood:

> Motherhood is still largely treated as a given and as a self-evident fact rather than as the possible outcome of specific social processes that have a historical and cultural location which can be mapped.

Challenging dominant patriarchal beliefs about motherhood, Smart (1996) initiates a 'historical revisionism' and a re-mapping of motherhood as historically and culturally located. This view is particularly relevant to this thesis as it allows me to consider the way different motherhood knowledges may be privileged according to prevailing social conditions. The notion that historical and cultural locations affect constructions of Aboriginal motherhood is an important idea to highlight because motherhood is historically positioned, being not timeless, but rather a changing and shifting experience, making the uncovering of multiple experiences and definitions possible.

Smart (1996, p. 44) discussed the rights of women (or lack thereof) throughout the 19th century, pointing out that it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that the status of 'mother' began to receive some limited legal recognition. She argues that before the establishment of motherhood as a legal institution, mothers had no formal rights to their children and yet, in spite of this, were still held to account for the care of children. The fragile nature of a mother's status is particularly stark in the case of unwed mothers, who were simultaneously blamed and assigned responsibility for their 'bastard' child, despite the legal position that her offspring is 'the child of no-one' (Smart 1996, p. 44). The rights of a married mother were also limited, with mothers only having legal rights to their children under the husband's authority. As Smart (1996, p. 44) elaborates:

> Only fathers, and hence fatherhood existed in law. The father gave a child his name, his inheritance, his religion, his domicile; in fact, everything a child was granted was treated as coming from the father. The mother was significant in that she brought forth the legitimate heirs, but after that she was little more, formally speaking, than a nanny would have been.

The organisation of motherhood as a legally and socially identifiable institution was given great attention throughout the nineteenth century. In the pursuit of

equal rights and equal power for mothers, Smart (1996) argues that emerging feminist agendas and women's rights movements in the middle and upper classes influenced legal and social changes. Feminist analyses and activism represented and advocated for middle-class Western women's emancipation. The fight for a mother's custody rights in circumstances of separation or divorce, or where a mother was being subjected to abuse, was pivotal to the legal acknowledgement of motherhood (Smart 1996). Alongside the legal acknowledgement of motherhood, Western feminist scholars made persistent efforts to have women's experiences of motherhood made visible (see for example Rich 1977; Glen et al. 1994). However, within these discussions, the rights of Aboriginal women were never or rarely considered, reflecting the dominance of whiteness in Western feminist thought and agendas at this time. It should also be remembered that Aboriginal people were not considered citizens at this time and that the abandonment of Aboriginal mothers and their children by white fathers was common, with mothers being blamed, dubbed as promiscuous, and not supported emotionally or financially, absolving white fathers of any responsibility.

To achieve rights for mothers, early feminists were instrumental in highlighting the social construction of motherhood as an institution and the central role of mothers in society and as carers of children. Smart (1996, p. 45) discusses the role of early feminists in emphasising the connection between a mother's love and a child's wellbeing:

> They demanded institutional recognition through the law, and they constructed an ideology of motherhood that rendered mothers as caring, vital, central actors in the domestic sphere, as well as persons with an identity and source of special knowledge that was essential to the good rearing of a child.

Thus, over time, particular values of motherhood have become pronounced and given special emphasis as a strategy for the attainment of Western women's rights. However, as noted above, while these legal and institutionalised changes were occurring, Aboriginal women and mothers in Australia continued to be excluded from legal systems and their protection. The 'good mother' within patriarchal motherhood therefore remained 'white, middle-class, married, stay-at-home' (O'Reilly 2010b, p. 21).

Thus, women's rights have often advantaged women who are more privileged in society, with the agendas of middle- and upper-class women taking centre stage. What is also noteworthy is that more privileged women in society have taken on the role of 'helper', imposing Western, middle-class motherhood ideals and knowledges upon more marginalised mothers. In the Australian context, feminism worked within 'institutionalised whiteness [and that] white women and white men without consultation with Indigenous people had, up until the 1930s, directed white feminist involvement in Indigenous issues' (Moreton-Robinson 2000a, p. 102). The invisibility of Aboriginal mothering knowledges has implications for feminist theorising and the subjectification of Aboriginal mothers through state institutions such as the health and welfare systems. Therefore, an analysis of Western gendered discourses is pertinent for examining the dominant patriarchal, racialised and classed lens that shape how Aboriginal families and mothers have been constructed as 'Other'.

While the evolution of feminism has allowed for redefinition, maternal agency and empowerment for some women, a hierarchy within motherhood continues to exist, constructing good and bad mothering in ways that intersect with race and class, generating significant inequalities for marginalised mothers. The ideals of feminism have not succeeded in the same way for Aboriginal women, and this can be seen in Australia today, where Aboriginal mothers are still 'deemed ineligible for motherhood' (Lake 2003, p. 156), with the state continuing to disproportionately remove children from Aboriginal mothers. As Hannah McGlade (2017) has argued, Aboriginal women continue to experience extensive human rights violations, including widespread child removal and soaring rates of incarceration, which she calls 'double discrimination' due to both race and gender. Considering this, it can be concluded that Aboriginal women have not been afforded the same benefits as white women and their rights continue to be ignored.

Constructing good and bad mothers

Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) provide insight into the way in which discourses of the good mother play out in contemporary Australia. These authors reiterate the

conclusion made by Porter and Kelso (2006, p. xii) that the imagery of good motherhood and its expectations are constantly changing and have a tendency to fluctuate depending on different sociocultural factors. The ideals associated with good mothering may change over time, which suggests that, logically, the good mother comes in many forms, not only that of the 'white, heterosexual housewife' (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010, p. 2). However, the adverse effects of hegemonic notions of mothering on the lives of mothers who do not embody the ideal woman continue. As Goodwin and Huppatz (2010, p. 6) explain, mothers are constructed as good or bad for reasons that extend beyond the welfare of a child or a mother:

> Regulating women through good and bad mother discourses has a number of functions: it ensures that women take on child-rearing, it ties women's identities to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of mothers. More generally, it regulates families and family life, it controls the reproduction of the next generation of citizens, it is also implicated in shoring up the dominant culture and driving nation-building agendas.

Hegemonic notions of good and bad mothering also regulate women by locking them out of the workforce, both by chaining mothers to their caregiving duties and attaching shame to mothers who leave their children and participate in work (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Indigenous critics of Western feminism highlight how Aboriginal women are conceptualised as a singular category through a white Western lens. This has influenced how Aboriginal mothers have been imagined by and responded to by the institutions of the state (Moreton-Robinson 2000b; Moreton-Robinson 1998). In Australia, hegemonic motherhood has been socially produced through middle-class, whiteness discourses which have silenced 'other' motherhoods, helping to secure white dominance. As discussed in Chapter 2, the media is often a space where the public 'meet' Aboriginal Australians (Cutcher & Milroy 2010). Dominant constructions of Aboriginal mothers as 'outsiders', 'deviant', and 'others' are reinforced by hegemonic motherhood discourses in the media that influence the way in which mothers are positioned in society and how they come to understand themselves. Hegemonic constructions of homogenous and singular Aboriginal motherhood silence motherhoods that

diverge from the norm and are diverse or complex (Ardenell 1999, 2000). These normative constructions of mothering in Australia are strengthened by Western social institutions that fail to account for alternative expressions and stories of Aboriginal motherhoods that resist discourses of the 'bad mother'.

Intensive mothering

A dominant contemporary Western ideology relating to motherhood is the notion of 'intensive mothering' which is embedded in attachment theories of child psychology. Vincent (2010, p. 110) describes intensive mothering as more of a regime than an approach to mothering, emphasising the way in which it has become 'reified and normalised' as an approach that should be aspired to by all mothers. Sharon Hays (1996, p. 97) argues that intensive mothering ideology encourages mothers to 'give unselfishly of their time, money and love on behalf of sacred children'. According to Ardenell (1999, p. 4), 'the ideology of intensive mothering and its institutionalisation in social arrangements and practices constitutes a hegemonic motherhood'. In reviewing a decade's worth of scholarship on motherhood and mothering, Ardenell (2000) has highlighted the key assumptions that underpin understandings of motherhood in the literature, identifying that intensive mothering promotes the idea of a motherhood which is child-centred and self-sacrificing, to the point where the mother invests completely in terms of her time and emotions. When viewing motherhood in this way, the focus is on the way in which mothers attend to the development of children through child-rearing practices. Thus, intensive mothering as 'good mothering' emphasises the importance of self-sacrifice, even to the point of losing herself to care for others. As previously discussed, motherhood is also closely tied with standards associated with idealised imaginings of the nuclear family structure (Ardenell 2000, p. 1194).

While motherhood is often spoken of as a common bond between women, Ardenell (2000) suggests that normative discourses and expectations associated with intensive mothering are likely to be divisive. She highlights that class is reproduced through mothering, and mothers who fail to reflect idealised mothering are considered inadequate, and 'not good enough' mothers. As

discussed in the previous chapter, this can be seen through dominant constructions of Aboriginal mothers by the state as unfit, and their demonisation in the media as dysfunctional and neglectful.

Since the 20th century, intensive mothering discourses have shaped Western normative understandings of what it means to be a good mother (Ardenell 2000; Bell 2004; Goodwin & Huppatz 2010). Carol Vincent (2010, pp. 109–119) has written on the sociology of motherhood, talking about intensive mothering and its relationship with 'good mothering'. From this perspective, to be a good mother one must be child-focused and prioritise all aspects of the child's intellectual and emotional development. Intensive mothering is constructed as shaping the worlds of white middle-class mothers yet it is experienced in complex ways in relation to intersections of race and class. Both Hays (1996) and Elliott et al. (2015) argue that intensive mothering places pressure on mothers of a different social class or ethnicity. However, Lareau (2002) has suggested that social class may have more of an influence than race in relation to child-rearing. Lareau argues that middle-class parents (both white and black) follow a method of child-rearing she calls 'concerted cultivation' (2002, p. 747). For her, 'concerted cultivation' is when child-rearing centres on the child's exposure to and participation in a breadth of activities, to the extent that this becomes the core activity of family life. Noting the enormous amount of investment that is required from mothers, she explains:

> They enroll their children in numerous age-specific organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labor, particularly for mothers. The parents view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children. Middle-class parents also stress language use and the development of reasoning and employ talking as their preferred form of discipline. This 'cultivation' approach results in a wider range of experiences for children but also creates a frenetic pace for parents, a cult of individualism within the family, and an emphasis on children's performance. (Lareau 2002, p. 747).

This individualistic view of good mothering practices intensifies expectations of intensive mothering within a capitalist society, which produces tensions for all contemporary mothers (Hays 1996). The contemporary pressures on working mothers to intensively mother, as well as to be dedicated and aspirational in the workplace, is what Hays (1996) has coined 'the cultural contradictions of

motherhood'. Mothers are compelled to strive towards societal norms of good mothering that are embedded in patriarchal notions of the family as well as having to work outside the home. These expectations intersect with race and class in complex ways and have implications for Aboriginal mothering practices, where understandings of child-rearing are underpinned by notions of community and interdependence, and less on individualistic self-achievement (Atkinson & Swain 1999). Mothering seen in this way challenges the individualistic understanding of intensive mothering within a nuclear family, with caring responsibilities that often expand to include the extended family group.

Although a singular contemporary vision of 'the good mother' as the 'intensive mother' dominates, the diversity of motherhoods is also acknowledged in the literature. Linda Rose Ennis (2014, p. 11) explains, that 'intensive mothering is an ideology that has strengthened in the last 20 years, pointing to the ingrained and powerful nature of dominant mothering ideologies'. However, as Smart (1996) has argued, a conversation about motherhood is incomplete without mentioning the single mother, lone mother, or unwed mother. She argues that these 'other' motherhoods are inseparable from the dominant story of motherhood because they show the hierarchies that exist within the ways we imagine and construct motherhood/s. For example, historically, it was more acceptable to be a widowed single mother than an unwed one. These hierarchies, the othering of single/lone/unwed mothers, reveal the patriarchal ideologies that underpin intensive and good mothering constructions. They also point to the way that racialised and gendered social inequalities are reproduced within dominant ideals of motherhood. However, these inequalities are not reproduced by dominant ideals alone because social practices such as the treatment of 'other' mothers in welfare policies also contributes to their marginalisation.

I will now discuss 'othered', or alternative, constructions of motherhood that challenge dominant discourses of motherhood and resist patriarchal or colonialist conceptualisations of motherhood. In doing so, I am also wary of the tendency to be reinforcing a hegemonic 'motherhood vs. other motherhood' dichotomy. It is worthwhile to note that there is an assumption within the literature on

motherhood that hegemonic motherhood relates to Western or Anglo-Saxon contexts. In this thesis, I cannot cover all the different ways of mothering that exist across the world. Hence, I particularly focus on dominant Western constructions of mothering because they frame hegemonic motherhood in Australia against which Aboriginal mothers are frequently measured and judged. Therefore, while hegemonic mothering practices are portrayed in the mothering literature in specific ways, it is important to recognise that hegemonic motherhoods are not necessarily similar across the globe. Globally, the family and the mother's role are understood in many different ways, emphasising the contextuality of hegemonic mothering discourses. As I write, I am also conscious of the potential for me to fall into a simplified dualism (i.e. dominant white Australian ways and Aboriginal ways). Responding to this, in the next section I examine literature that conveys the multiplicity of mothering identities and that challenges this binary view.

'Other' motherhoods

In this section, I will consider motherhoods that sit outside understandings of hegemonic motherhood. These 'other' motherhoods resist dominant discourses that construct mothering within Western nuclear family structures. I describe characterisations of mothers that emphasise their differences from hegemonic motherhood ideals — ideals that alienate and construct women as deficit mothers. I argue that this alienation operates to mask resistance by women who practise mothering in 'other' ways, because such resistance is perceived as a threat to the stability of hegemonic motherhood.

As discussed, Western hegemonic representations of motherhood rely on singular depictions of the self-sacrificing mother who is the primary caregiver within a white nuclear family arrangement. However, there are many different ways of experiencing and practising motherhood. For example, in Andrea O'Reilly's (2010a) *Encyclopedia of motherhood*, she engages with a multitude of mothering practices and motherhoods. O'Reilly argues that the single mother (or lone mother) are terms used to define mothers who practise mothering without the assistance of another parent. As Gillespie (2010b) points out, single motherhood can be either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary mothering can involve artificial insemination,

separation or divorce, while involuntary single parenting has eventuated because of a death, imposed separation from a partner, or unplanned pregnancy. Gillespie suggests that the stigma associated with single mothers has decreased over time because of the increased frequency of this family type. However, persistent stigmatisation of single mothers, despite the apparent changes in family dynamics, has also been noted (Huda 2001; Wolfinger 2014). For example, Wolfinger (2014) explains that while past perceptions of the single mother labelled her as a 'whore' or as an 'unnatural woman', it was the independence of her sexuality that was labelled in this way, since it was seen as a risk to notions of the 'nurturing housewife' as portrayed in hegemonic motherhood discourses. Wolfinger (2014) points to the continued stigmatisation of single mothers, and to how the shaming of single mothers now occurs in new ways within discourses of welfare dependency:

> In modern Australia, single mothers on welfare contravene the new, economic moral order by 'burdening' society with their dependency. Their decisions around family and work, rather than their personal moral choices, are the new object of social control.

This demonstrates how single mothers have been depicted as 'bad' in ways that reflect dominant cultures and political agendas. These political agendas are discussed by Wolfinger (2014) as shifting to reflect individualist economic considerations in state welfare regimes. Martha Fineman (1991) has highlighted the way in which a single mother's status is marked in professional and political discourse as being inextricably linked with poverty. She argues that poverty alleviation programs seek to solve the 'problem' of the single mother family and promote views about the deviant family unit, more than addressing any social or economic conditions affecting single-parent families. Fineman also explains that within such welfare discourses, moral judgements define single mothers as either good or bad mothers (Fineman 1991, p. 281–282):

> The imagery of welfare discourse, however, remains laden with moral and normative judgements that are founded on stereotypical assumptions about single mothers in the poverty context. The decisions to become or remain a single mother, particularly when undertaken by a woman who has never married, is the decisive issue for whether one is to be considered a 'good'

> mother. If they are single as a result of death (or, perhaps, divorce), poor, single mothers are deemed 'bad' mothers.

Therefore, bad mothers are associated with poor single mothers, and non-nuclear families such as the single-parent, divorced, non-biological, or queer family. Mothers living in poverty are 'othered' within classed, gendered and racialised norms of nuclear, middle-class and heteronormative families. Hegemonic motherhood and culturally entrenched and idealised notions of patriarchal motherhood continue to stigmatise mothers who do not fit the norm (see also Bueskens 2018; Dowd 1995, 1999; Kelly 2010; O'Reilly 2016; Slaughter & Fineman 1995; Summers 2002; Swain 1995). However, mothers are challenging these hegemonic understandings, and while still being 'othered' to some extent, diversity within motherhood is beginning to be recognised.

Mothering based on kinship, community and extended networks of care are also constructed as 'othered' forms of mothering. In a discussion of 'community mothering', Canadian author Arlene Campbell (2010) juxtaposes community mothering with dominant understandings of child-rearing that place the responsibility with the biological mother. She describes community mothering as based on the understanding that the community is responsible for the care of a child and suggests that mothering in this way reinforces the value of motherhood as a social and community institution. In contrast, understandings of intense mothering imply that relinquishing care to others is a threat to motherhood as a social and legal institution. She discusses community mothering and kinship networks in African societies (Campbell 2010, p. 240):

> …women who assist blood mothers are integral in the institution of African-American motherhood. Grandmothers, sisters, nieces, aunts, cousins, sister-in-laws and neighbors act as community mothers by taking on childcare responsibilities for one another's children. In many African-American communities, these women-centred networks of community-based childcare have crossed borders to include 'fictive kin' or extended family members. When relationships were not between kin or fictive kin, community norms traditionally were such that neighbors cared for one another's children. Based on a class commonality, everyone looked out for each other.

This way of community mothering is relevant for understanding Aboriginal mothering practices in Australia occurring within community structures that share

the care of children within extended social and familial networks. Dietsch et al. (2001, p. 59) examined maternal wellbeing and also articulated the importance of kinship caring:

> […] kin can most pragmatically be interpreted as an extended family where a mother's sister is not an aunt but rather a mother, and her female offspring are considered sisters rather than cousins. The extended kin network has the same connections, responsibilities and rights as in the Western nuclear family.

In the African-American context, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1987) has contributed significantly to the debate about the suitability of white American conceptions of the family to the lives of African-American women. She explains that mothering in African-American contexts can differ, as it is often situated outside the nuclear family; that the division of gendered roles is more diverse, and there is no dominant belief that mothers should remain home with children. This illustrates different understandings of diverse forms of motherhood practised in ways where women are not necessarily relegated to the private sphere. African-American women's paid work was often thought of as an integral part of the lives of mothers and, adding to this, it was not seen as undermining a mother's capacity to care for her children. Community mothering can therefore be described as coming from an understanding where ideas about providing for children practically and financially, as well as emotionally, are seen to be interdependent. According to Comerford (2010, p. 4), Collins' depiction of African-American care practices reveals that

> …motherwork is a collective responsibility with fluid boundaries between biological mothers (blood mothers) and 'other mothers' who share in childcare; … many women help raise children besides their own; and … this flexibility gives the community resilience and assists the blood mothers as well as the children. Motherwork includes both traditional nuclear family goals such as protecting and nurturing one's own biological children, but also teaching all children in a community how to protect themselves in a hostile world, imbuing them with pride about their African and African American heritage, and assisting those whose own mothers have not been able to care for them.

This depiction of 'motherwork' alludes to how practices and experiences of mothering are gendered, classed, and racialised, acknowledging the layers of care

work that mothers do in their communities beyond that of intensive biological mothering.

However, the meaning of motherhood has been subjected to intense debate and historical stereotyping. A study involving black women in the US by Rosenthal and Lobel (2016) found that negative stereotypes labelling black women's sexuality, motherhood, and socioeconomic status mirrored historical constructions of black women. Stereotyped images, such as Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel are explained as stemming from the history of slavery (see West 2008). As Rosenthal and Lobel (2016, p. 416) summarise:

> …the 'mammy' depicts an unattractive black mother who is strong and content in her caregiving role for many children, in the service of white slave owners or white employers. The sapphire (or 'matriarch') archetype is the image of an aggressive, dominating, angry, emasculating black woman. The jezebel (or 'sexual siren') is the image of an immoral, sexually promiscuous, and sexually available black woman.

The more recent stereotype is that of the American black woman as 'welfare queen'. Woodard and Mastin (2005, p. 273) describe the 'welfare mother' or 'welfare queen' stereotype as one where black mothers are constructed as immoral 'breeders', intent on living off the state. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues, these stereotypes depict mothers as a threat to society. Moreover, by constructing mothers in this way, dominant discourses blame mothers for poverty and disadvantage, justifying reproductive control of racial minorities. While African-American women's experiences differ from the experiences of Aboriginal women, these stereotypes and related practices of state control resonate with the stereotyping, sexualising and blaming of Aboriginal women and mothers in patriarchal and colonialist discourses and related practices of welfare state surveillance and control.

As Rosenthal and Lobel (2016) point out, black mothers in the United States are therefore perceived more negatively than white mothers and, as such, are degraded. They explain that when compared to the white mother, the black woman is depicted as more 'domineering', 'less attractive', and 'promiscuous', which imagery is deeply connected to slavery discourses and the sexual and

reproductive exploitation of black women (see also Collins 2000 and hooks 1989). Specifically, single black mothers have been targeted as the kind of 'mothers who sleep with and use men for money', also known as 'gold diggers' (Collins 2000; Woodard & Mastin 2005). Thus, African-American mothers are stereotyped as having children with the intention of acquiring benefits, either through welfare programs or men's financial resources, adding to the discourse that they are unable to properly provide for their children (Collins 2000). The degrading and devaluing of black mothering practices reflects persistent negative historical stereotypes and positions the black mother as a 'bad mother' through labelling her mothering as deficient in comparison to white American mothering norms. Stereotypes that degrade and 'other' black women in America resonate with the intersecting gendered and racial oppression experienced by Aboriginal mothers in Australia. There are similarities between African-American and Aboriginal mothering practices in terms of beliefs and practices around community mothering. Aboriginal motherhoods also fit within a community, kinship or relational conceptualisation of mothering (Ryan 2011; Wheeler 2006). I will now consider how Aboriginal mothers have been discussed in academic literature that focuses on Aboriginal motherhood in greater depth.

Aboriginal mothering practices

In the literature on Aboriginal mothering and motherhood, Aboriginal mothers are described as holding important cultural roles that involve the handing down of lessons to their children, thereby safeguarding cultures. In many Indigenous contexts across the world, mothers are respected for ensuring the survival of Indigenous knowledges and practices. As educators, Aboriginal mothers teach children through oral stories and by showing how to be in the world through everyday practices of mothering. Through these roles and responsibilities, Aboriginal mothers have been able to show children ways of maintaining traditions and knowledges for their people into the future (Wheeler 2006). In societies pre-invasion, the relationship between Aboriginal mothers and their children has been described as formed around a strong bond, whereby mothers were responsible for

nurturing, educating and protecting the community's children (see Hamilton 1981b; Kaberry 1936).

Similar to Patricia Hill Collins' notion of community mothering, many Aboriginal Australian communities often describe an experience of multiple mothering. Within the structure of multiple mothering, children may form attachments to numerous 'mothers' (Ryan 2011; Yeo 2003). Thus, Aboriginal mothering has been described as a 'network of connected women who mother and are mothered' (Cutcher & Milroy 2011, p. 153). Recent studies considering the ways in which traditional notions of multiple mothering have endured are somewhat limited, and it is acknowledged that multiple mothering practices have been impacted by colonisation. Atkinson and Swain (1999) explored the experiences of Koorie [2] mothers in a Victorian community and the experiences of women interviewed suggest that multiple mothering practices in child-rearing continue. These findings pointed to culturally specific notions and practices of motherhood that vary from dominant notions of motherhood practised in Australia today. Atkinson and Swain (1999, p. 224) noted that mothering is often tied to the person who carries out the role of mothering rather than solely assigned through biological connection. In exploring the complexity of Koorie family life and kinship systems, Atkinson and Swain (1999, p. 220) highlight the uniqueness of Aboriginal family structures and explain the shared role of care giving prior to invasion,

> Family life was structured around complex kinship systems, which located each person within a clan structure, with clear lines of rights and obligations to others within the family, clan and ultimately the linguistic group. The application of this concept of the extended family gave children access to multiple mothers (and fathers), with all the sisters of their biological mothers recognised as their mothers, just as the brothers of their biological fathers were recognised as their fathers. The grandmother was central to this extended family structure, with her descendants living together in a communal environment in which child-rearing responsibilities were shared throughout the group. Although women were overwhelmingly responsible for the care of infant children within this society, motherhood did not place women in a position of economic dependence because production was not divided from reproduction as it was in industrialised societies.

[2] The word Koorie is commonly used by Indigenous people of Victoria and New South Wales to identify themselves.

In the Northern Territory and Western Australia (Arnhem Land and the Central and Western Deserts), from around the 1980s, there are studies that provide examples of multiple mothering as a common way of looking after children (Berndt & Berndt 1981; Hamilton 1981b). However, the biological mother would most often maintain the role of primary caregiver (Berndt & Berndt 1981; Hamilton 1981b). More recently a study by Yeo (2003) identified the continued existence of multiple mothering in interviews with Aboriginal community members in New South Wales, showing that for many young Aboriginal children it is common to experience attachment to multiple women as 'mothers'. In her study, Yeo found that these female figures would offer the child long-lasting support and connections as they grew to become an adult. What we know is that universal ways of nurturing in terms of 'security, sensitivity, and competence' (Ryan 2011, p. 188) are conveyed in different ways across urban, regional and remote Aboriginal settings, compared with dominant Western models of care. In some Aboriginal communities, it is not uncommon for other children and relatives (such as sisters and brothers) to also care for one another, suggesting that multiple caregivers provide a basis for security in the lives of Aboriginal children (Ryan 2011). Aboriginal nurturing practices such as *kanyininpa* [3] (holding) offers the security and protection associated with mothering, as Ryan (2011) explains:

> The traditional form of Aboriginal nurturance was very broad and included nurturance and attachment to kin, to community, and to land, and provided Aboriginal people with a strong code for living socially, spiritually, physically, and morally. The example of *kanyininpa* (holding) from the Western and Central Deserts demonstrates how this Indigenous form of nurturance provided security, protection, and guidance within a sophisticated network of relatedness that regarded the holding relationship so highly that one's ability to "hold" others was integral to the functioning, maintenance, and sustenance of Aboriginal society from generation to generation.

Ryan's (2011) study draws on her work within Aboriginal communities and conveys this traditional practice as evident in contemporary collective Aboriginal practices

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[3] I have used the Pintupi word *kanyininpa* as is used by Ryan (2011). Pintupi belong to Central and Western Desert regions of Australia, the terminology is specific to culture with other language groups using different terms i.e. the words "kanyini" (in Luritja and Pitjantjatjara), "mardarni" (in Warlpiri), and "kanyirninpa" (in Kukatja) are all languages from this region translated by Myers (1986) as meaning "holding, looking after, nurturance".

of child-rearing in the Central and Western Deserts of Australia today. As illustrated in the above quote, Aboriginal mothering practices are positive and progressive, yet this kind of description seems to hold little resonance with the way many Aboriginal mothers are commonly portrayed in wider Australian society. In a study carried out by Malin, Campbell and Agius (1996, p. 44), mothering in 'Nunga [4] culture' is compared with the parenting ways of 'Anglo-Saxon middle-class culture'. Two women, an Aboriginal mother and a white middle-class mother, observed and reflected upon one another's mothering practices. This study found that Nunga children were encouraged to be 'independent, self-regulating and self-reliant' (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996, p. 47), and children were trusted and depended upon to look after and care for one another. These authors argue that Nunga families are influenced by certain values which place emphasis on less overt and more indirect means of control, which were perceived negatively by the non-Aboriginal mother. It was her judgement that the Nunga mother had inadequately supervised the children and that the children were disobedient. Coming from a different culture, with different values and traditions as well as living in disadvantaged conditions, the Nunga family faced harsh criticism by the non-Aboriginal mother. Adding to this, the non-Aboriginal mother had expressed her disapproval of the children's cleanliness, emphasising that the children's faces needed to be wiped. With no consideration for cultural differences or consciousness of about what it might be like to raise children in circumstances of poverty, the non-Aboriginal mother had failed to notice that the Nunga family was 'nurturant, self-sufficient, and resourceful' (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996, p. 47). From the perspective of the Nunga mother, she remarked upon the non-Aboriginal mother's desire for everything to be perfect, in her words 'just right' (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996, p. 44). She reflected upon the anxiety of the non-Aboriginal mother in relation to this and that she felt it impacted on her enjoying the time with her children. It is important to mention that this study only included

[4] The word 'Nunga' is used by some people as a way of referencing Indigenous people of Adelaide and surrounding areas. However, it is important to note that its use may not always be regarded as appropriate by South Australian Indigenous people and where unsure, this should be clarified as appropriate before using. The word Nunga is used here to maintain consistency with the terminology used in the mentioned study.

two families and that all families are unique. This study nonetheless highlights that cultural variations do exist, but most importantly, it demonstrates the ways that cultural difference and privilege come together to produce negative stereotypes. A persistent theme about parenting in Aboriginal families across Australia relates to shared caring, interdependence and mutuality.

Another factor worth reflecting upon is the intergenerational effects of child separation and the way these may impact on parenting. In the *Bringing Them Home* report it was found that many Aboriginal parents experience feelings of anxiety looking after their children related to the very real fear that their children may be taken away by the government. This uncertainty was conveyed as leading to less disciplinary styles of parenting. As one Aboriginal mother who contributed to the inquiry said, her own experiences of abuse influenced her mothering practices (HREOC 1997, p. 224):

> A lot of people think I'm very, very easy on my children. I don't smack them because I really used to get belted. A lot of people think a smack's not going to hurt them but I just remember it as a child, you know. They've got a lot of spirit in them and I won't knock it out of them. I just won't knock anything out of them that's in them already like I had it all knocked out of me. (Confidential evidence 629, Queensland: WA woman removed as a baby in the 1960s and eventually fostered at 10 years)

Being removed from her family, this mother's story highlights the way colonialist policies and practices have influenced Aboriginal mothers and their mothering practices. Their experiences of abuse and the separation from their own mothers disrupted the passing down of mothering knowledges. However, mothering in traditional ways has changed and adjusted to fit modern conditions (Atkinson & Swain 1999) and changing gender relations. In their Australian research, Atkinson and Swain (1999) highlighted changes in the gendered structuring of families, showing how action taken by the state has changed Indigenous men's positions of power in the family. This research within the Koorie community in Victoria found that disruptions to fathering were caused by men's absence from families due to high rates of incarceration, early mortality and an increase in relationship breakdowns. This study found that women had a more stable presence in maintaining family traditions in the Koorie community (Atkinson & Swain 1999).

However, the conclusion from this study — that one gender role is more or less disturbed than the other — is a view not shared by Pease (2004), who argues that racial oppression and discrimination among Aboriginal people have extreme effects for both men and women.

When discussing the devaluation of Aboriginal men in relation to family and community, we are also reminded by Pease (2004) that power operates differently across genders for people who experience racial oppression. While some authors claim that Aboriginal men have suffered more (Flynn 1986), other authors such as Bolger (1991) have contested this, referring to women's ordeals of rape and humiliation by white men. As this literature review shows, the immense disruption to Aboriginal women's lives which occurred at the time of invasion cannot be quantified. Regardless of gender, Aboriginal people have experienced the cataclysmic effects of the occupation of their lands and their lives have been subjected to immeasurable disturbances. As Pat O'Shane (1995, p. 151) explains, the impact is hard to understand because experiences of 'dispossession, racism, exclusion, extermination, denigration and degradation are beyond description'. She goes on to say,

> They strike at the very core of our sense of being and identity. Many of our people assume any other identity than that of Aboriginal: the denial of self. Many say, as I have done for years, I shouldn't be here in this world, I don't belong. Yet we are of the most ancient people in the most ancient land on Earth. We question who we are, what we are doing, where we belong (O'Shane 1995, p. 151).

There is an undeniable link between the invasion of the land and Aboriginal men and women's sense of place and belonging in Australia, and these effects include an acknowledgement of the loss of giving and receiving nurturing that was experienced by men as well as women. Shared responsibility in relation to care within Aboriginal communities reminds us not to assume that women are necessarily the only carers of children. Thus, while caring patterns are likely to be nuanced across different contexts and settings, it is also important to reflect upon male absences in the colonialist regime, and their implications for Aboriginal women's experiences of mothering.

There are many ways to understand motherhood. As Ryan's (2011) study on *kanyininpa* (holding) highlights, there are differences between Aboriginal Australian attachment practices, values and caregiving. Ryan's (2011) study demonstrates that parenting practices which are often primarily regarded as negative in Western contexts could be misinterpreted in an Aboriginal context of mothering. For example, in a Western context, children seeking care from multiple caregivers or a mother interacting with her child in a non-directive way may be assessed as 'poor attachment'. However, different nurturing practices have different meanings and purposes and, in some Aboriginal contexts, multiple caring is identified as positive and having culturally valued meaning (Ryan 2011). Aboriginal Australian communities value children and adults who are interdependent, while children's autonomy and independence tend to be considered a success within Western parenting ideals. An understanding of these differences helps us to acknowledge that we are dealing with the presence of quite distinctive cultural values (Parkes, McRae-Williams & Tedmanson 2015; Yeo 2003). It is significant to consider that although Aboriginal ways of mothering may seem unfamiliar and foreign to white middle-class researchers, these practices have a long history within Aboriginal society. Aboriginal mothers nurture and uphold family and community through practices such as multiple mothering that form complex systems of community and kinship support (Atkinson & Swain 1999). Thus, the diversities of Aboriginal motherhoods are not accurately depicted in dominant discourses and are yet to be fully heard and respected.

For Aboriginal mothers, class, gender and the complexity of race-based marginalisation intersect to shape their experiences of mothering. The invisibility of cultural differences in mothering and the othering of Aboriginal motherhoods has been critical to the reinforcement of white privilege that shapes who is deemed to be a 'good mother' (such as when intensively mothering within a nuclear family structure). Numerous scholars, including Ardenell (2000) and Collins (1991, 2011), have discussed the way in which deviant discourses of motherhood also make visible hegemonic motherhood. For example, as the position of single mother reinforces the status of hegemonic mother in the nuclear family, the position of the

black mother reinforces the status of the white mother. Pivotal to challenging the positioning of 'other' mothers as 'bad' mothers is the shifting of motherhoods that sit on the margins to the centre. While research has begun to deconstruct these mothering discourses, further research and analysis is required to bring attention to variations within Aboriginal motherhoods. In this thesis, I seek to develop an understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal motherhood may be constructed, not as a deviant but as centred, highlighting how different ways of mothering bring different benefits to children and communities. This thesis aims to add further knowledge in this particular area, which has not to date been comprehensively addressed within the literature.

Aboriginal mothers and resistance

Alternative ways of viewing mothering have been discussed as sites of resistance to dominant constructions of motherhood. For example, in the context of African 'community mothering', Arlene Campbell (2010) has spoken about the way in which community mothering is enacted as cultural resistance. In this context, community mothering not only acts as a way of maintaining cultural family systems, but it can also operate as a substitute for mainstream childcare systems, which some mothers have been unable to reply upon. She suggests that contemporary social challenges and a deterioration of connection with elders have, to some extent, made community mothering practices vulnerable. However, the collective resistance of mothers occurs through a 'sustainable network of elder, middle-aged, and young African-American women who share power, agency, and authority to support, mentor, and communicate' (Campbell 2010, p. 240).

Practices of Aboriginal mothering in the Australian context may also be argued to be sites of resistance to hegemonic motherhood. As bell hooks (1989, p. 8) describes it 'an act of resistance, [is] a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination'. Aboriginal mothering practices of multiple mothering and caregiving can be acknowledged as Aboriginal women's resistance to individualist, intensive mothering discourses. Resistance therefore lies in Aboriginal mothers continuing to mother in these ways despite colonial state interventions and

societal constructs and pressures associated with notions of 'good mothering'. As Bronwyn Fredericks (2010, p. 548) explains:

> Through a process of commemorating and remembering the past, Australian Aboriginal women have been reconstructing a useful legacy for the present. The telling of our stories provides a sense of our individual and collective experiences in the naming of all that was and is and all that has been distorted, erased, and altered to suit the needs of the colonizer. This form of articulating is part of Aboriginal women's resistance to the ongoing processes and impacts of colonization and is part of our re-empowering of ourselves as Aboriginal women.

Fredericks (2010) emphasises the importance of remembering the past, and past ways of mothering, as a way of healing the wounds inflicted on Aboriginal women through colonisation. Reflecting upon this, re-evaluation of Aboriginal 'multiple mothering' in the present day could also serve to resist the continuing practice of removing Aboriginal children into white institutional care. As Jim McIlroy (2016) has discussed, Aboriginal grandmothers who have been affected by removals have formed a national network called Grandmothers Against Removals (GMAR), which challenges forced removals and works to return removed children to their families. This illustrates the resistance of grandmothers who have been oppressed by the state through frustrating that very same state's attempts to continue interfering in their lives. However, it also points to the powerful role of grandmothers as instrumental to the collective healing of Aboriginal communities.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the way patriarchy shapes mothering through the institutionalisation of gendered, classed and racialised hierarchies that are reinforced by ideologies of the nuclear family and intensive mothering. This review of the motherhood literature highlights the dominance of certain assumptions about mothers that reflect white middle-class beliefs, ideas and values. The chapter has provided an in-depth discussion of feminist resistances that have challenged patriarchal beliefs, demonstrating the agency and empowerment that has resulted for some women. The chapter also described the invisibility of Aboriginal women's voices and rights within this movement and emphasised that homogenous and normative understandings of family and motherhood are problematic, as they fail

to acknowledge diverse experiences and mothering practices (Cowlishaw 1999; Montag 1997; Moreton-Robinson 2004b). Intensive mothering ideology and associated constructions of good and bad mothering were explored, discussing how race and class divisions generate inequalities for marginalised mothers. Despite the upheaval that invasion has caused in Aboriginal mothers' lives, research exploring Aboriginal child-rearing has shown that Aboriginal mothering practices are nurturing and protective and, in some contexts, include multiple mothering practices.

There is limited research that emphasises the perspectives of Aboriginal mothers and explores their diverse mothering practices and meanings of Aboriginal motherhoods. In the next chapter, I critically examine the theoretical position of this thesis and reflect on the impact of place and belonging in the lives of Aboriginal Australian mothers and families. I further discuss the postcolonial and intersectional feminist lens that supports me to explain the multifaceted impacts of colonisation in the lives of Aboriginal mothers.

4. Researching Aboriginal motherhoods: Postcolonial and intersectional feminist perspectives

Introduction

I consider both postcolonial feminism and intersectionality as relevant to this research because a combination of these approaches enables an analysis of how gender and race intersect, while also offering a critique of the historical and cultural context and social location from which knowledge is produced (Mohanty 1996; Narayan 1998). When considering the way in which gender and race come together in colonialist contexts and in the lives of Aboriginal mothers, it is important to consider diversities and intersections in order to avoid the tendency to essentialise and universalise social categories such as gender or race. In this thesis, I consider how to theoretically challenge dominant constructions of motherhood through an analysis of Aboriginal women's own diverse experiences and constructions of motherhood. In this chapter I pay attention to how postcolonial feminisms argue for a reversal of the deficit colonialist gaze by challenging dominant ideologies and deconstructing Westernised conceptualisations of motherhood. I also examine intersecting racial and gendered hierarchies in Australian society that influence the operation of power in the lives of Aboriginal mothers. I therefore engage with intersectionality alongside postcolonial feminism to forge a feminist analysis that aims to produce knowledge that is non-essentialist and reflects the complexities and diversities of Aboriginal women's and mothers' lives.

In the context of the colonisation of Australia, the notion of sovereignty and associated issues about a sense of place and belonging are pivotal to an understanding of the lives of Aboriginal mothers (Moreton-Robinson 2007, 2015). Sovereignty is referred to by Taiaiaka Alfred (Mohawk) (2005, p. 33) as 'supreme political authority, independent and unlimited by any other power'. However, he clarifies that sovereignty in relation to Indigenous people should be thought about differently, in particular when sovereignty is claimed illegitimately as is the case in Australia. This country was referred to as *terra nullius* ('no-one's land') in international law, even though Aboriginal people lived here (see also Chapter 2).

Infamously, Australia stands alone in the world as the only Commonwealth nation that has not developed a treaty with its Indigenous peoples (Falk & Martin 2007). A focus on invasion and colonialism is significant to this research due to the unique circumstances of European settlement in Australia, where issues of illegitimately claimed sovereignty remain unresolved to this day. Indigenous sovereignty is therefore discussed in relation to state sovereignty and the continuation of colonial rule. Aboriginal people arguably are the sovereign peoples of Australia, and the denial of this fact since invasion has had a significant impact on Aboriginal mothers' capacity to reclaim, resist and regain power as mothers (Moreton-Robinson 2007). For many Aboriginal Australian women, relationships with land and place are remarked upon as being uniquely important (Bunda 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2007; Watson 2007). According to Bunda (2007, p. 78), biographies of Aboriginal Australian women have brought to the fore the understanding of 'Aboriginal woman as sovereign, reclaiming the sovereign self, grounded by a connection to people and place'. This literature points to experiences of Aboriginal women resisting colonial rule in Australia, both in the past and now, in a context where there is no treaty that supports the idea of a shared sovereignty or that formally acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples.

Postcolonial feminism

This research employs a postcolonial feminist lens to enable the distinctions and nuances of colonialism and its effects on Aboriginal mothers' lives in Australia to be comprehensively examined. However, many authors also argue that a 'postcolonial' discourse is problematic because it suggests that colonisation is over, that it is something in the past and therefore 'finished business' (Smith 1999, p.34; Ashcroft et al. 2007; Gandhi 1998). As well, the dispossession of land, dislocation from country, child removals and disenfranchisement that existed in the colonial past all continue in Australia today (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007). When discussing the idea of a colonial past, Gandhi (1998) reminds us that these experiences do not remain fixed in the past. A critical point here is that those who have been the 'triumphant subjects' (or the colonisers) often have failed to understand the emotional and spiritual grip of the colonial past on the present

(Gandhi 1998, p. 6). Understanding that colonisation (or the effects of invasion) is ongoing is significant to this thesis because I seek to develop an understanding of the ways Aboriginal motherhoods continue to be constructed that are still tied to colonialist imaginings and negative stereotypes. Postcolonial feminism provides a useful framework with which to explore gendered inequality, violence, racism and sexism and, in particular, the removal of the rights of mothers through the removal of their children.

This research also aims to decolonise knowledges through the decentring of powerful colonialist discourses within motherhoods. Although decolonisation was once recognised as the 'formal process of handing over the instruments of government' (a process which has not begun in Australia), it has more recently been understood as 'a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power' (Smith 1999, p. 98; Akena 2012). In this thesis, I interrogate localised contexts of gendered colonialism and its effects on mothering. I also connect to processes of decolonisation, by examining how colonialist power is institutionalised in the state and the media but can also be resisted, for example, through direct action and alternative social practices of mothering.

An analysis that focuses on Aboriginal motherhood is a significant undertaking because the state has sought control of Aboriginal women's reproductive capacities and has exploited Aboriginal women to advance colonialist power. As I have argued in Chapter 3, Aboriginal mothers are persistently positioned through colonialist discourses as inferior to white mothers, and as 'not good enough' mothers. In this thesis, I argue that these representations must be questioned. In this research, I consider motherhoods that have been marginalised and sit outside the white Anglo centre. Postcolonial feminism fits well with an analysis of mothering because it helps to explain how Aboriginal motherhoods have been cast as 'Other' as they are measured against white benchmarks, norms and explanations of social and cultural life (Moreton-Robinson 2000b). An analysis of the privileging of white knowledges supports an explanation of how Aboriginal mothers have been positioned and re-positioned in Australian society in ways that obscure their

experiences, knowledges and practices**.** By making gendered and colonialist relations of power visible, unique and varied, understandings of motherhood that have been regularly silenced and excluded will have the chance to be heard.

Postcolonial feminism has a variety of meanings (Schutte 2007). While its development has been somewhat complex, it has grown out of much needed dialogue and a necessary shift in both feminist and postcolonial theories (Rajan & Park 2005). Primarily, this shift has been necessary because both postcolonial and feminist studies have not fully accounted for, or been inclusive of, the experiences of non-Western and non-white women. In response to some of these difficulties, postcolonial feminism supports the desire to know and understand the many different and diverse worlds of women across the globe (Ahmed 2000a, 2000b; Jackson & Jones 1998). Western feminist theory has frequently been scrutinised for its ethnocentric disposition (Spelman 1988), which has contributed to the emergence of black feminist thought and intersectional feminism (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). My attempt to understand the experiences of Aboriginal women and mothers was spurred by the extensive criticism of feminist literature that homogenises the experiences of women and produces a white middle-class bias about mothering (Bulbeck 1998; Collins 2000; Lucashenko 1994; Moreton-Robinson 1998, 2000a, 2000b, West & Fenstermaker 1995). Authors such as Chris Weedon (2002) have argued that mainstream feminisms have tended to speak of a common sisterhood and, in doing so, have taken part in the downplaying of cultural and class differences. Uma Narayan (1998, p. 86) draws parallels between gender essentialism and cultural essentialism. She argues that constructions of women have been produced through binaries of 'Western woman' vs. 'non-Western woman' subjects, which reinforces beliefs about homogenous cultural groups in ways that reflect colonialist ideologies. I am mindful of this critique, and through my engagement with postcolonial feminism, I aim to challenge this tendency to generalise about cultural experiences of mothering.

Postcolonial feminism, knowledge and representation

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000b) argues that despite claims of a theoretical shift and the supposed convergence of feminism and postcolonialism, changes in

scholarly thinking have only been minor. Moreton-Robinson points out that while feminism has problematised 'woman' as a category, the white middle-class woman still remains at the centre '— it is she who speaks, she who theorises — and as a result, her dominant position remains scarcely interrupted' (Moreton-Robinson 2000a, pp. 108–109). Critics such as Indian-born postcolonial theorist Leela Gandhi (1998) point out that non-Western cultures and knowledges have been marked as 'other' in relation to Western knowledges. Thus, while its objectives may be well meaning, postcolonialism essentially still fails to centre cultures and epistemologies that sit outside the 'Western world' (Gandhi 1998, p. x). Mohanty (1996) has also been critical of Western feminist scholarship for the way it has conveyed a normative experience of women, grounded on highly ethnocentric and privileged ways of being in the world. Mohanty (1996) suggests that Western feminists have held great power over the way in which third world women have been depicted as a singular monolithic subject, using the very narrow lens of a white middle-class woman. In this way, Western feminist discourses have been responsible for the discursive homogenisation and continued structural oppression of non-Western women, which colonised the differences and complexities that depict women's lives across culture, race and class (Mohanty 1996). Underscoring this as a significant issue within Western feminism, Mohanty suggests a need for the practices of Western powers to be called out and explained (Mohanty 1996).

In discussing the relevance of postcolonial feminism for Indigenous research, Schutte (2007, p. 166) supports a need to expose colonialist and patriarchal dominance as a way of resisting colonialism:

> …postcolonial feminisms highlight both issues pertaining to and affecting women as well as the role of women in leading efforts towards decolonization, e.g., through activist movements. Postcolonial feminists have also used their academic expertise to expose conceptual frameworks and ideologies used by colonial institutions in the exercise of colonialist–masculinist dominance.

Similarly, Spivak (1999) promoted the idea that academics have a responsibility to dispute and destabilise dominant ideologies so that discriminatory effects are countered. Zufferey (2012) and Briskman (2007) have reflected on the significance of reflecting on racism and whiteness in social work research and practice.

Therefore, it is important to connect how unequal gendered power and whiteness inform representations of Aboriginal mothers, and how these social inequalities interact in the lives of those mothers.

Irene Watson (2002) belongs to the Tanganekald and Meintangk peoples of Australia and raises questions about where the boundaries of knowing might lie, arguing for centring Indigenous knowledges. Western patriarchal colonialist discourses and practices position Western white men as 'credible knowers', discrediting women's testimonies of violence and oppression (Tuana 2006, p. 13). Questions are raised over the influence of the epistemological beliefs of 'the knowers', highlighting the way in which Aboriginal people, women and mothers are represented as objects to know, rather than subjects who know (Moreton-Robinson 2004a, p. 75; Watson 2002). As I undertake this research, I aim to be considerate and mindful of this object–subject dichotomy by privileging and centring Aboriginal mothers' own knowledges about motherhood. As a Western white woman, it is a priority for me to research in ways that question and critique the invisibility of whiteness in hegemonic constructions of motherhood, reflecting on my own constructions of mothering that are embedded in my own worldview. It is significant that I recognise the influence of speaking from a position of 'knowing' and through research as an act of power. Constructing visible resistances to dominant powers and conventional beliefs about motherhood is the contribution to knowledge that I intend to create.

Australian Indigenous academics highlight the way in which a hierarchy of knowledges has evolved (Moreton-Robinson 2000b, 2004a; Nakata 2003; Watson 2002). This hierarchy operates through unequal race relations, where a central ontology of whiteness is privileged and operates as the 'epistemology of the West' (Moreton-Robinson 2004a, p. 75). An examination of this will help to unravel what Moreton-Robinson describes as 'the silence, normativity and invisibility of whiteness and its power within the production of knowledge and representation' (2004a, p. 75). This will involve myself, as a non-Indigenous researcher, being continually reflexive of my own practice and assumptions, as well as working to ensure that the visibility and influence of whiteness in the lives of Aboriginal

mothers is seen (see Chapter 5). The racialisation of knowledge production is an important consideration for this research. As Moreton-Robinson and Ahmed argue, white feminists write about the subject of 'other' from a position of knowing, and knowledge is produced from a foundation of eurocentrism, which consequently feeds into the regulation of power (Ahmed 2000a; Moreton-Robinson 2000b). Ahmed (2000b) confirms that when talking about issues of representation in feminist research, in asking the question 'who speaks?', we are not seeking to know exactly who it is that is speaking, but rather the focus is on enquiring about the positioning of the speech act itself (Ahmed 2000a). In asking this question, I will continue throughout my research to be reminded of the ways I too am caught up in interactions of permission and power that construct the opportunity to speak, or to speak for.

When engaging with postcolonial feminism, the inherent privileging of white knowledge systems is brought to the fore. By thinking in this way, I note how the research space, institutional conditions and the language of academe are gendered and racially instituted (Ahmed 2004). From this theoretical positioning, there is scope to think about how Aboriginal women and mothers have been and continue to be constructed as 'strangers' within white feminisms. As Ahmed advocates, research must embrace the call for courage, the courage to speak, in spite of the uncertainty or possibility of becoming exposed. My research is also challenged by these issues of representation and the need to respond to pertinent questions of 'who speaks?' and 'who knows'? As Ahmed (2000b, p. 53) states:

> ...feminism is implicated in the relations of force and authorisation that structure the very possibility of someone speaking and somebody being spoken for.

As I will discuss in more detail in the methodology (Chapter 5), I have attempted to unpack issues relating to representation, by acknowledging and analysing my own privileged position and how this influences the research and knowledge that is produced.

The marginalisation of Indigenous women's voices extends beyond the ways that knowledge is produced within academia. In Chapter 3, I discussed the ways that a

colonialist gaze has impacted on the visibility of Aboriginal motherhoods. As detailed in the previous chapter, through the colonialist gaze, a racist and sexist imagery of the Aboriginal mother has been developed, shaping widespread disapproval and negativity and casting the Aboriginal mother as 'other' (Cutcher & Milroy 2011; Moore & Riley 2010). Also as argued in Chapter 2, the negative often media-sensationalised construction of colonised women is something which holds great significance to the life circumstances of Aboriginal Australian mothers. While mothers and mothering are often highly respected within Aboriginal society, carrying influence over decision making and being responsible for the transference of culture, the conception of a revered Aboriginal mother is a silenced narrative within dominant Australian state and media discourses. As discussed in previous chapters, the effects of colonisation, racism and gendered inequalities intersect. According to Mohanty (1996, pp. 173–174), colonisation has almost always included 'structural domination, and a suppression — often violent — of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question'. The violence of colonisation extends beyond that which is explicit, often operating in more underhanded ways to 'construe…degenerate types on the basis of racial origin…as a fixed reality' (Bhabha 1996, p. 41). For example, Indigenous women's experiences have been constructed as undesirable and as the 'negative instance of the white, middle-class female' that 'freeze women in time, space and history' (Mehta 2000, p. 396; Mohanty 1996). This thesis will challenge gendered colonialist discourses by listening to the lived experiences of one group of Aboriginal mothers, revealing the deceptions of dominant discourses in masking the complexity and diversity that lies within Aboriginal women's experiences of motherhood/s.

In Australia, research within the social sciences that specifically explores the impact of colonialist and gendered dynamics on Aboriginal motherhood today has been limited. In contrast, there have been significant numbers of research studies from within medical and midwifery studies on the health care and birthing experiences of Aboriginal mothers (Adams et al. 2018; Kildea et al. 2018; Kildea & Wardaguga 2009). However, the limitations of this research are that they rarely consider the experiences of mothering beyond the pre- and post-natal period.

When considering the way in which gender and race come together in colonialist contexts and the lives of Aboriginal mothers, it is important to consider diversities and intersections, to avoid the universalising tendency to analyse categories in isolation (Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2008; Ferber 2007; McCall 2005; Valentine 2007). While the categories of race and gender may at times converge, in other instances one category (such as race, gender or class) may be more of a disadvantage or advantage than another. In this way, intersections of race and gender are fragmented, situated, and can sometimes produce contradictions and tension within Aboriginal women's lives. Since colonisation, imposed gendered structures and associated discourses have had limiting and defining effects for women. Anne McLintock (1995) calls our attention to the gendered nature of imperialism, suggesting that there were obvious differences in the ways women experienced colonisation compared to men. The patriarchal ordering of gender means that social relations have been organised in ways to ensure the power and influence of white men is upheld. When considering Western epistemology (that is, what we know and how we know it), we are able to see the dominant positioning of white male subjects, whose knowledges discourage both those of white women and Indigenous peoples (Moreton-Robinson 2004a).

The organisation of patriarchal and colonialist power is more complex than gender relations in isolation from other social locations such as race and class. For example, the way in which patriarchal arrangements have influenced the experiences of white women is different from how they have influenced those of Indigenous women, because white female subjects hold greater hierarchical power. As pointed out by Walby (1989), Indigenous women experience racism in addition to sexism, and the former may take priority over any concerns about the latter. Dorothy Roberts (1993) explains that although all women are affected by patriarchy, the addition of racism into the equation changes the way that white women experience sexism compared to black women. Black women are more likely to experience multiple oppressions (i.e. race, gender and class oppressions) simultaneously (May 2015; McCall 2005). Numerous feminist scholars have emphasised that there is an important connection between patriarchy and racism,

in that racism is inherently patriarchal, and patriarchy is also racist, resulting in a different experience of sexism for black women (Collins 2000; May 2015; Roberts 1993). When considering the diversity of Aboriginal motherhood in Australia, it becomes apparent that mothering identities are likely to have been heavily influenced through the enforcement of intersecting patriarchal and colonialist beliefs that have shaped state government policies.

As Walby (1989) suggests, it is important that our examinations of patriarchy have some elasticity, so that it is possible to include the diverse ways women may experience discrimination or inequity. As previously discussed, the hierarchical structuring of gender in Australia has occurred through a 'cult of domesticity', which has functioned as the cornerstone of imperial advancement (McLintock 1995, p. 5). What this has meant is that the value of a woman is weighed according to her domestic prowess and commitment to reproducing the gendered social order. Complementary to this principle, motherhood is epitomised as the pinnacle of womanhood. As mothers, it was the responsibility of colonial women to reproduce for the nation and thus to ensure that its influence is sustained (McLintock 1995). This hegemonic mode of motherhood is more than giving life and caregiving — it operates as a social institution that defines and regulates women's positioning in society. Mothers who do not measure up to these expectations become vulnerable to experiences of societal exclusion and social alienation. The fear of rejection and of becoming a social outcast has been fuelled through colonialist gendered dynamics that have produced a deep-rooted belief that mothers should prioritise their lives around the needs and desires of men (Rich 1977; Roberts 1993), the nuclear family (Collins 2011) and the reproduction of economic relations (Becker 1991; Hewitson 2013) that privilege men.

However, unlike dominant constructions of colonial patriarchal motherhood, Aboriginal motherhoods have their origins in a historical cultural context where gender roles and relations were constructed around different collective priorities and ways of understanding the world. As previously discussed (see Chapter 3), these historically gendered practices inherently threatened colonial patriarchy and Aboriginal womanhood and motherhood has been negatively constructed as 'other'

and 'less than' white motherhood, resulting in deficit constructions of Aboriginal mothers. When considering how gender and race have intersected to shape Aboriginal motherhood since colonisation, it becomes noticeable that race has mediated experiences of gender as the dominant frame, to privilege first the white male, and then the white female. This has had detrimental consequences for the ways in which Aboriginal motherhood has been experienced and constructed, necessitating a closer examination of the role of whiteness in the decentring of Aboriginal motherhoods in Australia.

The normalisation of whiteness

Aboriginal motherhoods have become decentred in Australia because of the way in which whiteness operates, and its influence on gender relations in this country. In her essay titled 'Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation', Moreton-Robinson (2004b) argues that negative representations of Indigenous people have reinforced a position of 'Indigenous other', which has been applied to validate the invasion of Indigenous lands. Moreton-Robinson (2004a, p. 76) gives details of the many ways that Indigenous people have been portrayed, including as 'lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty', and in doing so explains how simplistic depictions of Indigeneity mask its complexity. The purpose of these representations is to mark differences and by representing difference in negative ways, the formation and structure of whiteness is supported (Moreton-Robinson 2004a). The critical point to note here is the way that the white race is itself invisibilised, with consciousness of race established as something that belongs to the 'other' (Moreton-Robinson 2004a). As key whiteness theorists have suggested, 'whiteness is itself the human universal that no (other) race realizes' (Montag 1997, p. 292). From this understanding, any race that falls outside the dominant white race is regarded as sub-human, recognised as the 'other' and falls short of white perfection (Montag 1997). The idea of whiteness as the representation of humanity is also pointed out by Moreton-Robinson (2004a) as guaranteeing power and, in turn, supporting the ongoing reproduction of whiteness. It is through the proliferation of this power that the dominant race is constructed as the norm, the measuring stick, the status quo. Whiteness is therefore very much invisible and is

seldom recognised by people of white skin colour. Moreton-Robinson (2004a, pp. 76–77) articulates the normalisation of whiteness and construction of the 'other' in the following way:

> Within whiteness's regime of power, all representations are not of equal value: some are deemed truthful while others are deemed fictitious, some are contested while others form part of our common sense taken-for-granted knowledge of the world. Imbued with a power that normalises their existence, these latter representations are invisible, unnamed, and unmarked. It is the apparent transparency of these normative representations that strategically enables differentiation and othering.

A critique of whiteness is helpful when trying to understand the way that racialised regimes of power have influenced gendered dynamics between women and the impact of this on the construction of a singular Aboriginal motherhood. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000a p. 24) argues that gendered racial oppression has been produced by white women, who have intentionally, as well as unconsciously, taken on the subject position of middle-class white woman, which is 'informed by an ideology of true white womanhood'. When white women are subjugated by white patriarchal power and situated as the true image of womanhood, Aboriginal women are seen to be in comparison 'less feminine, less human, less spiritual' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 24). This positions the white mother at the centre and the Aboriginal mother as the 'other' mother. Moreton-Robinson (2000) talks about how the relationship between white women and Aboriginal women continues to sustain social inequalities. This is linked to white women holding the responsibility of populating the nation and upholding the values of the nation, which encourages white women to regulate not only their own mothering identities, but also those of Aboriginal mothers.

As previously discussed, white women have played a significant role in the colonial project in relation to child removal and a belief that it was their maternal role to 'save' Aboriginal children. In Jacobs' (2005) comparative analysis of maternal colonialism, she contrasts Australia and the American West, noting the way in which colonialist women have assumed responsibility as the reformers, teachers and administrators of Indigenous people,

> ...[the] removal and institutionalization of Indigenous children was largely a feminine domain, defined primarily around mothering, particularly targeted at Indigenous women, and implemented largely by white women. (Jacobs 2005, p. 456)

While there is variation in the way white women reacted to their own gendered oppression (i.e. ambivalent to or defending the rights of Aboriginal women), generally there was direct involvement in child removal, adoption and fostering of children (Cuthbert 2000), the endorsement of child removal and/or the construction of Aboriginal mothers as deficient and unfit. White women responded to their own oppression by constructing their own mothering as normative and superior, enabling them to gain power from which to position their own rights movements. As McLintock (1995) argues, since colonisation, race has mediated experiences of gender in ways that have resulted in white women being granted significantly greater power than Aboriginal women. The interstices between gender and race can be seen in social relations between white women and Aboriginal mothers. For example, Sykes (1984, pp. 64–65) illuminates the way that Indigenous women have been consistently positioned as 'the helped' and white women 'the helpers' in public discourses. This has centred white motherhood as the norm in Australian society and is a dominant assumption in the education of professions such as social work, teaching, and nursing. These gendered relations reflect what Mohanty calls 'double colonization', where women are 'other' to men, and Indigenous/third world women are 'other' to white women (Mohanty, Russo & Torres 1991). It has been noted that white women held shifting positions as 'colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting' (McLintock 1995, p. 6), emphasising that gender does not operate independently of the colonialist context of Australia. Focusing on the narratives of Aboriginal mothers, this research explores the ways in which motherhood has been remembered, experienced and felt, and considers this knowledge in relation to colonialist and patriarchal discourses about Aboriginal motherhoods.

Postcolonial and intersectional feminism: A multifocal lens

As I have discussed, postcolonial feminism is a blend of postcolonial and feminist theories and its development has been spurred through the limitations of these

theories on their own. This way of theorising is useful for this research, as it rejects the eurocentrism of feminism, drawing attention to experiences of non-Western women across the world (Ahmed 2000b; Jackson & Jones 1998). Seminal postcolonial feminists Uma Narayan and Chandra Taplade Mohanty emphasise the importance of challenging white hegemonic interpretations of a universal gendered experience, while also addressing patriarchal and colonialist influences. This thesis makes visible patriarchal and colonialist influences and examines dominant representations of Aboriginal mothers by providing a critique of Western feminist representations of Aboriginal women and mothers. Aboriginal mothers' gendered oppression in Australia is critically examined in relation to the influence of colonisation and postcolonial feminism (Bulbeck 1998; Mishra 2013). I am therefore able to challenge colonialist and gendered constructions of Aboriginal motherhood identities and provide new knowledges by focusing on Aboriginal mothers' own narratives.

As noted earlier, Chris Weedon (2002) argues that Western feminisms that have sought to challenge gender inequalities through the representation of a common sisterhood as the shared experience of women. Western, white feminist approaches have downplayed difference and diversity, which is addressed through postcolonial, post structural and intersectional feminism. However, there have also been a number of critiques of postcolonial feminism, which include: 1) that it weakens the feminist movement by dividing it; 2) that it also promotes an ethnocentric lens; 3) that it is not clear whether patriarchal or colonialist aspects should be the main focus; 4) that it does not include the voices of all women and has not gone far enough to address cultural diversities, and 5) as noted already, that the notion of 'post' assumes that the colonial era has now passed, which is not the experience of, for example, Aboriginal mothers in Australia. Furthermore, as Uma Narayan (1998) argues, while postcolonial feminisms have challenged Western feminism, this has led to unintentional cultural essentialism, with postcolonial feminism potentially producing binaries of 'Western woman' and 'non-Western woman' subjects. She argues that this emphasises differences and has the effect of reinforcing beliefs relating to culturally homogenous groups in

ways that can reflect colonialist ideologies (Narayan 1998). I therefore intend to also draw on intersectionality and an intersectional feminist perspective in this thesis, in order to produce knowledge that is non-essentialising, which can consider particularities when considering Aboriginal women and mothers. I argue that a postcolonial intersectional feminism is broader and goes further, to challenge how Western, white, gendered and middle-class assumptions intersect to shape 'good mothering' beliefs that continue to 'colonise' Aboriginal mothers.

There are a number of critiques of cultural essentialism within postcolonial feminisms (hooks 1989, Lorde 2003; Mohanty 1991, 1996; Narayan 2000; Spivak 1999) because when a binary of Western vs. non-Western is established, this attributes sameness between non-Western cultures, which is problematic in Indigenous contexts. Postcolonial feminism has also inadvertently been involved in essentialism by not considering differences among non-white women. For example, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2011) suggests, the notion of sameness has been layered on to Aboriginal people by white colonisers and is blind to the diversity and complexity among and between Aboriginal women. In this thesis, I intend to move beyond Western and non-Western binaries.

Moreton-Robinson adopted an Indigenous standpoint within feminism and thus she is able to challenge the colonialist production of knowledge that is also inherent within the social sciences disciplines (see also Coburn et al. 2012). While I am cognisant of these understandings and theoretical complexities within this space, as a non-Indigenous researcher from a social science background, I also need to acknowledge that my white, Western social positions are inseparable from me. As a white Western researcher, I replicate a colonial encounter, by being a member of the dominant group producing and developing knowledge in relation to a marginalised group. I further explore my standpoint within this research in the methodology (Chapter 5).

Hence, although postcolonial feminist theorising has significant application within this thesis, I am compelled to include an intersectional analysis to elucidate

subjective social positions, and the complexity of everyday practices of mothering. Brah and Phoenix (2004, p. 76) describes intersectionality as,

> … signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.

I have constructed a multifocal feminist lens that draws on both postcolonial and intersectional feminism in order to account for colonisation and pertinent issues of representation by the colonial state, and the need to avoid fixing gender and race, which can inadvertently promote cultural essentialism. Adding an intersectional approach to my theoretical perspective acknowledges that there are multiple, intersecting axes of difference that potentially impact on Aboriginal mothers' lived experiences, challenging singular conceptions of Aboriginal motherhood.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have built on the discussions in previous chapters that have explored colonial state control of Aboriginal motherhoods and examined the influence of patriarchy and feminism on intensive mothering ideologies that can marginalise Aboriginal mothers. I have demonstrated how the power of racial and gendered hierarchies has operated to devalue Aboriginal motherhoods and dismantle Aboriginal practices of mothering. I have discussed postcolonial feminism in relation to Aboriginal women and mothers in Australia, to consider motherhoods that have been marginalised and sit outside the white Anglo centre, and to challenge dominant ideologies and Westernised conceptualisations of motherhood. I have also offered a critique of postcolonial feminism because the unresolved issues of sovereignty stemming from *terra nullius* make it impossible to reconcile the 'post' and 'colonial' in the Australian context. I have incorporated intersectionality as a theoretical lens to highlight how gendered, racialised and classed normative assumptions intersect to shape mothering practices and understandings of Aboriginal motherhoods in Australia. Therefore, I argue that a multifocal feminist theoretical perspective, informed by both postcolonial and intersectional feminism, is useful for reversing the colonialist gaze that focuses on

the normalisation of white motherhood and the deficits of Aboriginal mothering. Through using postcolonial and intersectional feminism together to question what it is we think we know about motherhood, and by making visible the privileging of white hegemonic knowledges, Aboriginal women's diverse experiences, meanings and voices can be heard in this research. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodological approach to this research and build upon issues of representation raised within this chapter, to consider my own positionality within this research and its implications for the knowledge produced.

5. Researching the experiences of Aboriginal mothers

Introduction

Building on previous chapters that discuss the colonialist context of Australia, the privileging of white hegemonic knowledges about mothering and my postcolonial and intersectional feminist standpoint, this chapter discusses the methodology I adopted for this research. The research has been guided by a qualitative interpretive paradigm that incorporates aspects of critical and constructionist theories as well as ethnographical and auto-ethnographical methodologies. This theoretical position considers both the material experiences and discursive constructions of Aboriginal mothers to help understand the in/visibility and complexities of Aboriginal mothering. In this chapter I focus on my use of ethnography, the research methods I chose, the contributors to the thesis and how I analysed data. I also consider the implications of researcher privilege in relation to designing, carrying out, interpreting, analysing and producing knowledge within this research. In Chapter 4 I discussed pertinent issues of representation, which I expand on here in relation to reflexivity and my own position of white privilege.

This thesis is not in itself an ethnography, but rather draws on an ethnographic research approach guided by postcolonial and intersectional feminist theoretical perspectives with an emphasis on decolonisation. The research inquiry is therefore guided by a qualitative interpretive paradigm. This is a post-positivist approach which evolved from criticisms of conventional positivist paradigms that assume the researcher is independent from the research and can construct objective 'truths'. While positivist research usually begins with a hypothesis or predictions that it then sets out to prove or control, this inquiry seeks to explore and discover knowledge in interactions with human beings, with an openness to many interpretations (Atkinson & Delmont 2011). The dualism of researcher and researched is an interface I attempt to resist by drawing on ethnographic approaches that focus on participatory research methods. As Bradbury (2008) explains, participatory research emphasises the participation of communities. From this understanding, this research has been planned in a way where the

researcher works together with people affected by the research. I did this by embedding myself in a community centre in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. I developed genuine trusting relationships with members of the Granny's Group by volunteering and participating in activities for over three years. More detail on the research context and contributors is provided in Chapter 6. I offered the research contributors control over what data was collected, where the research took place and the way in which data was collected. The Aboriginal women contributors to this research were enthusiastic about the direction of the project, and although they did not suggest changes to the research direction, were more likely (as relationships developed) to divulge personal experiences and knowledges of mothering that they felt were pertinent for me to know. One contributor also suggested ideas about how I could present my research, talking to me about the benefits of presenting a visual map in colours so that the data would be easier to take in at a glance (see Figure 1. Visual map of relationality). With such advice in mind, I have been conscious of continuing to question Western research logics, frameworks and assumptions throughout the research journey.

Through acknowledgement of my own colonial positioning, I have questioned whether we do actually live in a postcolonial reality. I have sought to engage with the concept of decolonisation and the processes that may be attached to this. While decolonisation for many colonised people is about reclaiming the past (Dei 2006), as a methodology it is about recognising and unmasking colonialist systems and, in this research, includes ethical consideration relating to how and what knowledge is produced. Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a Maori academic from New Zealand who has contributed to the theorising of decolonising methodologies. She talks about decolonising methodologies as a way of disrupting the ethnocentricity that is embedded within academic research practices. When defining decolonising methodologies Smith states:

> Decolonizing methodologies is concerned not so much with the actual technique of selecting a method but much more with the context in which research problems are conceptualized and designed, and with the implications of research for its participants and their communities. It is also concerned with the institution of research, its claims, its values and practices, and its relationships to power. It has 'talked back to' and 'talked up to' research as an

> institution of knowledge that is embedded in a global system of imperialism and power (Smith 2012, pp. 19–20).

This research is a process of and part of my own journey towards providing a space of decolonisation both in social science academia and my own research practices. Considering the meaning of decolonisation has helped me to develop my awareness of the cultural interface of research, in this case, between me the coloniser and researcher, and the colonised and researched, who are contributors to this study. It can be argued that university-based research cannot be separated from a colonialist paradigm, and although decolonising research aims to resist this, the colonialist lens remains dominant within Western academia. As explained by Martin (2008), decolonising research necessitates that Aboriginal knowledges are accepted, endorsed, and not deemed merely as supplementary to Western knowledges. Indigenous knowledges involve multidimensional understandings, which have been noted for their transformative potential and capacity to provide new insights, social justice and empowerment (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). The way in which this research and its methodology has been designed was guided by my relationship with the women contributing to the research and my own self-reflexivity on the concept and practice of decolonisation.

Reflexivity and privilege

Throughout this thesis, I frequently refer to and consider my own white privilege and positionality. In her seminal work, Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes privilege as 'an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions', where 'unearned power [is] conferred systematically' (McIntosh 2008, p. 124). White privilege is very much invisible because people of white skin colour seldom recognise it. Instead of talking about white privilege as the automatically bestowed unearned benefit, white people are more comfortable to engage with this advantage in terms of the disadvantage of 'others' (McIntosh 2008; Montag 1997). Authors such as Jensen (2005) have pointed out the complexity of the invisibility of whiteness. White people have the privilege of ignoring and denying they are living within a white-supremacist society, for they have 'the privilege of remaining ignorant because that ignorance is protected' (Jensen 2005, p. 10). Zufferey (2012) has explored privilege

within the social work profession and Sullivan and Tuana (2007) offer further insight into the ways that ignorance maintains privilege, leaving it unchallenged. As part of this research I have reflected on the idea that 'when people are unable to recognise their privilege…they are unable to see their role in keeping others subordinated' (Pease 2010, p. 11). As such, while traditional research conventions have opposed the inclusion of first-person accounts, I have concluded that to hide the researcher's (my) voice would be a failure to make privilege visible in the research process and would perpetuate structures of oppression. I move through the research space with a consciousness of the importance of acknowledging my privilege, but at the same time attempt to manage conflicting thoughts about how much to self-disclose and when a focus on self might cross a line to become self-indulgent.

I therefore intend to focus briefly on describing the multiple positions that I hold, not to ignore and shift focus from the oppression of others, but rather to explain how the way in which I view the world has been shaped by particular standpoints. Drawing from standpoint theory (Harding 2004; Hartsock 1998; Smith 1992; Wylie 2003), I acknowledge that multiple and intersecting social identities and positions influence the ways in which people view the world. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, intersectionality allows me to sensitively incorporate and analyse how race and gender intersect (Crenshaw 1989; Ferber 2007), a process that also encourages self-reflexivity.

Reflecting on my own positioning, I would describe myself as a middle-aged, white, heterosexual, able-bodied person of Dutch and English descent, and an Australian resident and citizen. I am also a sole mother to a kind-hearted and sometimes challenged nearly teenaged boy. My mother and father 'worked hard' throughout my childhood, moving our family from a working-class environment to a more middle-class one. I was raised in the Catholic faith, where beliefs about the nuclear family as the norm were constantly reinforced. This led to an assumption that I would, in this order, one day marry and have children of my own. This historical, social and cultural positioning has shaped who I am today. Yet my understanding of my identity, has not been static and has significantly changed through time.

Rubin et al. (2014, p. 196) mention differences between social class and socioeconomic status, suggesting the latter is changeable and reflects a person's current situation. Social class, on the other hand, is considered more stable and static and is associated with one's sociocultural background, which combines social and cultural privileges. So, while my middle-class status relates to the fact that I have grown up in a household with a degree of wealth, I think it is worthwhile to point out that, since my teenage years, I have lived out of my family home and experienced significant downward economic mobility. I would describe my socioeconomic status as shifting between the 'underclass' (economically inactive, living on the poverty line), lower class (low-skilled, low-income) and middle class (administrative worker). Claiming to be from the middle class is perhaps a blurred identity for me because, in the interests of marking out a social position, I am pointing to certain powers that come from being raised middle class, while also acknowledging that I have experienced social and economic marginalisation in earlier years. Today, I still live with economic limitations; however, the educational pathways available to me as a middle-class person are leading me in an upward trajectory. As a sole mother, the experience of stigmatisation is something I have struggled with. Sole parenting is not common in my local community and I don't see people like myself very often. For example, within my extended family my parental status is pitied, and my son is considered illegitimate, which also speaks to my perceived social status and how I am viewed as a mother. In this context, as a woman and sole mother, I bring a particular kind of marginal voice to this research. In relation to hegemonic discourses about motherhood, I am a deviant and an 'other' mother. My rationale for explaining myself as being both privileged and oppressed is because I believe that this dichotomy has greatly influenced how I have constructed meanings throughout this research. Although my position of racial advantage limits how I understand the world, I have also endured experiences of disadvantage that have expanded my capacity to look beyond privilege to a certain extent. In spite of this, my birth into a position of white privilege means my perspective will never be marginalised in the same way as Aboriginal mothers. This is a reality that remains problematic for me as a

researcher in this context. As Moreton-Robinson (2000b, p. 351) has argued, there is limitation and partiality in producing knowledge about 'others',

> To know an Indigenous constructed social world, you must experience it from within; to know about such a world means you are imposing a conceptual framework from outside. These two ways of knowing inform us that there are limits to know an 'Other' be they black or white and these restrictions impact on intersubjective relations and the exercising of power.

Therefore, I can never be an 'insider' researcher as I am not an Aboriginal mother. However, there may be spaces for sameness and difference in my conversations and relationships with Aboriginal mothers. Milligan (2016) proposes the concept of 'inbetweener' as reflecting greater interpersonal complexity than that which is presented by the insider/outsider dichotomy. Attempting to become an inbetweener as opposed to an outsider reflects participatory research principles and practices that support relationship building and a sense of collaboration (Milligan 2016). The knowledge produced in this thesis reflects the embodied, situated and partial perspectives of the researcher and contributors. The combination of perspectives means that the research is shaped through the intersubjective production of knowledge (Willemse 2014). Intersubjectivity is about the way we interact with others and understand each other to make meaning in the world together, which suggests that individual perspectives are shaped and 'co-created' by many subjects (De Jaegher et al. 2017, p. 492). Intersubjectivity is important to this research as it provides the capacity for issues to be considered from many different perspectives and gives the opportunity for white feminists such as myself to hear the diverse voices of Aboriginal Australian people (Moreton-Robinson 2000a) and mothers. Intersubjectivity allows fewer partial knowledges to be developed (Moreton-Robinson 2000a). This process is discussed by Willemse (2014, p. 10), who argues that the researcher's situated-ness calls for self-reflexivity, so that the position of the researcher and the 'other' both become the subject of critical analysis. In this chapter I attempt to use reflexivity to 'come clean' about my position (Lather 1993, p. 1993), but do so with an awareness of the risk of spilling over into a self-indulgent and narcissistic narrative that centres myself in this research and sidelines the mothers in this study (Davies et al. 2004; Denzin 1997; Pinch & Pinch 1988).

Throughout this research, I have remained mindful of my position of white privilege. A growing number of scholars continue to contribute to our understanding of how white privilege operates (Ferber 2009, 2012; Frankenberg 2001; Jensen 2005; McIntosh 2008, 2010; Moreton-Robinson 2000a, 2004a; Pease 2010, 2012). Racial privilege is a kind of privilege where the power of the racially dominant group is reinforced in ways that are harmful towards racially marginalised 'others' (Pease 2010, p. 9). Important to an understanding of privilege is the way in which it positions the dominant group as normative. If we are looking at the social construction of whiteness, then, as Frankenberg (2001, p. 6) suggests, whiteness needs to be named so that it will become marked. I have marked whiteness in this research by naming and thinking through its intersection with myself and this research, thinking about how my own mindset and practices embody and reinforce white privilege. However, I am also aware that whiteness is not invisible to the 'othered', including the Aboriginal mothers in this study. Aboriginal people live in a society where they are confronted with the dominance of white power and culture every single day. As Prior (2007) has highlighted, we need to remain cognisant and respectful of the power differentials in relationships between the researcher and research participants. Therefore, within this research it has been significant for me to acknowledge and analyse myself as a site of dominance.

An understanding of the interrelatedness of normativity and dominance is critical to this research because it aims to challenge hegemonic understandings of motherhood. This research and the relationships that have been developed through it are particularly sensitive to political and provocative critique, with myself as a white subject doing research 'on' or about Aboriginal women. Throughout this research, I have continued to deliberate on this problematic positioning and tried to find ways of researching with the contributors to this study. Yet my own historical and contemporary privileged position cannot be ignored. For example, I had a predominantly private school education where I was surrounded by others privileged like me. I grew up in a middle/upper-class suburb, with my mother reinforcing ideas that 'anything is possible', 'you can do anything',

'the world is your oyster'— ideas that I internalised. The opportunity to carry out this research has been yet another example of what white privilege affords me and/or makes visible to me. As Jensen (1998, p. 3) argues, 'I got a significant boost from white privilege, which continues to protect me every day of my life from certain hardships'.

Beyond simply the opportunity to undertake a research degree, there are other significant benefits that I have received along this journey. The mothers in this research have provided me with valuable insights into mothering, shared deeply personal experiences, and given me useful mothering advice. Perhaps most significantly, the women have made me feel loved and supported, which has given me strength to be both a mother and researcher. To stay aware of my position of power (something that can easily retreat into the background), I kept a reflexive journal throughout the fieldwork. My entries include reflections on day-to-day experiences and perceptions. I used journaling to help unravel observations that both comforted and discomforted me, but also to remind myself to reflect on my own position as a researcher. Following is an extract from my diary that reports a slippage in my cognisance of the need to analyse myself more deeply:

> I haven't written much by way of notes lately. Why is this? I ask myself. I feel I am becoming so at home that maybe I am falling into the trap of thinking I may not have learned something powerful enough to write… I should be using these moments and devoting this time to reflect on myself more deeply. (Journal entry 30/09/2015)

I share this journal entry to highlight the importance of remembering my 'unconscious' privilege, and to reflect that engagement with the world as a learner is not straightforward because my own power and privilege can often go unspoken and unacknowledged. The women's willingness to engage in this research is something I did not take for granted and speaks to their immense generosity of spirit as they have been willing to help me work through my own discomfort. I am required to constantly remind myself that as a white person I cannot separate myself from the state system (Applebaum 2008) and status quo because whiteness automatically provides me with certain power and privilege. If I lose a focus on

this, it is likely that I will centre my whiteness and fail to respond to research contributors sensitively.

In the spirit of critical self-reflective methodologies, I reflected personally on all my fieldwork experiences in order to raise my own consciousness. This included detailing my experiences and dilemmas throughout the research process (Finaly 2008) so that I could 'come clean' in an effort to expose the influence of my position of power in relation to the research (Lather 1993, p. 685). As Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 413) suggest, reflexivity can be operationalised to discuss 'the personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research'. Within this research, I have practised self-reflexivity in a number of ways. I have reflected on my own colonial privilege, whiteness and power within the research processes. I have reflected about my own relationships and emotions in this space. I have thought reflexively about the way relationships operate among contributors in the community and about the influence of structures such as organisations, institutions and governments. This has been critical to examining power differentials, my previous assumptions, and my interpretations within this research.

My position is that I am a learner and Aboriginal community members are the holders of knowledge and expertise on the topic of Aboriginal motherhoods. The research contributors were my educators when it came to the protocols of engaging with Aboriginal people. This research was granted ethics approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Australia and demonstrated adherence to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS 2012). I have had to be reflexive about the ethics process throughout this research. In particular, there has been a balancing for me between the ethical requirements of my university (inherently white Western frameworks), and the incorporation of localised ethics and protocols (the community). Being ethically reflexive has enabled me to privilege the knowledges of the community that I am working with by centring the perspectives and voices of Aboriginal mothers.

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I saw the importance of and strived to engage Indigenous academic expertise on my supervision panel. However, my attempts to secure such involvement were difficult and were challenged by factors such as the limited number of available Aboriginal academics I had access to. Aboriginal academics are in high demand and institutional rules and regulations regarding qualifications and experience limit which academics can participate on supervisory panels. While I remained concerned about the impact of white Western assumptions within academia and had ethical concerns about this throughout the research journey, I came to realise the value of the women I was working with (my research contributors) and started to understand their role, not just as contributors but also as advisers. I listened to the perspectives and advice of the women regarding how to do research well and it was through this learning that I was able to reflect on the university institution in a new way, recognising its racial structures of privilege more clearly. I came to the conclusion that I also needed to think beyond the institutions of academia and consider whose expertise was most valuable in this context.

As part of engaging with the women's expertise, I participated in an Aboriginal-run cultural awareness education program provided by the community who participated in this study. This supported me to adhere to more specific community understandings that relate to interpersonal relations in a cross-cultural context. The cultural awareness training program was an enriching experience and very different from the cultural awareness training I had previously received in a university setting. It was less theoretical/abstract and more interactive and embedded, including storytelling techniques for sharing and learning. Through the relationship I developed with the person running the program, I have been able to have regular contact and follow-up discussions about my research and have been invited to continue to attend cultural awareness programs in the future.

I have also discovered through this research that there are limitations to reflexivity. Regardless of how reflexive I am, there are still limits to how I am able to understand or know Aboriginal motherhoods. I am an outsider to Aboriginal motherhood and I have not lived as an Aboriginal mother. Throughout this

research, I have felt very close with the women I have worked with and have developed close relationships, discussed intimate and emotional details from our lives and we have shared a deep personal connection. This has been especially enriching for me; however, I have caught myself thinking that I am 'one of them', which is never wholly possible. For a while, I forgot myself, overlooking that while I might be a friend, I am also always a researcher. I cannot undo this position and so there is a declaration that needs to be made in relation to how this may affect the power relations within these relationships over time. Friendships will last beyond the research. Yet, I have a responsibility to maintain awareness that my identity in this space will also be bound up with my experiences and position as a researcher.

Guided by the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012, p. 3), I remain committed to the idea of 'meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and Indigenous people' throughout each stage of the research. Acts of reciprocity are involved when sharing knowledge and follow from past Aboriginal traditions that are continued in the present (Peterson 1997, 2013). Acts of giving, whether through time, help, or material gifts all contribute to the sharing of knowledge. I acted with a sense of reciprocity in this space by being available to talk with and listen respectfully to all the women's stories, not just the ones about motherhood that were relevant to my study. I volunteered in daily centre activities by providing support with lunch preparation, cooking, cleaning up and making tea and coffee. In addition to this, I have also provided office support in areas such as photocopying, laminating, typing, technology troubleshooting, as well as individual support for women over a range of their personal administrative needs, including assistance with will writing, insurance claims and housing applications. I have also supported the women at social events. For example, I worked in a canteen during a fundraising event, and travelled with the group on day trips as a volunteer carer for line dancing performances and an annual country trip. I have also brought in contributions of bread or dessert to meals, and at times have taken over full responsibility for the daily provision of food. In addition to this, I initiated 'pamper' days where I

massaged and manicured hands. I also supported the women to access a series of photographs from the museum archives. My actions were the result of a consciousness of giving back and researching in an ethical way in this space. I have remained mindful of the AIATSIS Guidelines principle 11, which refers to 'benefits, outcomes and giving back', and states 'Indigenous people involved in research, or who may be affected by research, should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project'.

I was honoured and surprised when one of the aunties nominated me with a National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Community Service Award in 2016 on behalf of the centre. I discuss this use of the term aunty in later chapters and explain why I was surprised that the women asked me to call them 'aunty' on my first visit. This award was presented to me in recognition of my support of Aboriginal people in South Australia. Being recognised for these contributions left me feeling a little self-conscious. The reason for this is because I was attempting to give back and diminish my power within the community; however, being recognised with an award left me feeling empowered and therefore complicated the process of trying to negate my power. This highlights the difficulty of achieving equal research relations, and the complex nature of reciprocal exchange. This evidence of reciprocal exchange within my research tells me that to some degree I have been able to perform in culturally valued ways and that in doing so, I hope I have privileged Aboriginal ways of knowing and being via this thesis.

However, it is the way in which my outsider positioning intersects with these reciprocal exchanges that make this work so complicated. I have found that the way in which reciprocity operated within this research was also a source of personal anxiety. Acts of reciprocity through giving can be undertaken from different stances and I found myself sometimes questioning my position or assumptions here. Sometimes I felt I may be replicating the 'white woman helper' role. As I discussed earlier in the thesis (see Chapter 4) the construction of white women as the 'helpers' of Aboriginal women who need to be 'helped' is a powerful construction (see also Aileen Moreton-Robinson 2000). Before Moreton-Robinson,

these complexities were also discussed by Indigenous rights activist and writer Bobbi Sykes (1984, p. 64), who talked about her engagements with the women's movement as 'mutually beneficial' while also pointing to the unequal power relations that exist within these relationships:

> Always, the white women are in the position of 'helper' and I am in the position of 'helped'. The exchange is lop-sided. White women give me access to their resources, whether that is the opportunity to address their numbers at meetings, financial resources, access to their printing presses or their distribution avenues, and I give them information from outside their sphere, as well as, on many occasions, the opportunity to feel charitable and/or 'liberal' (Sykes 1984, p. 64).

Relations between white and Aboriginal Australians have been constructed in the context of paternalistic cultures that have represented Aboriginal people as needing to be 'fixed' (Dudgeon 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2000a; Wright & Kickett-Tucker 2017). This history makes my 'helping' actions of reciprocity complex. This links to the point that Dudgeon (2008) makes, that all research may be seen as an act of colonisation, so while I am attempting to move towards decolonisation, using postcolonial feminism and ethnography as a way of privileging women's voices, resisting this history and power dynamic is a constant challenge.

Several perspectives in the literature were helpful for me to consider in responding to this dilemma. Breen (2007) for example, suggests that we change the focus, so rather than thinking about research as made up of insiders and outsiders, we instead consider both the researcher and the researched simply as humans. From this perspective of humans studying humans, we are all insiders. For me this is a little too simplistic, with fluidity and movement occurring in ways where researchers continually move between insider and outsider positions, or else adopt both of these positions at the same time. De Cruz and Jones (2004) highlight that these types of political and ethical complexities are intrinsic to social work/science research. The complex and changing nature of insider/outsider positioning has been considered by qualitative researchers when contemplating empathic connections between the researched and researchers (see Gair 2012; Rowlings 1999; Smith 2012). Smith (2012, p. 233) refers to her own experience as an insider Maori mother in her research. She argues that while outsiders have played a significant

role in the silencing of insider voices, insider positionings are not without tensions. The idea that both insider and outsider positions have their own limitations and tensions was useful for me in understanding the complexity of my positioning within this research. It has remained difficult territory for me, with my response being one of continuing to question and reflect on my role as 'white helper'. I am also continuing to examine my helping position as part of my own process of decolonisation — a project in its infancy. These research dilemmas have a long history in ethnographic studies, as discussed next.

Ethnographic research with Aboriginal mothers

Ethnography is a research method which stems from the discipline of anthropology, although contemporary feminist and progressive ethnographies have attempted to disassociate from what may be seen as colonial origins. Brewer (2000, p. 10) defines ethnography as:

> ...the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of method which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

Neuman (2006, p. 381) defines ethnography in the following way:

> Ethnography comes from cultural anthropology. Ethno means people or folk, and graphy refers to describing something. Thus, ethnography means describing a culture and understanding another way of life from the native point of view.

The idea of 'going native' within ethnography refers to when the researcher is seeking to actively take part in the environment alongside the people being researched. 'Going native' is discussed in the literature with flexibility, and has been defined by Tresch (2001, p. 303) as '...crossing a line of objectivity to the extent the researcher comes to experience the world in the same terms as the people he or she studies' (Tresch 2001, p. 303). This method involves the development of close relationships with cultural groups through involvement and observation in a real-life setting.

Tresch (2001, p. 303) has argued that the ethnographic method takes participant observation 'beyond its usual limits'. This style of 'real research' in social anthropology was called 'ethnography' (Brewer 2000). Sociologists on the other hand have tended to call this kind of research 'field research' or 'participant observation' (Brewer 2000). Despite the differences in how these approaches have been labelled, they are in effect alike. Social anthropology emerged as popular in Britain and has been noted for its connection with British colonialism (Brewer 2000). During the British Empire, cultural anthropology and ethnography were widely used as a way of finding out more about the cultures or groups that were being colonised. The information collected was then often used against these populations in ways that would ensure their defeat and assimilation. This means that, historically, the methods and methodological approaches I am drawing on originally operated as powerful tools within a colonialist process (Brewer 2000, p. 11).

The origins of anthropology and ethnography reflect colonialist thinking that relates to researching 'the other', bringing to mind constructions of research subjects as 'native', primitive and savage. Wolcott (1999, p. 11) refers to the origins of its definition in 1909 where it is defined as the 'descriptive account of non-literate peoples'. While ethnography has travelled in many directions since its origins (such as becoming a methodology beyond anthropology), I draw from ethnographical approaches to support acts of decolonisation, while attempting to leave behind some of its colonialist features. This thesis therefore offers a critique of dominant discourses about the mothering relationship, mothering practices and meanings, as opposed to claiming to be an authoritative account of marginalised mothers (Hertz 1996; Ozkazanc-Pan 2012). Steering us away from defining ethnography as merely descriptive, Wolcott (1999, p. 12) has suggested a broader meaning, stating that '…ethnographic accounts arise not from the facts accumulated during fieldwork but from ruminating about the meanings to be derived from the experience'. While Wolcott talks about ethnography as a perspective rather than a specific way of doing research, Brewer (2000) suggests many researchers view ethnography and fieldwork as interchangeable. This thesis

is not an ethnography per se, but rather takes an ethnographic research approach, as a useful way to work closely with Aboriginal mothers and explore their social meanings. I used fieldwork therefore as an ethnographic method.

Field work as an ethnographic method

Information about mothering was collected during fieldwork over three years and data was collected by forming meaningful relationships with mothers within one organisational setting. The data collection methods included participant observation, keeping an auto-ethnographical diary, writing field notes, completing semi-structured interviews and social mapping. Denzin (1970) uses the term triangulation to describe the use of multiple methods and theoretical approaches within research as a way of widening the scope of what is recorded. The methods in this research have been chosen both as an act of cultural inclusion and political activism, as I have worked towards 'decolonising' both myself and the research space (Kovack 2005; Smith 2012). By using multiple methods, I have been able to incorporate oral, observational and visual data, meaning that relational ways of storying and therefore knowing, have been embraced. I attempted to support the contributor's sense of ownership in the research by being flexible in relation to the timing of data collection, while also respecting each contributor's preference in relation to different forms of communication and involvement. Fieldwork is not a technique as such, but the stage upon which methodological techniques can be brought into play. As the researcher strives to consider multiple meanings, engagement in the field is typically intensive and long-term. Participation within the field or research setting involves developing personal connections, as well as the collection of data through interviews, direct observations, and personal documentation (Neuman 2006).

Preliminary connections and relationships with Aboriginal communities were established through conversations that took place during my Honours research. For this research, purposeful engagement and collaborations with the research setting and community began through the formulation of a research information letter, introducing the research to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

organisations based in wider metropolitan Adelaide, such as social groups, community organisations, health networks, early learning and human service organisations who were in contact with Aboriginal mothers. However, before I had disseminated the letter, I attended an Indigenous community event, where I met a member of the Stolen Generations who was interested to hear more about my research. After several meetings, the elder reminded me of the importance of understanding the community protocols and offered to take me to visit Granny's Groups within South Australia. The first group was a very politically focused group where I had the opportunity to sit in on a meeting with the Minister for Correctional Services. This was an extremely passionate group, but it was a space where women were noticeably under pressure and were fighting for very specific issues affecting their families. After leaving the meeting, the elder suggested another group she thought I should meet, describing the other group as more of a social group. It was considered that the significant advocacy roles carried out by the women in the more politically focused group meant that they were likely to have limited time and energy to welcome me in that space. The social Granny's Group was quite different. I was welcomed and the environment was focused on getting together, 'having a yarn' and sharing lunch. I have made an ethical decision to not name the organisations I visited due my desire to maintain the anonymity of participants, but I will contextualise the centre in a general way in Chapter 6. Yarning is a term used by some Aboriginal Australian people to describe storied conversations (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Fredericks et al. 2011). Because of the conversational nature of this group it was possible for me to engage with the community and begin to build ongoing relationships. Although this research originally began with the idea of exploring single motherhood specifically, the women in this community included single mothers, mothers and grandmothers. The women showed interest in this research. Thus, it was fitting for me to broaden its scope to include motherhoods more broadly, particularly guided by the perspectives of grandmothers. Mothers offered to share their experiences irrespective of their single mother status, which enabled me to see the importance of a broader approach. When I talked about the research, it was common to have women say things like: 'I'll tell you about motherhood'; 'What do you want to

know?, 'You can talk to me', 'I'll help you anytime', 'I'll talk to you about my family'. These conversations started a research collaboration. I began visiting the centre once or twice a week. While in the first couple of months I attended the centre in the role of researcher only, this positioning evolved to include a position as a volunteer. I took notes after attending throughout this time and focused on building relationships and being wholly present in my interactions with the group.

To begin with, I spoke about my research with individuals, but after attending the group for about a month, I was able to present ideas more formally to the group over lunch. Going into more detail about the research, I was able to position myself as learner and the women as experts. I invited the women to direct me, provide me with information, make suggestions, or raise questions in relation to these ideas. When I spoke of the negative way in which Aboriginal mothers have been talked about in the media and society, many of the women nodded in support of the idea that this was an issue needing to be challenged. At the end of the meeting, three women raised their hands and agreed to participate in the research. From here a modified snowballing technique supported the final recruitment of six mothers. This technique allowed more Aboriginal mothers to become aware of my research interests and become involved, providing further opportunities for women to get to know me, and for the continuation of research discussions.

Participant observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic method that involves the gathering of data through the researcher's immersion and participation in the day-to-day life of research contributors (Brewer 2000). This method is the most distinguishing aspect of ethnography because meanings are derived beyond the spoken word of interviewing. Data is gathered through close involvement in a naturalistic research setting that involves participating, watching and talking with contributors, to help the researcher understand important practices and meanings associated with social life (Musante & Dewalt 2010). Throughout my three years of experience in the research site, I tried to listen carefully and watch attentively in order to gather a whole picture of women's motherhoods. As Neuman (2006, p. 394) explains, 'The core of social life is communicated through the mundane, trivial, everyday

minutia'. During fieldwork, I paid close attention to these details as a way of increasing my awareness of social subtleties, to increase the depth of my overall knowledge, and to further contextualise the interview data. Through my involvement with the community, I observed participants in day-to-day activities and would participate by having a yarn over tea and coffee, cooking meals together, cleaning up together, and through involvement in activities such as beading or line dancing. According to Murchison (2010, p. 89), there are three significant features of participant observation:

1 Total length of time spent in the field
2 Breadth of time spent in the field
3 Number of times spent in the field

The duration of time spent in the field is noted as important because of its influence over both the quality and depth of information collected. My engagement in the field began in 2015 and occurred mostly on Wednesdays and Thursdays. I began fieldwork with a greater intensity, but my involvement modified over time to reflect changing research needs. For example, I attended between once and twice weekly in the first year of research, and this then changed to between fortnightly and monthly in the second year. Coming into a third year, I usually attended once a month and more often where possible. Each session consisted of an approximately five-hour visit; a general overview of attendance is described below:

Table 1. Fieldwork frequency

2015	2016	2017
1-2 x weekly (6 months)	1 x weekly (6 months) 1 x fortnightly (3 months) 1 x monthly (3 months)	1 x monthly (10 months)

I have attended multiple versions of similar events, with Wednesday and Thursday events involving a semi-structured program at the centre. For example, on both of

these days the social program opens from 9:30am to 3:00pm, however, start and finish times are informal with people coming and going at all times. On the Wednesday, the mornings are usually structured around an arts and crafts activity and on Thursday afternoons the dancing group comes together. These activities take place in the centre flexibly. Women can choose to take part or not and choose to structure their time at the centre in the way they prefer. An advantage of attending on the same days on many occasions has been that my understanding of everyday social situations and interactions compared to more formal events has become clearer. Drawing knowledge from multiple events in this way allows me, as a researcher, to consolidate what I observe and form a more complex picture of the social world that I am participating in (Murchson 2010).

Autoethnography

My perspectives, understandings and emotions changed throughout the course of the research and I recorded these experiences through auto-ethnographical writing (Brewer 2000). Autoethnography allows the researcher to draw from a number of techniques, including but not limited to, journaling and reflexive writing, self-observation and critique, memory work and other personal documentation (Chang 2008; Zufferey 2012). One of the key ways that I have used autoethnography within this research is through reflexive writing. Autoethnography has long been recognised as a qualitative research method involving reflexivity. Ellis and Bochner (2003, p. 209) describe autoethnography as an 'autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural'. The flexibility of this method means that it can be moulded to suit specific research directions. In this research context, using reflexivity as autoethnography has been a helpful tool as it 'unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing' (Richardson 1994, p. 523) about Aboriginal mothers. My assessment of myself is a critical area for evaluation, especially when as a researcher, I am arguing that I am pursuing social change by focusing on 'others'. In my evolving experience as a white woman, researching in Indigenous contexts, the comparative powerlessness of contributors due to a history of genocide, colonisation and persistent assimilative and discriminatory

policy is at the forefront of my mind. Writing about my own personal experiences within the research is a way of clarifying power relations inherent in the research process and to explore any tensions that exist between the researcher and contributors. While writing about the self has become central to ethnographic research, particularly when working in marginal contexts, Leibing and McLean (2007, p. 21) emphasise the importance of personal boundaries, suggesting that while self-disclosure is important, it should only be in 'brief interludes'.

Field notes

I also collected data through making written recordings of my reflections and observations. Field notes are an ethnographic technique closely interconnected with participant observation. They provide a written account of what has been important to me, as I attempt to understand the experiences I have observed. Writing field notes is important to this research because my thinking has developed over the course of this research and field notes allow me to examine my developments in thinking and understanding over time. Field notes have also prompted me to record the mundane or include descriptions of events, that I later reviewed and where meaning became visible in retrospect. In the first year of the research I wrote intensively after each session. However, due to the length of this project this fluctuated over time. The style of this writing is at times descriptive as a way of remembering the occasion, but also includes analytic and reflective entries (Neuman 2006). In this example of a descriptive field note, I am mainly describing the things that I see around me and the specifics of the circumstances. This descriptive style of writing is referred to by Emerson et al. (2011) as a way of depicting the scene. I am doing this in the descriptive field note below, by trying to create a picture of the setting itself, and also by the recording of objects, people and activities that were going on in the room.

> As we walk into the big hall, I can see a long table and a kitchen off to the side. There is a group of about five or so women who all come over and say hello, thank me for coming, and tell me to make myself at home and grab a cuppa. This is a very warm welcome and it is beyond what I could have imagined. We sit down for some casual chit chat… As I speak with the women, I hear about who they are and also they are interested to know who I am. I let people know I am a researcher from UniSA and that I am a student… On this day the

> women are making jewellery; they are mainly beading and then I am shown to surrounding cabinets which are full of their delicate work. There are also paintings and some wood work pieces. (Journal entry 18/06/15)

Another style of writing that I have used throughout my journal is quite different from this descriptive approach and adopts instead a more analytical style. I have included here a couple of examples of analytic journal entries that involve my deeper interpretation of the things I have seen through my fieldwork experiences. As Emerson et al. (2011) suggest, it is through these processes of analytic writing that researchers are able to begin to understand and make sense of their experiences in the research setting. By writing and reflecting upon experiences, I can begin to make linkages with my current knowledges. This prompts me to begin to record questions that are raised, which later support the development of my analysis. Below is an example of an analytic field note:

> This experience is definitely giving me a connection or window; I am developing a feeling for how the group support each other, provide a sense of belonging, a sense of acceptance, a sense of family. Within this, there is reminiscing of the past… and always discussions of motherhood. The women's stories of life on the missions are fragmented and it can be hard to trace the histories because of dislocation. (Journal entry 13/08/15)

> For each of these women, they have experienced abuse, trauma, and kidnapping. The death of parents, sisters, brothers and members of their families. Often the absence or loss of a mother has been something which has driven strong notions of motherhood. While mothering may have been interrupted and impacted on the passing on of knowledges to some degree, for this particular group of mothers it could be argued that negative consequences have not flowed onto their own 'mothering practices' because from what I have observed they have strong and positive relationships with their children and grandchildren. (Journal entry 05/11/15)

Lastly, reflective writing, is a type of analytic writing that, unlike descriptive notes, clarifies and explains, and tends to be more personal (Emerson et al. 2011). In the reflective field note below, I look inward to discuss my own emotions and feelings in the space:

> Today as I drive away I feel overcome with emotion. The sense of what I have gained personally from this day is what is at the fore for me. I have come here today as a way of giving back to the women, to try and do some of the giving, but yet I have left with the sense that once again the women have enriched **my** life and given to **me**. On reflection, what I believe this is, is an overwhelming sense of togetherness, family and warmth and love. There is something for me

> that is so warm – that it is spiritual. What I am noticing is that this spirituality is something that I am experiencing through the women. That their way of being is enriching me. (Journal entry 24/06/15)

> Finally, what I would like to write today, is that it's all very self-centred in many ways. I talk about what I felt like before, what I felt like during, what I felt like after. I guess this in many ways is my role as a researcher… although, I think my way through life in these terms quite often. I think that my self-centredness is important to acknowledge. (Journal entry 06/08/15)

These excerpts are examples of the journal writing that I undertook intensively for over two years, and which tapered off in the third year. Since I began full-time employment in 2018, I am now mostly in contact with the women by telephone. Using journaling and diary entries in a range of ways (describing, analysing and reflecting) has supported me to build a rounded record of my experiences and feelings, and has also helped to track the development of my thinking and understanding over time. This has deepened my understanding of the complex experiences of mothers in the group as well as the politics of research and my own engagement with the research space.

Interviews with women

Research interviews can be unstructured, structured or semi-structured. The structured interview follows a schedule of set interview questions (including closed-ended questions) and ensures that each participant is given the same questions in the same order (Bryman 2016). The semi-structured interview is established as a guide for the researcher, which means that questions do not need to be asked in sequence and the interview has the freedom to ask deeper questions on areas of significance (Bryman 2016). This research used both informal (unstructured) and in-depth semi-structured techniques to collect data. Informal interviewing was used because much of the data gathered from participant observation were through informal conversations that occurred during the fieldwork (Fontana & Frey 1998). For this research, I engaged in informal interviewing for the purpose of collecting, validating and further contextualising semi-structured interview data. To do this, I engaged in a 'social yarn' with potential contributors at the beginning of the research and this has facilitated the development of trust over time (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 38). As previously

indicated, yarning is a term used by some Aboriginal Australian people to describe storied conversations (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Fredericks et al. 2011). This conversational process is more than simply just a talk; it is a conversation that is interwoven with storytelling and the sharing of knowledge and experiences. Yarning is a method that I was familiar with when I commenced this study; however, it is not a method I have had to consciously activate or purposefully set out to use in my conversations with women. Instead, yarning is automatically attuned to and with the environment. Therefore, yarning has been about me becoming part of the group and embodying the group's ways of being with my engagement. I tried to avoid being the 'professional' researcher embarking on a recruitment drive which is centred on securing participants. The act of yarning centres and prioritises the women's ways of interacting and social values. It is through this process I found that contributors approached me to find out more and be involved in the research and, in this way, I have been able to confirm individual interests and learn about the social contexts of mothers' lives. Engaging with women contributing to this research has been a staggered, gradual and ongoing process. Rather than focusing on finishing interviews, I have moved slowly through the space with sensitivity to the needs of the group as a whole as well as to the lives of each individual.

Indigenous ways of knowing and communicating are often oral, with storytelling recognised as meaningful for Indigenous research due to its harmonisation with culture. As noted, the formal data collection technique used for this research has been in-depth semi-structured interviews. While different forms of oral communication are drawn upon through this study, interviews provided transcripts that could be analysed in-depth. However, ways of communicating such as yarning provided me with added context which supported greater understanding of the interviews. Some of the women in the group would talk to me using detailed stories about histories, memories or stories from their parents. While this reminded me of storytelling as an ancient or traditional practice, the literature discusses storytelling or yarning as interchangeable (Geia et al. 2013). According to Brewer (2006) semi-structured interviewing is loose and provides

flexibility so that the researcher can draw from a prepared guide of questions as needed. It is also important to this research as it taps into the women's 'meaning-endowing capacities' where, through naturally flowing conversation, 'rich, deep data' can be unearthed (Brewer 2000, p. 66). Women were encouraged to tell their own story in their own way, although to commence dialogue, when needed, women were guided to reflect on experiences and meanings in relation to being mothered, being a mother, and being a grandmother.

The contributors

While a community of many individuals have shaped my understandings and interpretations, a group of six Aboriginal mothers were the core contributors to this study. The involvement of Lisa, Grace, Helena, Cindy, Mona and Valerie has been significant (names are pseudonyms to protect the women's identity). The women who have contributed to the study are Aboriginal elders, great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers. The women belong to a Granny's Group located in suburban Adelaide in South Australia that is managed by local Aboriginal community members. I have made an ethical decision to not name the organisation and will instead contextualise the centre in a general way (see Chapter 6). Three of the women in the group are blood relations; however, I should highlight that, from the women's understanding, they are all family. Age was not a specific criterion for participation but contributors were all grandmothers aged between approximately 50 and 80 years. Three of the participants were (biological) sisters although all are 'sisters' in a broader sense. Although all the women who have contributed to this study share the similarity that they are mothers who visit the same community group, each woman has shared a unique story of being a mother. None of the women in this study had children with Aboriginal men, an interesting factor that is explored later in the thesis. While the women mainly lived in the city, many moved frequently to rural and remote areas to return to country and visit family and kin. To deepen my portrayal of the women contributing to this research, I provide a short narrative for each mother below:

Lisa

Lisa was born on a mission in South Australia, Lisa has five brothers and two sisters. She was close to her mother and cared for her when she was unwell. Giving birth to her only child when she was a teenager, Lisa recalled not knowing she was pregnant until late in her pregnancy and the shock of finding out through her mother. The father of Lisa's child, her Italian boyfriend, asked Lisa to marry him after the birth, however, Lisa felt that getting married just 'because of that Italian thing' wasn't a proposal she was interested in accepting. Lisa experienced a number of violent relationships with men throughout her life. She is a self-supporting single woman/mother today. Lisa is extremely proud of her son, has a close relationship with her daughter-in-law and is the proud grandmother of two grandsons.

Grace

Grace lost her mother when she was five years old and found it difficult to recall experiences of being mothered before this age. Grace was not permitted to remain with her father for reasons she could not completely understand; she was removed from her seven sisters and brothers and placed in the care of her father's Italian family. Enduring a great deal of loss and trauma in her childhood and teenage years, Grace recalls her younger years as sad, lonely and frightening. After longing to have a family of her own so that she could create her own experiences of love and happiness in her life, Grace mothered six of her own children, including a daughter she lost as a teenager in a road accident. Although a single woman today, Grace was married to one man throughout her main mothering years. Grace is grandmother to nine grandchildren.

Helena

Helena remembers having a 'really good' childhood. She talks respectfully about her mother and father as loving and nurturing. Raised with a strong Christian upbringing, Helena spent part of her childhood living on a South Australian mission. Helena's mother was widowed when Helena was twelve years old when her father was killed in a road accident. As one of the eldest siblings in a large family of 15 children, Helena remembers the strain of earning money to support her large family, and the loneliness of being sent out to work from a young age. Helena has worked throughout her whole life and continues in employment today. After marrying an Italian man, Helena gave birth to three daughters and a son. She is the proud nanna of four grandchildren.

Cindy

Cindy was stolen from her family as a young girl and endured being separated from her family and country. After moving to Adelaide from 'the bush', most of her mothering years were spent in the city. Being away from family and with her mother having passed away, Cindy mothered without the support of family, describing that she 'more or less just coped'. Cindy is a protective

mother and grandmother who has proudly raised her children, whom she felt she had 'overprotected'. Cindy lives together with her 'loving' husband, and after raising their children together they describe themselves as 'happily married'.

Mona

Mona comes from a large family and has seven brothers and seven sisters. Her mother lost three children before they were toddlers. Growing up on a South Australian mission, Mona's father was a very religious man and she describes both her mother and father as very hard workers. She said: 'we were always busy... we never went on the dole'. Mona talks with pleasure of the music and laughter that her father brought to her family before he died in a car accident, which also took the life of her uncle. After the death of her father, Mona took on significant mothering responsibilities for her younger siblings, while also caring for her own young children. Mona married a Polish man and gave birth to three children. She worked hard to be able to afford to send her children to a private school. Mona's husband often worked away and for this reason Mona explains herself as being both 'mother and father' to her children. Mona is the grandmother of ten grandchildren.

Valerie

Valerie is the youngest of 15 children. Valerie speaks with a level of awe of her mother's ability to care for so many children. Valerie explains that her mother spent her whole life mothering, as she too had come from a large family. When Valerie's great grandmother died, her mother took on the role of mothering her seven siblings at a young age. Valerie felt privileged that her father and mother had provided her with chances for education, especially when many of her extended family had missed out on these opportunities. Valerie became a mother at a very young age. She married a Hungarian man who she acknowledges and respects as holding his own values and culture. Valerie grieves the loss of her first child and continues to care for her grandchild who survives his mother. Connection with her family is critical to Valerie, who sees her children and grandchildren as 'the single most important thing' in her life.

These six women were interviewed up to three times each. Interviews lasted on average one hour per participant with total hours of interview data for all participants equalling approximately 12 hours. The second and third interview, when needed, were used to clarify or elicit further discussions from the initial interview. This was an extremely useful approach as it allowed for time between interviews to reflect on emerging themes. The subsequent interviews also allowed me follow up new potential lines of enquiry.

Table 2. Interview frequency

	Lisa	Grace	Helena	Cindy	Mona	Valerie
Number of Interviews	2	2	2	2	3	1

Interviews were emotional experiences for all participants. While women often reported experiencing a great deal of joy and happiness from sharing their histories, there were also significant events of trauma and loss interwoven in women's narratives. This points to the significance of drawing from Indigenous and feminist research methodologies, where the interviews are foregrounded with 'opened, emotional engagement and the development of potentially long-term relationships based on trust and emotional reciprocity' (Brewer 2000, p. 69). Because of the intimacy of interview discussions and my relationship with the women, it was important for me to check in with the mother's emotional wellbeing. I would often invite women to have a break, and check that they were okay to continue, and provide a leaflet with contact numbers of both Aboriginal and mainstream support workers. This ensured that women were able to access support outside of our time together. However, belonging to a close community group also meant that the women were very connected with one another and attuned to one another and emotionally supported one another when needed.

My engagement with one mother in particular involved the reliving of extremely traumatic memories for her. This left me feeling concerned. After checking in with the participant, we decided to modify her interview. She explained that although she had found the sharing of her story relieving and cathartic, it was also something she rarely talked about. I checked in with her about details that she was not comfortable to share as part of this research. In response to this conversation, the recorded interview method was abandoned. Instead, we followed a more structured question and answer format and the answers were typed together into a word document. This way the participant was able to reflect on each sentence and confirm if she was comfortable with the level of her disclosure. The importance of

this flexibility, and of modifying the research to meet the sensitive needs of each participant cannot be overstated. This particular participant had a strong desire to contribute and be involved. Therefore, it was important to enable flexibility within the research design in order to ensure the inclusion of her story in the research. As explained by Kovack (2005), coming from Indigenous ways of knowing necessitates that data is collected in ways that honour organic research methods that are genuine, and unforced, processes that I have strived to follow within my approach. Hearing the stories also had a significant impact on my own emotions, for which I also sought support at the time.

Given the nature of the engagement and my involvement with community, including the development of friendships, it was important for me to also ensure that this in no way led to women feeling obliged to participate. It was important ethically that I was certain women felt no pressure to take part, and were completely willing and comfortable with their level of involvement. Processes relating to the recording and storing of data, identifiable information and anonymity were explained to the contributors. Where women agreed to participate, all except one of the narratives mentioned above were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure rigour, transcripts were provided to each contributor in a coded format, less than two months prior to the analysis, providing significant time for contributors to reflect on what they had shared, giving them the chance to verify transcript accuracy and offer any alterations. This was a valuable step for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it was reassuring for participants to see confidentiality enacted, by viewing their transcript with pseudonyms. It was also valuable for women to be able to remove any data. For example, where one woman had identified a particular achievement of one of her children that may have identified them, she was able to advise me to remove this from the data. It also reminded me to think about how names and places can identify people and their connections more readily in Aboriginal communities, which was something I had initially overlooked. Each woman had variable comfort levels in relation to disclosure of information.

Social mapping

As Neuman (2006, p. 402) suggests, social maps are a useful way of conveying the field setting because maps can illustrate 'the number or variety of people and the arrangements among them of power, influence and friendship, division of labour, and so on'. My decision to include a social map is also influenced by the seminal work of Dorothy Smith (2006). Smith's work on institutional ethnography recognises the value of including supplementary illustrations or maps to further an understanding of how social relations are coordinated in the research setting. As she argues, institutional ethnography is about thinking through 'how things are actually put together' or 'how it works' (Smith 2006, p. 1). Finding a complementary way of communicating the research setting alongside textual communication was important for this research, because the organisational and social environment was complex. During formal interviews, mothers also contributed to a visual map that anonymously illustrates lines of relationality and human connections within the group. Relational mapping was completed in an individual meeting with each contributor in the final year of data collection, from 2016 to 2017. To capture lines of relationality, contributors to this research were asked to represent their relationships with others by drawing lines connecting themselves with others in the research setting. Lines were illustrated in the following ways: a double line to the people who are your blood relations; a straight line to the people you are really close to, the people you love; a dashed line to anyone else you feel close to; a dotted line to anyone that you do not feel so close to. Once I had gathered this information, names were removed and data was converged onto a single map, to support my relational analysis of this research context (See Figure 1 on 'Mapping relationality' in Chapter 6).

Art-based approaches are often regarded as participatory (Finley 2011), and empowering acts for women (Clover 2011; Huss & Cwikel 2005; Walsh et al. 2013). An arts-based dimension was initially suggested for this research as a way of countering the privileging of the English language which typically shapes connection within an oral interview. However, this was not something that mothers were interested in. While I actively engaged with women for their ideas

and the suggestions to create and shape the research how they chose, in the end the women preferred to yarn together. While art can be emancipatory, I have also reflected on the assumption I made heading into this research that an art-based approach would be ethical and appropriate. This has taught me to remind myself as a researcher in an Indigenous research space to respect individual subjectivities and not assume the applicability of various research methods. Instead, it is important to prioritise flexibility.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is defined by Braun et al. (2015, p. 95) as a 'method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterned meanings or 'themes' in qualitative data'. Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research as a way of identifying both explicit/surface meaning as well as more implicit/underlying meaning and themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2014; Taylor & Ussher 2001). It is suitable for this reflexive research because it encourages the researcher to question assumptions within the analysis (Braun et al. 2015). Textual data from my formal conversations with the women was analysed through an inductive approach, sometimes referred to as 'bottom-up' and 'data-driven' (Braun & Clarke 2014, p. 1948). This approach corresponded well with the feminist position of this research, which aims to centre participant narratives about what is important and in doing so, resists oppressive research practices. A bottom-up approach to data analysis supported the generation of themes that were dominant within the data itself, which also involved challenging the researcher's assumptions (Braun & Clarke 2006; Patton 2002). The development and identification of categories and themes to interpret the data is political (Braun & Clarke 2006; Huberman & Miles 2002; Miles & Huberman 1994; Walter 2010). Themes are not always immediately obvious when looking at data, as Gubrium (2012, p. 197) explains:

> Sometimes the theme is foregrounded, sometimes it is backgrounded, and sometimes it is present only by inference and revealed through indicators, signs, metaphors or other means of interpretation.

I also attended to silences, inferred and backgrounded themes within the data, to make visible the invisible when exploring influences on the practices of Aboriginal mothers. For example, as I have listened to and analysed narratives within this research, it has been important for me to consider themes that relate to racism and oppression that may not be conveyed as such by the women I interviewed. Using an ethnographic and reflexive theoretical lens, in my analysis I systematically coded the data. To begin the analysis, I once again listened to the audio recordings. I annotated the transcripts by highlighting passages with meanings relevant to my research questions. I did this by analysing each transcript individually, and then developing my analyses to reach across the data set. I began by circling related words, repeating words and identifying data that raised meaning or questions. When searching for themes, I looked for difference and similarities across the data, identified overarching and subthemes and categorised these initial series of themes (Braun et al. 2015). A first set of themes was then developed, checking for consistency in ideas across the data set. It was at this stage that I was able to look for more implicit meanings within the data and develop a more condensed set of themes. As themes began to overlap and merge, I was able to see relationships between themes, in ways which drew them together. By exploring relational areas of nuance and intersection I was able to narrow down my themes. Then, through closer inspection of the data, I made links relating to postcolonial and intersectional theories that helped to explain and progress my interpretations of the data.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the complex and layered methodological approach of this thesis, drawing attention to the benefits of a flexible and unconventional design. I have argued that reflexivity has supported me to acknowledge myself as a site of dominance and make visible my positions of privilege. I have shown how I became cognisant of structures of power and how they intersected in my own interactions, interpretations, and the knowledge produced in this thesis. This research design responds to subjectivity challenges inherent in social research, by positioning the researcher as learner and the contributors as experts in their own

lives. I have described the importance of meaningful engagements and relationship building in the acknowledgement of diverse perspectives. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, the methods I used included participant observation, autoethnography, fieldwork and interviews. Integral to understanding the ways I have carried out this research, the research setting and my approach to working with the community centre and research site is a distinguishing part of this thesis. In the next chapter I aim to bring you, the reader, into the social world of the Granny's Group and community centre, with the aim to clarify the context and provide insight into the research setting that I have immersed myself in.

6. Contexualising the research

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the research context and my own position within it. As I have previously discussed in the methodology (Chapter 5), a commitment to community engagement has been central to this research. In this chapter, I provide a wider contextualisation of the research setting and explore the formation and dynamics of the Granny's Group. I elaborate on the pathway into the research setting, my introduction to the group and the way relationships were developed. A 'social map' has been included to visually reflect the interrelationships within the group of women with whom I spent my time. I explore the key theme of connectedness and belonging that emerged from women's narratives, using participant excerpts to convey a holistic and rich description of women's engagement with the Granny's Group. The different quotes I have included communicate the diverse meanings associated with the purpose of the group and the importance of this space to the women's sense of identity and worth. I then deepen this social contextualisation by looking further into significant group dynamics and subtleties by considering the subthemes of reciprocity and relationality, and Christianity and spirituality. Throughout this chapter, I draw on my own personal reflections to clearly articulate my social positioning in this research. At the heart of this research is my reflexive engagement with an organically formed grass-roots Granny's Group.

Granny's Group: Building the research relationship

The group was developed by local Aboriginal community members and is nestled in suburban Adelaide in South Australia. The Granny's Group is housed within a community centre which is Aboriginal-managed. Established in the 1980s, the centre has a strong local history. The centre has ties to the Catholic Church, and these associations are evident in the overarching leadership and governance structures. Earlier unofficial reports that I viewed discussed the history and operation of the centre in more detail. However, after considering the potential risk that identification of the centre may have for protecting participants'

anonymity, I have made an ethical decision to not delve into the historical development of the organisational setting and only contextualise the centre in a general way as it related to my engagement with it. The way in which the centre operated on a daily basis was at times confusing to me as a white person, with my particular assumptions about how organisations work. For example, the organisational structure seemed highly fluid so that boundaries between different programs and the roles of individuals were not always clear and obvious to me. While this was my perception, it was not necessarily the way it was experienced by the women. My research focused on the women's relationships and experiences of mothering, and it was not my intention to undertake a detailed historical or organisational account of the centre. However, the way in which the centre once operated and has been described in existing reports did not completely match with my own observations and pointed to the centre having undergone significant changes over time. The point I think necessary to make is that while daily centre activities were quite different from those described in the past, there was a continuation of similar values and ethics around the provision of a welcoming environment and values of social inclusivity. The original philosophy of the centre was to provide an alternative and safe space for Aboriginal community members within the city of Adelaide. Alongside this, there have always been ties to the Catholic Church and it always sought to be a welcoming environment for Aboriginal people who are Catholics. Social services and programs were and continue to be specifically aimed at providing women and people who attend the centre with the opportunity for connection with others, healing from hardship and trauma, and participation in activities that foster Aboriginal people's sense of collective belonging.

The centre provides numerous religious and non-religious activities and services that include, but are not limited to, the Granny's Group. For example, the provision of food parcels and vouchers, clothing assistance, counselling, and post-release assistance for individuals who are transitioning from prison to community are some of the core services. Support is often given to Aboriginal people who may find themselves travelling to the city hospital from regional areas at short notice.

For men, women and children who find themselves in this situation, toiletry bags are available which provide the basics, such as soap, toothbrush, toothpaste etc., and for longer-term hospital stays, individually tailored 'artwork bags' are also put together with supplies including paints, brushes and canvas.

There are specific services for Aboriginal Catholic community members, which include a weekly mass (a religious/spiritual service) where the local Aboriginal culture and Catholic faith come together. The service takes place in a renovated chapel adjoining the centre, which is inscribed with Indigenous artworks and symbolism. I attended five services over the time of this research; at my initial attendance I can recall thinking that it was not typical of my own experiences of Catholic mass as I was growing up. These I remember as serious, sombre and a little unnerving; while at the centre, the mass felt more evangelical, reminiscent of gospel singing with a great deal of praise and joy. Children kept time with the music with their clapping sticks (a traditional percussion instrument with which you keep rhythm by striking one against the other); there was singing, and a plethora of other musical instruments. It was obvious that engaging in music creation was an integral part of the lives of many of the families with ties to the centre and reflected their Aboriginal/Catholic practices of spirituality.

However, it is not the centre itself that is the focus of my analysis, but rather the women from the Granny's Group who attended and contributed to the research. The key focus of the Granny's Group is to operate as a social hub where women are able to relax in an environment which is physically and mentally stimulating and supports their everyday lives. While the group offers a network of support and the chance to connect with one another, it is also a significant link to women's Aboriginal culture and history. While the women have lived different lives and have different perspectives on mothering, there are also parts of their histories and certain cultural practices and perspectives that are shared. The Granny's Group has over 20 regular members, with some more transient attendees. Structured around art-based activities, the women (who are now grandmothers) come together to share a prepared lunch. This lunch is often prepared by non-Aboriginal volunteers as well as Catholic staff. Throughout my time at the centre I had the opportunity to

work as a volunteer. I found keen enthusiasm among volunteers, who number around seven. While this number fluctuates at times, volunteers are often asking for things to do and ways to pitch in. While for some volunteers, their role is a more permanent weekly commitment, for others it is more sporadic.

During the Granny's Group, the women spend much of the time telling stories and reminiscing about the past, laughing and supporting each other through friendship. This takes place alongside more structured activities, which may include beading, various crafts, card making and line dancing. The line dancing class is made up of a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members and is a partnership between an aged care social program and the centre. While the centre operates and functions at its heart for Aboriginal people, there is also a tangible atmosphere of inclusion of others. For example, the openness of the group in terms of accepting me as a younger non-Aboriginal person was unanticipated and unexpected. Throughout my time as a student, I had developed an assumption about the likelihood of resentment or my dismissal by Aboriginal people, based on my evident whiteness and the privilege that this had afforded me. I felt that my experience of being included in this space represented the centre's strong philosophy of acceptance and reconciliation. These encounters and the stories that the women have shared with me have shaped my understanding of Aboriginal motherhoods.

My introduction to the Granny's Group

When I first found out that I would be meeting the group of women, I can remember feeling excited, nervous and extremely privileged to be offered the chance to get to meet with the women, who were well respected grandmothers in their communities. I had heard of the Granny's Groups during my previous studies, when researching Aboriginal services on the internet, but I didn't have much of an idea of what to expect. Having some previous knowledge of the colonisation of Australia and the impact that this has had on the lives of Aboriginal peoples, I was aware of the profound resilience of Indigenous populations and felt an innate respect for the women before we had even met. When I first walked into the centre, I was greeted by Helena, the coordinator, who was standing at the door

with a big smile and a warm welcome. When I walked in, I entered a spacious hall, with a huge, oval table that could seat 20 people. The walls of the hall were lined with the women's creations, including paintings, some wooden objects and cabinets that were brimming with beaded handicraft. Off to the side the area was also equipped with a large industrial kitchen and there were lovely smells of home cooking. As I entered, a group of about five women came to say hello; they thanked me for coming and invited me to make myself a cup of tea and make myself at home.

My memory of sharing lunch on my first visit is still vivid. I recall one of the aunties (female elders in this community are traditionally referred to as 'auntie') telling me she would be happy to help me, reassuring me that I was welcome to talk to her any time. She asked me for my number and said she would put the word out and help me to connect with people to discuss my research. Another auntie also gave me her details to contact her any time for anything and I remember feeling that the door was always open for me. The women told me throughout the day that they would like me to come back again. I can remember the women telling me that I was like family now, that I had many mothers and that I was like a daughter to them. It was at this time that the women also invited me to refer to them as my aunties. When I left that day, I can recall the women all insisting on a big hug to say goodbye; there was a closeness, an investment of the nurturing of a human connection, there was a shared interest in spending time together, being in each other's company, 'having a yarn'[5], laughing and being together.

These occasions are recalled from my initial introduction to the group. However, over the three years I have attended the group, the relationships and emotional bonds that I have developed continued to align with this way of being. Through my engagements with the women I have noticed that the women's ways of being are

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[5] 'Yarning' is described in the literature as 'an indigenous cultural form of conversation' (Ng'andu & Dessarab 2010, p. 37). While yarning has been explained as holding different meaning in different indigenous contexts (see Dean 2010), these conversations are explained by Walker et al. as often involving storytelling and sharing of information. See also Bacon (2013) 'Yarning and listening: yarning and learning through stories' in '*Our voices, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work'*. B Bennet, S Green, S Gilbert, D Bessarab (eds) Palgrave Macmillan: Melbourne, pp. 136–165.

centred on an understanding of the importance of reciprocity. These engagements have shown me that reciprocity is understood by this group of women as an expression of relationality with one another. Through my own engagement in this space and enactment of repeated practices of connecting and purposeful reciprocal exchange, the bonds I have formed are unable to be explained merely as bounded by this research. It is my understanding and feeling that the relationships I have formed with the women are grounded in deep social bonds that have provided the foundation for lasting friendships. This experience was by no means unique to me in this setting but is something which I understand is tied to the meaning of relationality as reciprocity, being supportive of interdependence and connected-ness with one another. Moreton-Robinson (2000a, p. 16) explains that, 'relationality means that one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self'. An understanding of this is discovered through 'reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory' (Moreton-Robinson 2000a, p. 16). She speaks specifically about relationality and Indigenous women stating that 'Indigenous women's relationality encompasses principles of generosity, empathy and care that connote ideals of respect, consideration, understanding, politeness and nurturing' (Moreton-Robinson 2000a, p. 16).

As I have previously mentioned, I had not expected to be so readily accepted by the group. I can recall reflecting on why I felt so moved and surprised by the warm welcome I received from these Aboriginal women. I started to ask myself, 'Why it is that I am always so nervous I might be disliked or unwanted in Aboriginal spaces?' I'm still working through my answer to this. However, in theory, it is linked to a consciousness of my own whiteness and its association with privilege and oppression (Frankenberg 1993). Being in a space where I am a minority, and yet representative of a dominant group, causes me to feel anxious. As a white person, my usually invisible whiteness now becomes noticeable to me and I am confronted by it and forced to see it. But also, I feel it is completely justifiable for Aboriginal people to reject me, and there is a discomfort in being white, knowing the trauma and loss that has come from this. I feel an initial discomfort with the consciousness

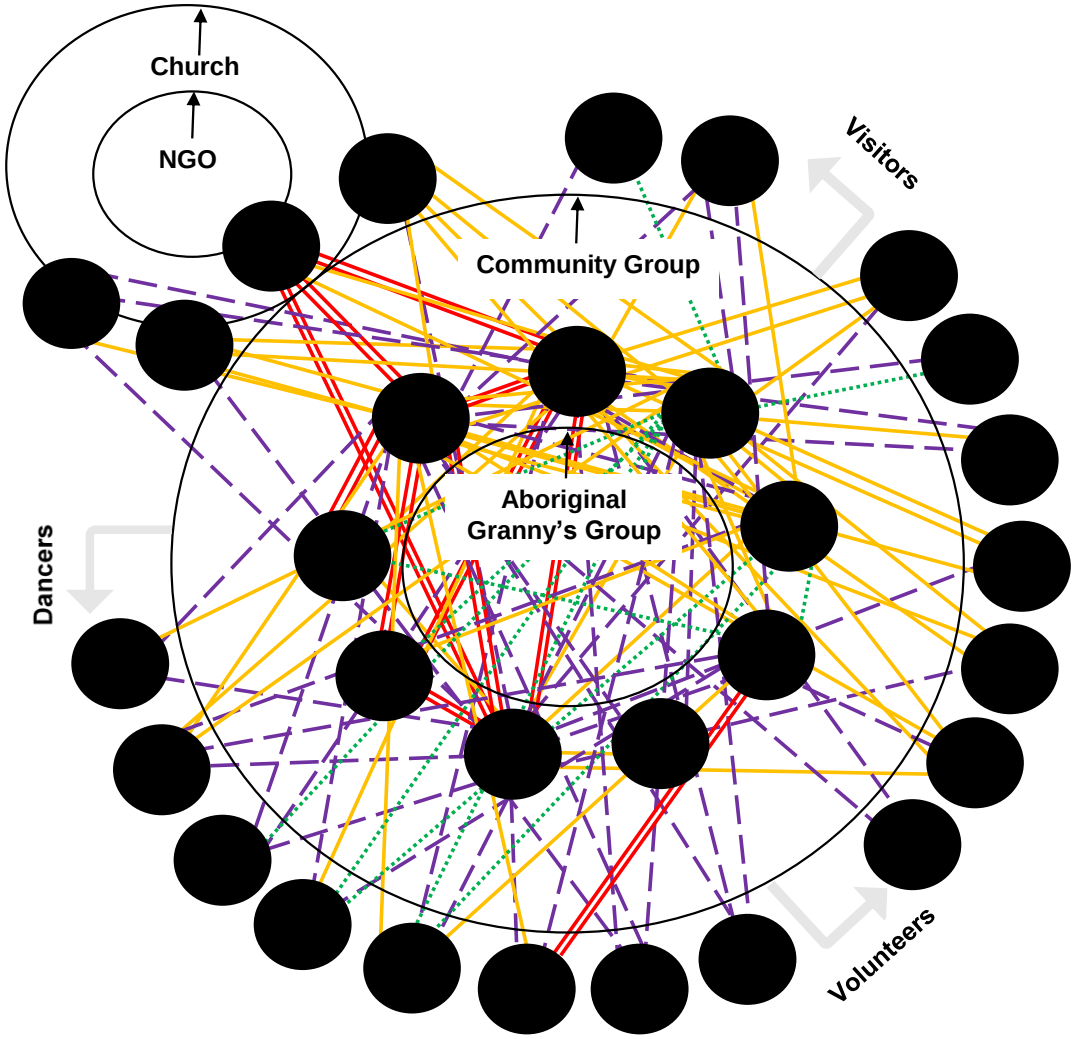
of my own whiteness, as it catches me by surprise, but there is also a more lingering anxiety and discomfort. I am forced to sit uncomfortably with the anxiety and just accept that it needs to be felt. Acknowledging these feelings helps to raise my own consciousness of the power of my whiteness and privilege, the power that it gives me, but also the power that it takes. I am mindful that if I ignore it, then I am covering up, and running the risk of becoming complacent and potentially causing harm. In the United States, Jensen (2005, p. xviii) talks about us feeling our discomfort, and hating our privilege and our whiteness. He suggests that by letting these feelings come out we are perhaps taking a first step towards self-acceptance, so that we can then begin to learn to love others. These self-indulgent feelings of wanting to escape the humiliation of our whiteness are, as he argues, tied to our own humanity. While my place in the group was one of personal tension, it was also, increasingly, one of growth, belonging and connection.

Mapping relationality

Following a suggestion from one of the contributors who encouraged me to represent information visually and in colour, I have collated a conceptual or visual map (see Figure 1 Visual map of relationality below). I have adapted this idea to represent connections and lines of relationality within the group. This social map helps to illustrate the centrality of human connections and togetherness which has been central to this research. While maintaining anonymity, each circle is representative of key people I have come to know throughout my research. Data for this map has been collected from individual contributors and amalgamated to form a representation of relationships in the community centre and as a relational whole. The image shows the cross-cultural and multi-organisational setting within which this research took place. For example, while the non-government organisation connects with the Granny's Group as a funding organisation with religious links, it is not practically involved in the day-to-day activities of the group. The dancers are affiliated with a dancing program which is run in conjunction with the Granny's Group. The community group represents the community centre within which the Granny's Group sits. Individuals are represented as circles which are located within the different organisational spheres

of the research setting. As I explained in the methodology (Chapter 5), relationality was indicated on the social map through a series of lines. Lines were illustrated in the following ways: a double line connecting people who are blood relations; a straight line to people contributors felt really close to, the people they loved; a dashed line to anyone else contributors felt close to; and a dotted line to anyone they did not feel so close to.

Figure 1. Visual map of relationality



Connectedness and belonging

In this section, I elaborate on the relationships depicted through the social map by using some of the women's own words. I explore women's sense of belonging and what they understood the purpose of the group to be. This section presents data from field work that relates to the meaning of the Granny's Group to the community and women. Understandings about what it means to belong can be diverse. Processes of belonging are always dynamic and multilayered. This relationality map draws on belonging literature that analyses 'social locations', 'people's identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings' and/or as 'ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 12). It presents the complexity of kinship and social relationships that shape meanings about relationality for the contributors to this study. The women in this study shared with me a common understanding that the Granny's Group was a place for socialisation and connecting with others, but it was also a political space that supported a sense of belonging for Aboriginal communities. This was explained by the women in terms of both receiving support for themselves but also offering support collectively to one another. While there were commonalities in understandings of the purpose of the group, individuals expressed a diversity of meanings that related to their own histories and personal attachments to the group. For example, Lisa conveyed her involvement in centre activities as being an important way that she had taken ownership of her own health and aimed to improve her longevity. Having experienced significant health issues, she explained to me,

> …and I said well you know I want to see my grandchildren grow up, this is why I do this line dancing and gym. (Lisa)

Being a part of the Granny's Group was important to Lisa as it helped her to become physically stronger. After losing her father early in her life due to illness, and then as a young woman being responsible for the care of her sick mother, Lisa's experiences of grief and loss have influenced how she feels about her health. She expressed that she felt she had always cared for others but that she had not

necessarily been cared for. Lisa explained that being a part of the group had given her the opportunity to look after herself for the first time. She told me about the significance of having the social and emotional support of peers and that this had become a significant part of her life and something she had longed for. Through my time with the women, I noticed that the benefits to general wellbeing, physical and mental health stemming from group participation were regularly discussed by all the women. For example, women would often speak of the ways in which activities (in particular the line dancing) helped to keep them mentally fit, manage their weight, and strengthen their bodies. Women's expressions of belonging within the group resonate with the work of Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 18) who explained that a sense of belonging is influenced by and influences a person's social location and the way they position themselves. Women's emotional connections created a sense of 'home', leading to expressions of 'hope' which have been spurred on through feelings of 'safety' (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 18). This explanation of belonging resonates with the way in which belonging operated within this research setting.

When considering how the group contributed to women's sense of belonging, Grace shared with me that she had felt a sense of disconnection from people throughout her life and that it was only when joining the group that a sense of connection to others began to develop. This sense of disconnection extended to her Aboriginal culture. Her Aboriginal mother died when she was young, and she was subsequently placed in the care of a non-Aboriginal family. She said that her son had recommended that she join the group, but that at first, she was extremely hesitant and afraid and worried that her disconnection with her culture would cause her to feel unwelcome or lacking. Grace explained to me,

> My son said 'You need to get to a group Mum', and I said 'Oh no they mightn't like me in there'. And he used to ask me all the time and I used to say, 'Oh no don't know if I can'. I don't know why I just felt um shy. I was a very back person, I stood back a lot of times, and in the end I said 'Oh ok I'll go'. And I felt very awkward getting there cos, you know, they can't help it but a lot of em say 'Well, where you from?' you know, and I don't know what that meant first, which is to do with being Kaurna [6]or whatever, but I didn't realise that so I just said 'Well, Adelaide' you

[6] Kaurna people are the Indigenous inhabitants of the Adelaide Plains, which are located within South Australia. Amery (2016) provides an extensive examination of the Kaurna language which provides a background on Kaurna people and their language. For a further discussion of Kaurna people and their

> know, not realising the rest that goes with it… so they were a bit confused by my way I suppose. As well cos I never learnt anything enough, I could have but I didn't sort of ask my brother or anything, cos he's, you know, he's the one that knew so much, he spoke [language], you know, he learnt it [culture], so I wish I did, I still would have liked that even later. (Grace)

Grace's sense of dislocation from family and culture had had a substantial effect on her sense of cultural identity. The traumas of child abuse under the care of her non-Aboriginal family influenced her ability to trust people, which added to her feelings of isolation. However, despite her apprehension, Grace's son, a health worker, thought that this particular Granny's Group would be a good fit for her, and with his persistent encouragement, she decided to give it a go. When I asked Grace what it was like when she finally joined the group, she told me:

> When I met em I think, well this is great, this is so lovely that… they all though, once they were, said hello they thought well she's ok. Yes it's just getting to know if they want you there, basically because you're frightened – well I was anyway… I was very scared, I really was scared going in there. Cos I thought yeah, I was that slow and I thought, should I go in or should I back, back out, my son didn't understand that at all. He said 'What are you worried about?' I said 'I don't know, I just might be that they don't want me there' you know, but of course that's silly, I was quite welcomed. (Grace)

When she spoke about her affection for the group, Grace would smile, explaining to me that she had found a place where she feels that she belongs, where she can connect with culture in ways that she felt she missed out on as a child. She has discovered a sense of family, community and happiness through her involvement in the Granny's Group. She mentioned that the group was like 'family',

> It's lovely, its lovely, you know this is more… the best one ever that I've come to because its more family, the other groups are great but they weren't… it was still all… separated basically. (Grace)

Like Grace, many of the women who attend the group share in the view that they are surrounded by 'family'. While there are a number of blood relations within the group, an understanding of the group as family has a distinct meaning for group members who have experienced separation and disconnection from kin in their past. The women attached a multitude of meanings to the purpose of the Granny's

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language see *Warraparna Kaurna! Reclaiming an Australian language*, Department of Linguistics, The University of Adelaide, University of Adelaide Press., Adelaide, South Australia. ISBN (ebook) 978-1-925261-25-7 file:///C:/Users/Test/Downloads/603901.pdf

Group. However, overall, it seemed that the women's cultural identities were nurtured and their relationships with people within the group offered a sense of connection and belonging.

Reciprocity and relationality

To further discuss the reciprocity and relationality within the group, I explore my relationship with the group and the way in which relationships have developed over time. I provide autoethnographic observations in relation to the interpersonal dynamics and subtleties that I observed. Since my introduction to the group, the values of reciprocity were repeatedly highlighted to me, both in terms of interpersonal exchanges but also about the tangible trading of creations such as beaded necklaces and bracelets. The notion of reciprocity from an Aboriginal worldview may be explained as an important process involving actions of giving and taking. These practices are symbolic of an Aboriginal worldview that centres the balancing of resources, and may also be gestures of thanks. Baskin, in *The values and ethics: guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research* (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p. 10), explains reciprocity in the following way:

> A mutual obligation exists among members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to achieve an equitable distribution of resources, responsibility and capacity and to achieve cohesion and survival of the social order. This mutual obligation extends to the land, animals and other natural elements and features. In contemporary settings the value of reciprocity continues in various forms, and may vary between locations. Examples include the redistribution of income, benefits from the air, land and sea, and the sharing of other resources such as housing.

The reciprocity that operated within this research setting was relational, inclusive and embracing. As previously mentioned in my reflections on the first initial conversations over a warm cup of tea, the women were proud to share stories about their lives and families with me and in return, asked me questions about who I was and where I had come from. The women spoke passionately about their beading and told me about a fundraising trip to the Northern Territory they were working towards and how they were looking forward to sharing their creations. The women invited me to make a bracelet and advised me that I was to keep the

first bracelet I made for myself. However, following this, the women (warmly) educated me on the common practice, that is, that I must return to make another and pass this next one along to someone else. Throughout my time with the women, I observed continuous displays of reciprocity, which were very much embedded in the group's social way of being or relational ontology (Peterson 2013). These reciprocal exchanges reflected the sharing practices that have been identified as significant within other Aboriginal cultural groups. For example, Peterson (2013, p. 167) has talked about the persistence of sharing in broad terms, discussing the wider Australian context both pre-and post-contact with colonisers. In this work, he highlights a link between identity, reciprocity and ontology, suggesting that,

> ...the central reason for the persistence of sharing in the Indigenous Australian context is that it underwrites a relational ontology in which sharing has a profound significance for the nature of personhood (Peterson 2013, p. 167).

These acts of reciprocity and sharing upheld connectedness between individuals throughout my time with the Granny's Group. It contrasted with the extreme competitiveness and individualism of dominant societal values and interactions. I noticed that reciprocity often operated through material exchanges that represented acceptance and connectedness. I was able to see that reciprocity holds further meaning, as it is an 'obligation that comes with relatedness' (Sherwood 2013, p. 216). The valuing of reciprocal interpersonal exchanges, and an investment in connections with one another, was something that operated to build the community and support the social cohesion of the group. This reflected a belief that everyone in the group was valued. This could be seen in the very structure of the group when we were beading, which was an activity performed in a circle, together and as a group. While we created together, the women told stories, and there was reminiscing and a sense of being 'at home'. I noticed the women showing an interest in the creations of each other, sharing ideas about the design of their bracelets, and there was a lot of positive commentary and support happening.

The mutuality and support the women showed for one another was verbally expressed but was also present at a deeper level. I felt strong emotional

connections between the women. I observed the women encouraging one another and 'talking each other up' (a colloquial term meaning the women spoke positively about one another), by telling me about the love and respect that they have for one another. This showed me that the women valued one another. I was able to see that the women had organised ways of ensuring that everyone in the group felt as though they belonged and were taken care of. This was apparent when the women explained to me that if one person is stressed or sick, they all rally round and look after the person. This articulation of social structures of interdependence was also apparent in my previous Honours research when I researched the dreams and aspirations of mobile young Aboriginal Australian people who moved in, out and through remote, regional and urban locations. The research found that young people thought in ways that would operate to benefit their family and kin, which was consistent with a valuing of interdependence over independence (Parkes, Mcrae-Williams & Tedmanson 2015). The women in this doctoral study also lived and discussed this idea, telling me that this is the way the world needed to be, a peaceful and caring world, where we look after each other.

A delicate balance is necessary for me as a researcher working in an environment where interconnected and interdependent relationships with one another are valued in this way. I am both expected to build respectful 'research' relationships and at the same time understand the limitations of these and extend beyond them. The way in which I interpret and manage these boundaries is subjective, with decisions regarding how closely I develop bonds with others being up to my own discretion. Although 'good' decision making is reliant on a robust application of reflexivity, this is still very tricky ground. There is a requirement within participatory research practices that, as a researcher, I should do no harm. This causes me to reflect upon the Canadian Indigenous saying, referenced in Cochran et al. (2008, p. 22) that, 'Researchers they are like mosquitos; they suck your blood and leave'. This is echoed through a conversation I had with Cindy, who I can recall telling me about people coming to talk to her from the government, 'sucking her brains out' and then leaving. And so, I became aware that my research actions within the Granny's Group had the potential to cause harm in terms of frustration,

disappointment or disillusionment for the women. It became clear that my investment in relationships that extended beyond that of 'researcher' and were more reciprocal and authentic, better met the women's expectations. When the women were voicing their displeasure with people coming and going and feeling used up by researchers, I interpreted this as them asking me to take part in a more respectful exchange, one that mirrored the kind of relationship that they value. This insight or advice significantly challenges assumptions about the nature of research, the research process and what research engagement might involve. Notions of connectedness, reciprocity and relationality are significant to the women in this group in ways not captured in typical research discourse. I therefore had to adjust my approach in response to this challenge through working to ground the research and analysis in ways that reflected this way of being and valuing.

Christianity and spirituality

While there was a similarity in the way the women in the group understood and practised being reciprocal, women's connections to Christianity were more varied. This led me to explore the different connections that relate to Christianity and spirituality within the Granny's Group.

The essential values of Christianity, such as faith and charity, were strong and underpinned the daily activities of the community. However, I observed no exclusion or judgemental attitudes towards non-religious group members. This was surprising to me, as exclusion was a feature of the fundamentalist Christianity that I had grown up with. Mills (2006, p. 18) captures how fundamentalists typically reject the beliefs of others:

> If your opinions on religion disagree with those of the Fundamentalists, they will for that reason declare your character to be bankrupt.

This negativity towards others resonated with my own experiences of being raised in a strict Catholic household until 14 years of age. Beliefs that were instilled in me were very much in line with this thinking, and Aboriginal spiritual beliefs would have been regarded as the work of the devil. As McDonald (2001, p. 43) points out

in her examination of Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberley town: 'Aboriginal spirits were assigned to the satanic realm by European missionaries'. Aboriginal spirits were seen to be under the control of Satan, and this meant that non-Christians could be judged by Christians (including Aboriginal Christians) for participating in 'sinful' activities such as disco dancing, love making or corroborees (McDonald 2001). The women's stories highlighted a complex relationship between religion and spirituality, where there is a coexistence between a strong connection to the Christian faith and its values, alongside a strong identification with Aboriginal spirituality. This created tension for me as I reflected on the combined role of the churches and the state in the control and surveillance of Aboriginal mothers' lives. However, it was not articulated in this way by women in this study.

Many of the Aboriginal women who attended the group had lived through some kind of encounter with religious 'missions' and government institutions. Of the women who I interviewed, two-thirds had lived on missions at some stage during their life. These women expressed a connection with Christianity; however, as posited by Schwarz and Dussart (2010, p. 5), although Christianity had influenced 'Aboriginal worldviews and lived practices', values around 'kin-relatedness' remained dominant. The women who had been raised on missions were second generation Catholics. They described religion as integral to helping them and their community to stay strong and keep their families together. Valerie expresses how Christian practices supported and gave 'strength' to her family:

> You would know that most Aboriginal communities were supported by different not-for-profit church groups, our case it was Catholic Church… So one of the things my father was keen on was a soon as we were born that we would be christened in the Catholic Church. So that, the issue about getting me christened straight away just became a bigger problem, because they didn't have cars, Daddy had the responsibilities of getting Mum organised, getting me organised, and getting us to the church to be baptised. And they had a very strong commitment to the ideals that they believed defined them. And they were entwined if you like with non-Aboriginal expectations, the church, and that part of their cultures … all be it different, combined… and that's how we were brought up. And I think that over the years that's contributed to the strength of our family. I think that's what sets us apart from other Aboriginal families, although we have the same problems, the same levels of grief, and loss, and suicide, drugs and alcohol, deaths in custody, all of that. But I think we've all been lucky to have my mother in a way …that strength just came from having to do all those things all the time [mothering a large family]. (Valerie)

Thus, Valerie reflected on her experience with the Catholic Church as a source of strength and refers to the way in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture were able to co-exist. This is interesting to me as it sits in contrast with my own experiences of the church, which had left me feeling judged and excluded. Three contributors described Christianity as helping them to remain strong, but the others did not regard Christianity as important. Three of the women were non-religious. One woman, Lisa, talked to me about her rejection of Christianity due to her negative past experiences. For example, when she was pregnant out of wedlock, her sister had tried to pressure her to have her son adopted, as a 'Christian thing', so that she would not bring shame on her family. Lisa told me:

> And um my mother walked in, 'What's all that?' and I looked at my sister and my sister said 'Oh Mum, this is only to help Lisa, you know she's young and she shouldn't have that baby'. You know she was looking more on that thing of — ah it's the Christian thing to do — you know it will shame her... and that's what I really think she was doing that for. (Lisa)

Lisa showed extraordinary strength as she rejected the judgement her sister associated with the birth of her son. As well, Lisa, Cindy and Grace had also described their experiences with the Catholic Church as problematic, often seeing religion as responsible for the creation of family separations or mistreatment within their family. Women who were non-Christian did not participate in related aspects of the centre that were specifically Catholic, such as church services. However, they still had close relationships with religious staff and participated in joint ventures such as fundraising activities and charity work. The women frequently spoke of the significance of their spiritual identity and expression of self as connected with special family places and spending time 'on country'[7]. The women often talked about returning to these special places with family and cultural connections to clear their minds, to recharge their batteries and to 'take action' when they needed to practise 'healing'.

The term 'country' refers to traditional land, with the terms land and country often used interchangeably. Research by Kingsley et al. (2008) in the context of Victoria, Australia focused on the Yorta Yorta Nation, Boonwurrung and Bangerang tribes, and importantly points to the relationship between Aboriginal people and wellbeing, highlighting the belief 'If the land is healthy... it makes the people healthy'.

While some of the women were raised on missions and spoke of positive experiences, there were other Aboriginal women who visited and were connected to the group who described being stolen from their families as children and being placed under the care of missionaries, with devastating consequences. I was really struck by one of the stories of an elder who visited the group. As we looked around the chapel together and glimpsed pictures of the Pope John Paul II holding up an Aboriginal toddler, the woman shared with me that she had been a member of the Stolen Generations and, while she loved to come and see her family every once in a while, the white walls and reminders of Christianity caused her discomfort. For her, the space triggered memories of her past and a childhood of institutionalisation and abuse. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the separation of Aboriginal children from their mothers and their land ('country'), was extraordinarily damaging because personhood, country and spirituality are uniquely linked (see Eickelkamp 2011). This was particularly evident for Mary, a more transient visitor to the group, because it was a difficult space for her to sit comfortably in. She explained that she felt like a white person living in black skin and how this had left her feeling confused and unsettled about where she belonged. Aboriginal identity in this Christian space therefore means different things to different people. This relationship was a complex one. For some women, Christianity was expressed as a strength while, for others, it was synonymous with grief, loss, trauma and institutionalisation. As noted in earlier chapters, the trauma of being stolen from their mothers, family and land has had a profound intergenerational effect on the lives of Aboriginal people. While acknowledging the historical and ongoing oppression of Aboriginal women through the intentional suppression of Aboriginal knowledges, spirituality, belief systems, family and community, this research space, the Granny's Group, has also become a place where these connections can be rebuilt.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on my introduction to and reflections on the Granny's Group, as well as women's perspectives about how belonging and interdependence, Christianity and spirituality operated within the research space. I reflected on how

women in this study welcomed me into the group and offered me a place to participate. This is significant to the context of this research because it is in this space that women's cultural and spiritual identities, including my own, were nurtured through a relational sense of belonging. The intersections with Christianity in this space added a layer of complexity to the research setting, and I have highlighted how women's identifications are diverse and multilayered. For example, some women in the study perceived Catholicism as a source of strength while, for others, it was a cause of intense pain. In the next chapter, I begin to explore the way in which, through my engagement with the women, I began to understand different layers of multiple mothering.

7. Mothering as relational

Introduction

Mothering cannot be understood in isolation or as separate from the women's other life experiences. In this chapter, I explore women's narratives in relation to their sense of relationality and perceptions of multiple mothering. This analysis extends beyond understandings of multiple mothering discussed in anthropological literature that tend to focus on Aboriginal women having a designated structured cultural kinship role of being a mother for children other than their immediate offspring (Berndt & Berndt 1981; Hamilton 1981b). Women in this study provided examples of multiple mothering through practices of caring that extend to their own children, siblings, children of siblings, extended family members and non-family members. Multiple mothering in this study is understood as a system of mutual support, where caring arrangements provided mothers with relationships that assisted them to cope and offered relief from mothering to those going through challenging life situations. This understanding of mothering as relational was associated with feelings of collective acceptance, rather than any kind of stigmatisation. Throughout this chapter I explore different layers of multiple mothering that have become evident through my engagement with the women. To foreground this process, I begin by considering how ontology (ways of being), epistemology (ways of knowing) and axiology (ways of doing) influence women's constructions of themselves and how these have implications for how motherhood is understood and experienced. Intersecting layers of multiple mothering are described as themes. The first theme relates to experiences and understandings of intergenerational forms of multiple mothering. The second theme is about the construction of white mothers in terms of their mothering approaches. The third theme describes the core values of acceptance and open door policies in constructions of mothering. The fourth theme shows that time and healing are related in mothering practices, and the final theme touches on how mothering operates as a framework of support in grief and loss.

Ways of being-knowing-doing

As a starting point for this chapter, I establish that there are diverse ways of mothering that relate to ontology (ways of being), epistemology (ways of knowing) and axiology (ways of doing) (Martin & Mirraboopa 2003). A number of Indigenous scholars have challenged dominant and positivist philosophical thought (Arbon 2008; Ford 2010; Martin 2003; Nakata 2008; Rigney 1999), arguing that there is not one way of being in the world. There are many diverse ways of knowing-being-doing, which is also significant to my understanding of the world and my analysis of motherhoods. As Sylvie Poirier (2008) notes, personhood relates to ideas about being a person and the self that are central to thinking about being and becoming. Reflecting on Indigenous ontologies in Australia and Canada, Poirier talks about personhood as focused around concepts of a 'dividual' (shared) being, and a perception of the self as relational (Poirier 2008, p. 80). Piorier (2008, p. 78) provides a descriptive of these relational ways of being:

> The notion of the person as "dividual" is thus understood as a nexus of social, dynamic and manifold relationships both between humans, and between humans and non-human persons and agencies (be they places, animals, plants, ancestors or otherwise). Such relations between human and non-human constituents of the dwelt-in world are not extrinsic to one's identity and being. They are embodied, an intrinsic and integral dimension of one's bodily-self (hence the expression "relational self") that connects one meaningfully to the surrounding socio-cosmic environment. Each person is thus a node within networks of agencies, social (but also political and ritual) relations, rights and responsibilities.

In contrast to the individualistic notion of self, which is prioritised in most if not all dominant Western ways of being, knowing and valuing, a 'dividual' and relational self comes into being through relationships with both humans and non-humans. These social interactions are understood as one's 'being', meaning that [mothering] relationships are intrinsic to the self, while at the same time they also form one part of a composite identity (Piorier 2005). This is quite different to Western hegemonic notions of personhood and motherhood, which are constructed through individualistic ideas. From an individualist way of being, the individual is seen as having social relations that are extrinsic or external to the self. As Poirier (2008) suggests, an understanding of 'dividual' and relational forms of

personhood is fundamental to reflecting on the shaping of Indigenous postcolonial identities.

While Piorier (2008) refers to Aboriginal personhood as 'dividual', other authors have engaged with Aboriginal personhood by discussing how autonomy and relatedness operate in tension (Myers 1986), or by considering personhood as extending in time and space (Keen 2006). These different interpretations reflect the different perspectives of anthropologists studying different Aboriginal communities and contexts within Australia (and Canada), highlighting a variability of understandings as they depend on time, place, and cultural groups and mediate meaning. Additionally, individualist and relational constructions of identities interact or merge in Australia because of the effects of colonisation (or the invasion), which complicates how Aboriginal mothers are being and becoming in the world. Developed through her ethnographic research in the Kimberley in Western Australia, Katie Glaskin (2012) has contributed to understanding Aboriginal personhood through notions of embodied relatedness with kin that involve interactions of exchange, associated with sharing and reciprocal giving. Burbank (2011, p. 142) has also reiterated a closeness between family members in Aboriginal communities, emphasising that ways of relating to one another are based upon balance and equivalence, and align with principles of reciprocity.

Veronica Arbon (2008, p. 48), who belongs to the Arabana peoples, explains Aboriginal ontologies as 'signifiers of knowledge, processes and practices'. She talks about being-knowing-doing from her own worldview and emphasises the significance of reciprocity and relatedness within the Arabana way. She suggests that identity is formed through engaging in community life and activities that maintain a relational balance. This is achieved by being reciprocal (as a way of doing), that is 'looking back into oneself to an embodied reciprocal related essence and then outwards to reciprocal relatedness in the world' (Arbon 2008, pp. 3–4). Arbon (2008) also highlights the centrality of relatedness and relationality, where relationships extend to all entities (both physical and spiritual). Relationships are explained through reciprocal responsibilities and roles (Arbon 2008), which include mothering roles. Relatedness and relationality are described as shaping the

organisation of space and time and locating people on country in ways that unite both past and present. Time in this way of being is understood not as linear but rather as an experience where past–present–future coalesce. Arabana peoples' 'knowing' is portrayed by Arbon (2008) as multidimensional, she explains that knowledge comes from people and from the environment, and that this knowledge is learnt through the passing down of stories. A certain form of 'doing' is thus critical to being-knowing because it involves active engagement in life with related people and places, and includes practices such as storytelling, art, singing and dancing. Through community engagement and collective dialogue, understandings, interpretations and knowledges are developed. Arbon (2008, p. 53) explains how family life is a system of relationality, involving roles and responsibilities that are shared through dialogue and mentorship:

> If we observe our families, for example, little sisters, our Kaku, who have the responsibility to help mentor their kupa kupa (their sister's baby who is considered to be their child) we can see dialogue, mentorship and responsibility in action.

There are debates in anthropological literature about the meaning of ontology, and whether ontology is just another word that can be used interchangeably with culture (Carrithers et al. 2010). The scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed discussion on this debate, however it prompts me to clarify what I mean when I refer to 'culture'. As the early work of Clifford Geertz (1973) suggests, culture is not about the search for scientific meaning, but is instead interpretative. He states that 'culture is not a power… it's a context', one which can be *'thickly – described'* (Geertz 1973, p. 14). An emphasis on context and complexity is also put forward by McRae-Williams (2008, p. 38) who suggests, 'To understand culture is therefore to attempt to understand the context in which people exist in all its complexity'. Rather than seeing culture as homogenous and referring to a sameness across places and persons, I understand culture as a space of contestation that is continually reshaped in different contexts and at different points in time. Next, I present how mothering is relationally experienced and shaped by cultural contexts and complex intergenerational influences.

Intergenerational multiple mothering: 'Just a balance that we had'

In my earlier discussion of Aboriginal mothering practices (Chapter 3), I mentioned the number of authors who talk about the continued existence of multiple mothering, and explain the practice as the mothering of children by additional women, beyond the biological mother (Atkinson & Swain 1999; Chang 2008; Yeo 2003). Women in this study spoke about practising multiple mothering through the mothering of sisters' children, mothering of siblings, and mothering within community. Multiple mothering is related to a cultural kinship system where a biological mother's sisters also occupy a mothering role for their sisters' children. For example, while in Western cultural frames a mother's sister would be understood to hold the role of auntie, in this context the child would grow up understanding and referring to their mother's sisters as 'mother'. As a Gangulu woman from Queensland, Lilla Watson (1989, p. 112) explains:

> … Children for Aboriginal people don't belong just to the biological parents. They belong to our kinship group and further, they belong to our community. I don't have any children. I have never borne any children, but at the same time I am responsible for a large number of children.

Through an understanding of motherhood in this way, it is therefore likely for children to form motherly bonds with any potential number of significant women (Atkinson & Swain 1999; Berndt & Berndt 1981; Hamilton 1981b). As discussed in Chapter 3, Yeo (2003) suggests that multiple mothering provides a network of mothering relationships for children that operate to support them into adulthood. Most of the women in this study talked about practising and experiencing multiple mothering throughout their lives, referring specifically to their mothering knowledge being passed down intergenerationally.

Valerie spoke about mothering her sister's children, telling me about the importance of passing down cultural knowledges in relation to mothering. She discussed practices of multiple mothering through examples of storytelling and of breastfeeding within her family:

> I think those meetings and get togethers… we talk about the old stories, we talk about the old people, we talk about what parts of the culture, and tradition, we remember… normal things for us, like breastfeeding… I breast fed

> all of my sister's children if I was babysitting them, it was no big deal… because of that closeness too. (Valerie)

When Valerie talked with me about breastfeeding her sister's children, she confirms this practice as being normalised within her family. The practice of feeding her sister's children illustrates how for Valerie her role as a mother embodies ways of caring that extend beyond her own biological children. This contrasts with hegemonic notions of motherhood where the responsibilities of caring for children are confined to 'traditional family' arrangements that locate responsibility of children with the biological mother (O'Reilly 2010b). Dominant practices of motherhood within a mother–child dyad can place excessive demands on an individual mother. This is often described as mothers providing intensive amounts of time and energy, as being in a position of 'full responsibility but no power' and denying their own sense of self (O'Reilly 2010b, p. 20). Valerie's capacity to mother and care for other children (such as her sister's children) offers a broader understanding of motherhood. Throughout our interview, I noticed that Valerie was proud of the closeness within her family, generating a definition of motherhood that can resist oppressive discourses about 'irresponsible' Aboriginal mothers.

Ways of nurturing are depicted through anthropological contributions that show differing mothering practices in Aboriginal communities. In her work exploring Aboriginal child-rearing in North Central Arnhem Land, Annette Hamilton (1981b) observed that breastfeeding was only carried out by the biological mother. Yet, Valerie's breastfeeding of her sister's children was something that she considered 'normal'. This points to a diversity of cultural mothering practices and experiences. Hamilton (1981b, p. 34) does, however, point to a common significance of the bond between sisters and their sisters' children, stating:

> … a mother's real sisters, although they do not breastfeed the child, do care for it more than any other 'mothers'… and although the child's tie to its real mother is very strong there seems to be a feeling that this should be extended to include her sisters as well.

Although the breastfeeding of one's sisters' children is a new finding, the relational bonding observed by Hamilton in the 1980s resonates with Valerie's mothering of

her sister's children, which demonstrates the close multiple mothering relationships that have operated in her family. For many women in this study, nurturing was expressed as extending beyond the biological mother–child relationship in ways that centred a connection with others. The nurturing of children is carried out in ways that support a child to become a part of a collective, as opposed to an isolated mother–child unit (Hamilton 1981b, pp. 163–164):

> Thus, whereas in our own society (and others) the child and its mother are isolated as a separate, mutually dependent and exclusive dyad, the Aboriginal child is placed immediately into a group relationship characterised by excitement and diffuse emotionality among many, while retaining the exclusiveness of the mother's body. Since the child does not attach exclusively to its mother, nor equally to each member of the group, a kind of balance emerges between the child as a separate individual in relation to its mother and as a member of a group of women and children.

This contrasts with dominant notions of motherhood that allude to mothering in an isolated family unit that strengthens the nuclear family structure. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, hegemonic family structures that are nuclear and self-supporting situate the biological mother as primary carer under the control of a male economic provider (Ardenell 1999; Douglas & Michaels 2004; Hays 1996 O'Reilly 2007, 2010b). These individualist notions of motherhood contrast with notions of multiple mothering as discussed by the women in this study. Aboriginal mothers in this study alluded to a different way of being in the world, which they conveyed through a different set of values that centre family, community connectedness and relationships. Therefore, mothering is practised in a way that serves to strengthen these broader understandings of family and relationality.

As well as mothering the children of siblings, other experiences of multiple mothering in family life were also shared by Mona, who talked about mothering her siblings. One experience she shared with me related to a time when her mother was unwell and hospitalised. She explained to me how the family re-organised and the children took on mothering roles:

> And so all us older ones in the family, coming from a big family, us older ones, we had to look after the younger ones. Bath them, make their bottles, we had to chop wood, to make fire, to boil the water and that you know, we took over the motherly role of those kids you know. And now I remember when Mum

> came back from hospital, she was sick… and Daddy was doin' the washing, Daddy was doin' the cooking… everything, Mum was in bed, and us older ones we had to look after the younger ones… Substitute mother… yeah we were and my granddaughters exactly the same now. I went to it like duck to water, cos I knew everything see! Knew everything! (Mona)

In this narrative, Mona uses the term 'substitute mother' when referring to older children taking over the mothering role, which is also now being practised by her granddaughters. The word substitute is significant in this case as Mona was literally taking over the role of mother, replacing this role while her mother was gone. When she explains that this practice is carried out by her granddaughters today, this highlights the diverse ways that multiple mothering may be practised, as either a complete substitution of the mothering role or alternatively, as caring for siblings to provide additional support for the mother. The notion of parentification (role reversal where a child takes a parenting role) from Mona's perspective is positive, which sits in contrast with Western notions of parentification that have pathologised such role reversal as inherently bad (Hooper, DeCoster, White & Voltz 2011; Hooper, Marotta & Lanthier 2008; Shifren & Kachorek 2003). For example, Mona shared her thoughts about how she felt these experiences of being a 'substitute mother' had prepared her for the mothering of her own children. When she spoke to me further about the passing down of mothering knowledges to her from her parents, and from her to her grandchildren, she illuminated the intergenerational qualities of multiple mothering in her own personal experience.

In Mona's family, her grandmother on her mother's side died in childbirth when Mona's mother was ten years old, which potentially impacted on the increased demands placed on siblings in Mona's family. Akin to Mona's experience, Helena also discussed mothering her siblings and how this functions as everyday practices within a large family:

> …when there's so many around in the family all the time, you know you just don't notice little things because you are such a big family. There was always something happening you know, and so you don't actually hone in or focus on one particular person … Mum always just seemed to be Mum and you know. And because the older sisters always helped and supported the younger sisters it was just a balance that we had, yeah. … I mean from when we were little and

> the older sisters always had, you know, like I came under [my older sister's] wing who's just older than [another sister] so there's me… like that… groups of kids under older sisters. (Helena)

Helena talks here about 'just a balance that we had', which highlights the way in which mothering operates as a shared responsibility among siblings, including how the task of mothering was balanced among clusters of children, and within each cluster, hierarchies were established based on age. Some subtle differences between the care provided by grandmothers and siblings as caregivers are discussed by Scelza (2009), who considered critical caretaking among Martu Aboriginal people in the Western Desert. She identified grandmothers as providing the most care, which was more likely to be high demand tasks such as feeding, cleaning and changing. However, the study also points to the significant role of older siblings in caring for young children, suggesting that although siblings were carrying out low-demand tasks such as holding, watching and playing with babies, these care giving tasks were carried out 94 per cent of the time by siblings (Scelza 2009).

There were varied examples from the women of how children are mothered by older children, as well as by multiple mothers, showing how knowledges in relation to shared mothering are taught from a young age. This sits in contrast to ideas in the literature about motherhood being a transition, that begins with the birth of a first child, and as a new or alien experience that is initiated from this time (Miller 2007; Winson 2009). The mothers in this study who experienced multiple mothering from childhood and provided care for their siblings, developed skills of mothering in their early years. Therefore, motherhood is not simply something which can be associated with adulthood but is understood as occurring within a broader understanding of the operation of care. The mothering role is not regarded as an added responsibility, inconvenience or burden, but is normalised as everyday life and is a familiar role that women have been prepared for.

Furthermore, Mona referred to multiple mothering as a practice that extends beyond the family to the community. She told me about the many children that her own biological mother cared for throughout her life.

> Mumma was very compassionate, both her and Daddy, they were… Mummy used to have all these… I think during her life time when she moved to Adelaide…, Mum looked after 'bout six hundred kids, street kids, plus her own grandkids too… and she was lookin' after them, so that was good being brought up with parents like that… this is what I see as very important. (Mona)

When Mona indicates that it was 'good' being raised in this way, she conveys pride associated with ways of caring for a wide range of children, with different kinds of connections to the family. Feminist scholars have posited that mothering can be experienced as both oppressive and emancipatory (Kinser 2010a; O'Reilly 2010a). Researchers who argue that motherhood can operate to resist oppression (Collins 1986, 2000) promote empowering strategies that overtly name people's experiences of oppression in order to take action and reconstruct identities. Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) suggests that race and gender intersect to contribute to women's oppression and while action can be taken collectively, it is also the reconstruction of the self by individuals (for example, through the sharing of personal experiences or by speaking out) that contributes to women's empowerment. Collins (2000) notes that individual resistance can allow people to regain control and see themselves as active change agents against oppression. With Aboriginal motherhoods constructed through dominant discourses as unfit, dysfunctional, deficient and dependent (Moreton-Robinson 2000b), Mona resists these oppressive discourses and reconstructs Aboriginal mothers as compassionate, caring and giving. By highlighting the pride that she feels in relation to her mother's multiple mothering of her own biological children and other people's children in the community, Mona is reconstructing motherhood as an act or strategy of resistance to Western notions of mothering. Mona spoke about the way in which her mother cared for multiple children as underpinned by values of compassion and as a grandmother herself now, she proudly continues to practise and pass on these values through continued mothering. This suggests that the relational valuing of shared caring and multiple mothering is shaping women's sense of self and sense of being as a mother. As Poirier (2005, p. 15) described, a 'dividual' and relational way of being in the world is about living in the world where relationships with others are intrinsic to self, where one's relationship to others is significant to one's mothering identity. Multiple mothering therefore

brings satisfaction, enjoyment and a great sense of pride, which relates to women's cultural identity and affirms the strength of women's mothering practices.

This passing down of multiple mothering knowledges through the generations was discussed by most of the women in this study, indicating that sibling mothering is common. This emphasises the significant influence of family connections within practices of mothering. The findings about relationality and mothering resonates with Moore and Riley's (2010, p. 185–186) conversations with an Aboriginal mother who provided them with an understanding of good mothering as being achieved through kinship networks and as a journey involving the support of kin and community. Therefore, Aboriginal mothering can be seen to be a supported journey through relationships with sisters, grandmothers and cousins, which challenges individualist understandings of the good intensive mother in a nuclear family system. However, this was mostly practised by mothers who had not been directly affected by the state removing them from their families (as members of stolen generation/s), as they were most likely to be able to continue these practices within their own families. For example, as Grace explained in Chapter 6, she felt disconnected from her cultural identity and Cindy also felt isolated, having been removed from her Aboriginal family and community at a young age. Therefore, the experience of mothering as a supported journey in relationship with others as a collective was not the experience of all the women and depended on family histories. Women's experiences of removal from their Aboriginal families disrupted these mothering knowledges.

White mothers as deficit 'other': 'They haven't got that'

Within this theme, I consider the ways in which women in this study express different understandings of motherhood that connect with extended family structures, contrasting this with dominant practices of nuclear family mothering. When speaking with women in this study about their perceptions of motherhood, they talked about multiple mothering in relation to perceived 'white ways'. Valerie explained:

> He's not a half-child, half-brother to her daughter you know what I mean?... the way we live and exist with our extended families is no halfs, or steps... you either are, or you aren't. In the same way that you're either Aboriginal or you're not. You're not – you can't just be in those two fingers, or one ear, you either are or you're not. In the same way with how you engage with family, the boundaries around that are non-Aboriginal boundaries, they do not have any place how we understand it... and grandmothering, the same... and care as well. ... And it's a proven fact that Aboriginal children prosper best when they're with family, and to them the family doesn't stop and start as mother and aunties, they see the auntie as an extension of the mother, if the mother is not available... and that gives them the best sense of comfort. (Valerie)

Valerie articulates differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of mothering, highlighting that from her understanding 'the auntie is an extension of the mother'. Valerie talked about family relationships in terms of togetherness and closeness, which is contrasted with non-Aboriginal ways that define limits, and measure relationships by distance (such as 'half' or 'step'). When clarifying the association between family boundaries and Aboriginal mothering, Valerie did so with a sense of pride in her own ways. Valerie's articulation of these distinctions between her own mothering ways, in comparison to dominant Australian ways of mothering, may be understood as her resisting oppressive and negative discourses about Aboriginal mothering. By positioning multiple mothering practices as part of a broader ontology of relational caregiving, one where caring occurs within a different understanding of family boundaries, dominant practices of intensive biological mothering are positioned as abnormal for Aboriginal children.

The idea that motherhood is the practice of caregiving by children, mothers, aunties and grandmothers makes the marking out of the biological mother less distinct than within hegemonic understandings of motherhood. The biological mother is more visible within Western individualistic notions of motherhood where there is a focus on the biological mother as self-sacrificing, all-giving and primary in terms of raising her child (O'Reilly 2010b; Sutherland 2010). For many of the mothers in this study, the way in which they have described motherhood for themselves includes an understanding of caregiving as a shared responsibility with others. These findings highlight the centrality of relatedness and the way in which these beliefs and ways of being inform an ontology of care where mothering is relational.

In her earlier mothering years, Mona lived in remote parts of Australia, which she recalled as ethnically diverse. She reflected upon the complexities of mothering in different cultural contexts. Drawing upon her understanding of a range of mothering practices, she told me:

> …when I was workin' at the school I found it very confusing with the non-Aboriginal, I always refer to them as white and black, the white ones didn't … the Greeks and the Italians and the Chinese they got that culture where you know when they say for example the daughter is having a baby right, the Chinese mother will come and look after them, the mother and the child for one year, then she goes back to the China or Hong Kong or wherever she come from and the mother come and looks after for 12 months. So that's two years the mother is recuperating from the baby but with the Western-style society, they haven't got that… it's just 'throw a shrimp on the barbie', give us a beer, you know! (Mona)

When Mona associated 'Western-style society' with white Australian ways, it is noticeable that she does not include Greek, Italian or Chinese people as Western because of their differing mothering practices. It seemed that Mona was able to identify a cultural similarity and was able to see a connection in mothering ways in other cultural contexts. For example, Mona talked about mothering as a practice within Greek, Italian and Chinese communities that was also embedded within wider extended family structures, in contrast to stereotypes of Australian cultural practices such as 'throw a shrimp on the barbie' (a slogan for an Australian media tourism campaign targeting the USA in the later 1980s). Mothering that extended outside the nuclear family, to the significant support of grandmothers, was noted as being different to hegemonic notions of motherhood in the Australian context. This was something that Mona explained as a way of allowing mothers important time to heal after childbirth, suggesting that 'Western-style society' fails to care for the mother because 'they haven't got that', and hence failing to provide mothers with the relational support and time to heal. By positioning hegemonic mothering practices as marginal, dominant understandings of motherhood are presented as being alien, foreign and strange. This positioning of 'Western' motherhood within dominant stereotypes such as *just 'throw a shrimp on the barbie', give us a beer, you know!"* (alluding to men asking women for a beer) may be recognised as speaking

back, and as an act of resistance to dominant understandings and unequal gendered experiences of mothering.

Acceptance and open doors: 'We don't deny anybody, you know'

Women's construction of mothering also involved an 'open door' to everyone's children, which is associated with a broader sense of understanding about community responsibility to care for others. Reflecting on her own childhood, Lisa spoke to me about her mother's multiple mothering practices, as a mother to all children in the community, which she has perpetuated. These practices are shown to differ from common 'white' practices that would typically stereotype children running away from detention as delinquent. However, for Lisa, her memories of multiple mothering were about helping others in need,

> [my mother] … as she got older, young boys from [Youth Detention Centre] … they run away… and they head straight to Mum. And next minute police is knocking on the door looking for these children … they'd be having showers and all, you know, doing 'em up nice and clothing and that and ah…. they have a good yarn to Mum. And you know they all runaways, white boys and all you know! … They all run to Mum… she told some police officers 'oh, they're gonna spend the day with me and I'll take 'em back to [Youth Detention Centre] when we finished tea and finish our yarn'. And so after tea and that, then she'd get in the car and you know they were all in the car, happy as! And they had that yarn and say this and that … you know cos one Aboriginal boy'll come, and a couple of white fellas that run with 'em you know, and then ah then she takes em back. Then like ten, 20 years after they're on Mums doorstep, and they remember Mum, give Mum a hug and say 'Thank you for being there for me'. And they big boys now and um and that's the type, she'd mother other people's children too. Cos um some mothers got no time you know and you just see it … all you can see is ignoring them and that, and that's probably where I got my trait from… they'd come and have showers and that, the house open, but um… we don't deny anybody you know. Especially if they wondering the streets and yeah so, and that's what I did myself now cos my mother was like that, I do that, I took over that thing you know um, anybody hungry, yeah help yourself you know, or, you know where the fridge is, you know just to and that's only just like I got enough food, ah what goes around come back you know, in other ways and that's my belief. (Lisa)

The multiple mothering that Lisa has described in this account reflects intergenerational practices, by making comparisons between her own mothering practices and 'beliefs' and those of her own mother. Multiple mothering is about community identity and pride, but as Lisa's dialogue shows, mothering is about more than this. Extending care to all children, who will return in 20 years and say,

'Thank you for being there for me', shows a compassionate mothering that is responsive to vulnerability and marginalisation. Reciprocity, openness and empathy is offered through social exchanges such as a 'supportive, listening yarn'. Through this exchange there is no expectation that the 'helped' will perform in a particular way, in return for this kindness. The yarn is not one of discipline but is instead one which offers unconditional support that permits space for people to heal in their own time. This sits in contrast with disciplinary practices within hegemonic motherhood that operate to reinforce societal norms and uphold patriarchal power. Caring for many children and the children of the community is attached to a sense of relationality and responsibility for others, which may be fundamentally linked to a different way of knowing-being-doing mothering in the world. As Piorier (2008) suggests, an understanding of the self as relational is reflected in Indigenous knowledges that emphasise connection with others. By caring for the children of other mothers, this is about an understanding of 'the self as one' in the world with others. This way of understanding mothering is reflected in practices of multiple mothering where care is extended to many children, including caring for 'a couple of white fellas that run with 'em'. This is distinct from the ways white mothers have been discussed earlier as wanting to 'help' Aboriginal children (Chapter 3), and it is noted that Lisa is not positioning herself as a superior helper, but rather as always being there for any child. Similar understandings of care emerged through many of the narratives of women in this study, where the responsibility of caring for others is grounded in a belief that nobody should be denied support. Mothering as caring is spoken about as attending to an individual's basic human needs, that is, food, shelter, and hygiene, social and emotional support.

When I reflect on these stories of helping marginalised children and families with acceptance and openness, and the provision of basic needs and resources, I am reminded of the women's own experiences of marginalisation and oppression. Empathising with the needs of others, including the marginalised and oppressed, was conveyed to me on many occasions. Women's understandings of marginalisation shape their empathy towards others experiencing similar

circumstances. Thus, hardships in women's lives have potentially contributed to the 'open door' philosophy practised by many mothers in this study. These practices of mothering also challenge dominant discourses that accuse Aboriginal mothers of being irresponsible and having children to gain welfare payments (Weiss 2013). These findings show that Aboriginal mothers are active in upholding community connections, and in providing care, support and resources to large numbers of children outside their own biological children. When Lisa described her way of mothering that extended to all kids 'white boys and all', she is emphasising that her extended caring for children is not limited to children of her own racial background. As I have previously argued, Aboriginal mothers have been framed by the state and the media as not good enough mothers (Cutcher & Milroy 2011; Goodwin & Huppatz 2010). However, the actions of mothers in this study suggest the opposite. Aboriginal mothers in this study talk about a style of mothering that does not conform to dominant constructions of caring for biological children within a nuclear family. Through this broader understanding of caring beyond the nuclear family, mothers are exercising their own agency. Mothering with agency alludes to women rejecting the oppression and exclusion that is attached to the way in which Western individualism situates their motherhood as 'other' (DiQunizo 2013). Thus, I argue that many of the women in this study perform mothering as a site of resistance to individualist Western mothering discourses and unequal social arrangements.

Like many of the other women who contributed to this study, Mona also spoke about multiple mothering and caring for the children who nobody else wanted. Here, Mona talked to me about multiple mothering outside of her biological family and within the community to support those who were excluded:

> I used to look after her, she used to call me Mum, she died too. So I was looking after her too and her sister right, but I was at the school… and I can hear this sobbin', screamin' and I thought what! who's hittin' the kids out there? Cos they always come to me, even the teachers on duty you know… But yeah I could hear screamin' screamin' and when I looked out there she was draggin' those two kids … but you know what? Nobody wanted to look after them… and I said, 'What are you doing with them two?' And they both pulled away from them and they ran to me and they said, 'they [workers from services] takin' us, we don't wanna go!' and I said, 'Where? Where? Where?

> you takin' them?', And they said, 'We are putting 'em on the bus tonight to send 'em to Adelaide because nobody wants to look after them down here, we send 'em down to Adelaide'. And I said, 'No, no you are not', and I said 'Come here you two sit down there, no more cryin' now, I'm gonna look after you'. Cos they call me Mum, some call me Mum some call me Aunty Mona some call me nanna right?... Well even when they got older they said Mum! Mum! where's my brother and sisters?... and I took 'em to the shop and I bought them shoes and little white lacy socks, new dress, and you know, when it was swimming time, pants, bathers and towel and things and swimming cap, I bought all of that out of my own money... no matter where she was she'd sing out 'Mum!'... But that's how I looked after my own kids too... money was no good to me, my rewards for helping people was a smile on my face... and comin' and saying thank you to me and I'd be [there] twenty-four seven. (Mona)

In the above narrative, Mona discussed the ways in which she practised caring for children within her community as if they were her own, with the only reward being 'a smile on my face'. Again, here we can see an example of the unconditional offering of support, the provision of basic needs to children who are abused and marginalised. When Mona said 'Even when they got older, they said "Mum! Mum! Where's my brother and sisters?"' this points to the significance of relatedness, where Mona is regarded as the mother, and other children in her care as sisters and brothers, which is understood as a long-term, lasting relationship. This resonates with Arbon (2008), who emphasises the way in which relatedness sits at the core of being and organises time and space. As well, time is known in a different way, it does not mark beginning and end points, but how the past–present–future come together (Piorier 2008). Mona practised multiple mothering in ways that erased boundaries between caring for her own children and the children of others in her community.

The way in which Mona and the other women talked about mothering leads to an understanding of mothering as sitting within a broader sense of care, one which extends beyond notions of hegemonic mothering centred on the biological mother–child relationship. In this study, mothering is akin to caring for others and supporting others, reflecting notions of relatedness and reciprocity. This presents an understanding of the self in terms of one's relationship to others that centres balance and harmonisation with others (Arbon 2008). Social equality is therefore upheld through acts of reciprocity, something that was noticeable within Mona's

stories of giving back to others, through the mothering of children within her community. A strong sense of acceptance and empathy rooted in these practices of multiple mothering may also be recognised as acts of resistance to colonisation and oppression. Relatedness and reciprocity exist alongside lived experiences of oppression and come together to influence how motherhood is socially understood — that is, as the responsibility to provide non-judgemental care to all.

As Glaskin (2012) explains, reciprocity is based upon interactions of exchange that involve both the giving to another, and giving back, which in this study, points to the unconditional help and care offered by the mothers. For example, care is offered in a way that promotes children's autonomy in decision making and personal agency. Unconditional caregiving may be analysed as differing from more authoritarian or coercive styles of parenting (Pridham et al. 1995). Within an authoritarian structure, there is little opportunity for a child to find solutions to their own problems or behaviours, and this punitive approach restricts individual freedoms through controlling practices that can serve to maintain beliefs about traditional family structures (Altemeyer 1988) and gendered roles (Duncan et al. 1997; Walker, Rowe & Quinsey 1993). Within a hierarchical nuclear family structure, parents try to enforce obedience to continue to maintain their power in family relationships (Peterson & Zubriggen 2010). However, the women in this study argued that family structures based on kinship systems promote a compassion which is maintained through reciprocity in the community. This unconditional mothering involves inviting children to their homes with an openness and the offer of unconditional support when it was needed. Mother's stories conveyed to me the importance of acceptance, openness, empathy and showing an understanding towards all people who are experiencing difficulties in life.

Time and healing: 'She just allowed me to have the time and after that I was the best mother'

The other side of the reciprocal exchange is focused on mothering as a system of support for mothers as well as children; it is not just about mothers giving but also mothers receiving. Lisa talked about being cared for as an adult mother by her own

mother. The experience of not finding out she was pregnant until late in her pregnancy was something that came as a significant shock to Lisa. As Lisa shared with me her experience of post-natal depression (or in her words the 'baby blues'), she described the ways she was supported by her mother during this time:

> Crying and going through swings and my Mum said to me, my son was five then…no bit earlier… and she said, cos I was feeling that way — my mother come down sat next to me and said, 'Here Lisa I'll look after [son] for ya and you go and do travel, you go 'en catch up with people you know… you go 'en do your travels'. And so I went and done a lot of travel. … my Mum looked after him well… and I told Mum oh, I was with this guy, I met up with this guy and his two children… I'd been away for about five months or a bit more and, ah, I looked at him, my mate, and I said 'I've gotta stay home now', cos we were gonna head [away] and I said, 'Oh I miss my baby so much I gotta stay home'. … Yeah I done my travelling and my Mum allowed me to do that. And she never asked me 'When you coming home? or rah-rah', she just allowed me to have the time and after that I was the best mother. I had that baby blues and I reckon a lot of women got to have that time off, you know 'cos it's a shock. It was a shock to my body, to myself you know, of what happened to me having the baby, cos nobody told me what was gonna happen! (Lisa)

This account shows reciprocal and relational practices of caring for children by grandmothers. Lisa's mother gave her time to heal: 'She just allowed me to have the time and after that I was the best mother'. However, if we consider hegemonic notions of the 'good mother', the ever-present mother, practising 'intensive mothering' is expected to be a constant presence in a child's life. Lisa leaving her children with their grandmother could be seen to be a rejection of the intensive mothering ideology, and such mothers are likely to be subjected to criticism of neglect or abandonment. As Gustafoson suggests, 'Few mothers are more stigmatized than those living apart from their children' (2005, p. 1). Although Gustafoson (2005) speaks primarily about long-term, permanent absences in motherhood, a characterisation of mothers who are absent as bad mothers or non-mothers speaks to the powerful way in which mothers who diverge from intensive mothering ideology are positioned as shameful (Gustafson 2005). In contrast, mothers in this study could leave their children or have time away from primary caring responsibilities, during difficult times, to heal, and this was not stigmatised. In the above description, Lisa talks about 'travelling' at a particularly difficult period in her life during which she had access to unconditional support and

understanding from her mother. This support helped Lisa to embrace motherhood and become what she sees as a 'good mother'.

Across the women's stories, there are many intersecting layers of multiple mothering but all their stories share basic similarities, such as a strong sense of acceptance, empathy, an open door and giving and being given unconditional support. This is also illustrated in Lisa's story. Lisa talked about being allowed to do other non-mothering activities by her own mother, such as travel without pressure, was not compelled to 'fix herself' by a particular time and was permitted to take as long as she needed to recover. Her return to wellbeing is the measure, not time. An awareness of healing and being cared for is therefore integrated within practices of multiple mothering, which relate to understandings of care that are broader than supporting the biological mother–child relationship. A holistic understanding of caregiving values interconnectedness and reciprocal caregiving and is significant to Aboriginal cultural understandings of healing and being (Lohoar, Butera & Kennedy 2004). Furthermore, togetherness is associated with healing from the disconnection inflicted on women's lives by state policies and through colonisation (Peeters, Hamann & Kelly 2014). A significant theme that has emerged throughout this analysis relates to the idea that allowing time to heal is not just about mothers recovering but is more deeply embedded in a different understanding of the way in which caregiving operates socially and culturally. For the women in this study, care is not just focused on one directional caregiving from mother to child, rather, women's understandings of caregiving are multidirectional between children, mothers, grandmothers and communities. Multiple mothering practices are focused on all beings living in the world, supported through acts of reciprocity and the importance of giving to one another (Arbon 2008; Poirier 2008).

Helena also spoke about certain elements of multiple mothering that were touched on by Lisa, related to the association between healing and caring. Helena recalled the struggles in her life as a mother, remembering the period when one of her daughters was using drugs. When she reflected upon this time, Helena told me it was the 'worst time of my life'. Her daughter had come home pregnant at a time

when Helena had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer and was preparing for her mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Although her daughter had set up her own place, once she had given birth to her son, the drug taking didn't stop. A few years later, Helena had become 'burnt out' from the constant helping and, out of frustration, recalled screaming at her daughter. Helena had become so frustrated with her daughter she told her she could bring her grandson to her house, but that she could not be near her anymore. This was such a difficult time for Helena and she retold this story with tears in her eyes. She explained how this experience became a turning point in her daughter's life:

> And so the next day Hayley [pseudonym] rang me... she said 'Mum don't hang up just let me say something quickly', um, she said, she told me she signed herself in [to rehab] and she wanted me to come and get my grandson. Cos she didn't want him there and of course I didn't want him there either... Cos down the track she's told me, 'Mum, I got this close to being totally, you know, hopeless' and so you know, that was the turning point. ...And so she went in there, I went there, I picked him up... I didn't even stay long to visit her, I just gave her a hug and I said, 'Do you know what?...I love you so much, but right now I'm hurting and I don't like you, I don't like the person you've become'. I remember clearly saying that to her, 'I love you so much, you are my daughter and you always will be but right now I don't like you'... but I did say to her that I was proud that at least she's taken that step... Then my oldest daughter ... wanted her to go and live with her and for a few months... so I spoke to her about that... so it was agreed that I would have [grandson]... and [daughter] would go to Sydney and that was the turning point... my eldest daughter was giving her one hundred percent support ... nice clothes to start a job and, well she was there for two years, she came back to visit [grandson] ... and he was my baby. That's why I've got this real bond with him. You know, he's my baby cos I mean when I was going through the cancer treatment and all that, he was the little baby laying in my arms, all the time... so there's that extra special bond... she obviously got into a job, got into counselling ... did all this wonderful stuff... was really proud of [her]..., kept telling her was proud of her and you know, after a while, and then we got close again. Cos she kept coming back to see her baby and missing him and all that, I could see the big change in her, and that's it, and she's been good ever since. (Helena)

Like Lisa's mother, Helena frames taking over the care of her grandson as an important time which allowed her daughter the opportunity to recover and heal. She recalled it as a time when she was able to develop a special closeness with her grandson, who she refers to as 'my baby'. It is interesting to note here that the threshold for Helena, her daughter's drug taking, had become unbearable. However, the responsibility of caring for her grandson while also incredibly ill

herself was not a problem nor constructed as a difficulty, but rather as a source of strength through caring. As grandmothers, the women expressed that caring for grandchildren is a responsibility, but it is also an important source of strength for themselves and a way of building family and community connections. Again, here, a mother's absence is not stigmatised, rather, it is normalised and regarded as facilitating healing. Similar to what has been described by Lisa and Helena, many of the mothers talked openly about needing time to heal and providing time to others within motherhood. This hints at the transformative potential of multiple mothering and extended networks of care for mothers who are struggling with mental health issues such as post-natal depression or addiction. This caring ontology emphasises and values mothers, in both their presence and their absences.

Along these lines (and similar to Mona), Lisa contrasts her mothering practices with those of 'white people', highlighting the importance of relational care. She compared her style of mothering to her perceptions of 'whitefellas ways' that pathologise and institutionalise people who need care:

> …white people if they can't control their children they say they wanna put them in an institution or rah-rah-rah and this is how I think they do it with elders when their grandmother or mother get too old they straight away want to look to put them in the home… and I say when I getting' old I'm going to [country], I've got a big tent, I'm goin' there and stay there, my resting time. And see with the children we try and pull resources … maybe they could go on respite get them to go spend time with their aunties… you know cos there is a lot of pressure on young ones and so you got to have somebody… let the aunty go and look after him or somebody he just connects. So we don't go and put 'em straight into an institution and say there's something wrong with this kid you know, we do that. And I'm sure that's the way some white people do it too, but when they playing up, they trying to tell you something — take notice. And I think when they like that and some of the parents say 'Oh he's just a naughty little thing', 'little demon kid' or something and so that's all it is, is something goin' on with their lives and they want your attention, deal with it you know. (Lisa)

Again, we see here in Lisa's dialogue the 'othering' of dominant perspectives, as she positions white people's mothering practices as strange and pathologising. She articulates a critique of the assumed ways that white people care for loved ones. Within this, she recognises that there is a hegemonic construction of motherhood

that does not 'pull resources' to care for children. There is also a greater depth to this narrative through Lisa's experiences with welfare and experiences with state-sanctioned child removal, which are likely to cement her view about white people and their inclinations to institutionalise. These comments are not just a fear or distrust of white people and their institutions; there is a traumatic and colonising history that has shaped her perceptions about the exclusionary responses of white people.

In the past, and even in contemporary times, an Aboriginal mother's perceived incapacity to care for a child, or the appearance of a loss of control of a child, often subjects her to high levels of intervention. As noted in earlier chapters, the effects of institutionalisation have a long history for Aboriginal people living in Australia. Also as discussed, the institutionalisation of the Stolen Generations contributed to a disruption in attachment between mothers and their children, as well as 'ongoing medical, psychological and emotional problems, addictions, mental illness, incarceration, violence, self-harm and suicide' (Haebich 2011, p. 1033). Mothering, from Lisa's perspective, is about accepting people as complex human beings needing care because they are 'trying to tell you something — take notice'. This is contrasted with the kinds of care provided in institutions, where humans with struggles and challenges are constructed as broken people that need to be fixed because 'there's something wrong with this kid'.

As O'Reilly (2010b, p. 20) notes, Western patriarchal motherhood constructs a mother who 'turns to the experts for instruction' as a 'good mother'. Thus, dominant constructions of the good mother are that she should be an ever-present mother, a mother attuned to her child's need, leading to the early identification of problems and correction through intervention where needed. However, a good mother is constructed in other ways by women within this research. A good mother is associated with feelings of connection, empathy, surviving marginalisation and an acceptance that does not stigmatise. For example, Lisa has described being a good mother within a non-pathologising context of community care, where children can 'go spend time with their aunties' and connect with family in the 'big tent'. Through relational practices of multiple mothering, a mother

practises both the giving of time and taking of time in order to be more attuned to her child's needs, but this is not achieved through recourse to 'experts'. When considering the contemporary pressures that individualist discourses about mothering place on women to prioritise the needs of their children while silencing their own, the potential for the sharing of caregiving by mothers is a way for all mothers to push back and resist the oppressiveness of these dominant ideologies.

The women in this study expressed a broad conception of mothering and care that reflected reciprocal ways of being-knowing-doing in the world. They spoke about caregiving in ways that conveyed an understanding that all people need unconditional acceptance. A mother in this context is understood as a whole being, one with her own needs that operate alongside her childcare responsibilities, which can be contrasted to the self-sacrificing mother of dominant ideology, who is demonised if seen to prioritise her own needs (Jackson & Mannix 2004, p. 40; Coward 1997). The power of this hegemonic discourse is captured by the question raised by Andrea O'Reilly (2010b, p. 19) who asked, 'Why are mothers' demands for more time, money, support and validation only responded to when they are seen as benefiting children?' This points to the systemic valuing of the child over the mother, and the invisibility of the needs of mothers. In contrast, multiple and relational mothering serves as a support mechanism for both the mother and the child.

Mothering as a support for grief and loss: 'That helped me, cos I didn't have time to grieve'

Above I have discussed multiple and relational mothering in terms of its practice of acceptance and its relationship to time and healing. Within this theme, I consider the way in which caring creates a support structure for dealing with loss and grief. A conversation I had with Mona is significant here, where she spoke to me about stepping in as 'mother' for her own mother. When Mona lost her father in a tragic car accident, she recalled:

> I had a baby, that was my oldest right, and Daddy was killed. He was born in March and Daddy was killed just after that in a car accident… Mum was lost, she'd come and she brought the kids to me in [Northern Adelaide suburb], I

> was living in [Northern Adelaide suburb] then and she dropped the kids off there and I never seen her for three months. And I had an eight month old baby looking after eight brothers and sisters. The eldest was 13, and there was eight of them and I had to walk pushin' the pusher and pram uphill with my boy and takin' em to the [local school], and I used to do that, it was a lot of extra work…That helped me, cos I didn't have time to grieve. Even with deaths in the family, like you know when we lost my sister. (Mona)

Here we see how Mona and her mother relationally dealt with their experiences of grief and loss, when a significant loss associated with the death of a family member compromised their emotional wellbeing. By Mona taking on the responsibility of mothering her siblings, she admits that this placed her under considerable pressure, but again she positions this absence not in terms of the stigma of her own mother leaving, but instead assessed that this was a benefit to her, and helped her to survive her own grief. Mona also expresses mothering as part of a relational ontology of caring, where caring for others is understood as a process of healing.

In contrast to Western ontologies of care, shaped through a system of patriarchy, where the biological mother should be available to care for her child 24/7 and in doing so, must appear completely fulfilled through these responsibilities (O'Reilly 2010b), the women in this study expressed ways of mothering that privileged empathy and the acceptance of others, through practices of relatedness. From a Western perspective, a mother leaving her children with her daughter is constructed as shameful, yet for Mona it is how the 'extra work…helped' her to also heal that is emphasised. When reflecting on death and grief on other occasions in her family, Mona often spoke about how the work of mothering gave her strength in times of trauma.

The idea that multiple mothering is a supportive structure for grief and loss was repeated in Valerie's life, when she talked about the way in which mothering works to 'reinforce' and 'prepare' children within her family. Valerie emphasised the importance of supportive, collective mothering as an everyday practice, to assist her family and particularly her grandson. With the loss of her eldest daughter she told me about the ways that multiple mothering could support her grandchild:

> Organising things we were always together. I mean because what happens with family is you all go your separate ways, so making myself available to

> them, and inviting family there, always trying to be together … In our case with this horrendous grief and loss, and in my case losing my daughter… that we respect, and get together for those special dates. And you would also know that we have a grandson that was a part of that awful grief and loss. And I think to reinforce him, and prepare him for what might happen. (Valerie)

Thus, multiple mothering practices support mothers and their children at times of significant social and emotional upheaval. Valerie highlights the need for 'togetherness' as an essential part of life, and an ongoing commitment to care and healing, through the maintenance of this family closeness. Making herself available and being available to one another as a family is significant to Valerie's story, which resonates with how mothering and care is also understood by other mothers. Even if things are difficult, there is an emphasis on always having that 'open door' to your family and community. The multiple mothering practices and an ontology of collective caring conveyed through the stories of women in this study also serve to help others in their family or community to deal with experiences of grief and loss that disproportionately affect Aboriginal communities (Wynne-Jones et al. 2016).

Conclusion

While previous research on Aboriginal mothering emphasises kinship structures, obligations, and rules of social organisation, I have shown how Aboriginal mothering practices are lived experiences of relational and reciprocal caregiving. Mothering in this sense can include caring for biological children, mothering sister's children, siblings, or unrelated children. It includes grandmothers mothering grandchildren and importantly mothers themselves being mothered by others. The valuing of community closeness, connectedness and relatedness plays out through the women's practices of multiple mothering, with state-sanctioned removals from family influencing the way motherhood identities interact with individual and relational constructions of being a mother. Mothering as the practice of caring for others with a deep sense of empathy was central to the sense of self as mothers to the women in this study. The women talked about mothering as a process or practice supportive of healing. Mothering for these women extends beyond the mother–child relationship to be dynamic and multidirectional. Chapter

8 will further examine the complexity and resistance to dominant discourses and practices that are revealed within Aboriginal women's narratives of motherhood.

8. Complexity and diversity in Aboriginal mothering

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored relational and reciprocal experiences of mothering among Aboriginal women. In this chapter, I build on this discussion by exploring the highly complex world in which the women's experiences of mothering occur. As elaborated in Chapter 3, what is considered to be a good or bad mother involves the navigation of different values and beliefs. Mothers in this study were exposed to, related with and sometimes internalised dominant and hegemonic constructions of motherhood, such as intensive mothering. They also live their day-to-day lives within the contexts of their own histories and experiences that are gendered, classed and racialised. It is within these layers of complexity that nuances and tensions emerge around what motherhood means for these Aboriginal women, all of whom are also now grandmothers.

In this chapter I draw from postcolonial and intersectional feminist approaches, and take a non-binary perspective to this analysis. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, this approach enables me to move beyond the essentialism inherent in Western vs. non-Western binaries (hooks 1989; Lorde 2003; Mohanty 1991, 1996; Narayan 2000; Spivak 1999). I do not demarcate positions, such as black motherhood versus white motherhood, or Western vs. non-Western motherhoods; rather, I begin with a recognition of the complex intricacies of human experiences and lived realities. This allows a deeper critique of mothering and how the mothers in this study experience, practise and make meanings associated with motherhood. This chapter discusses the diversity and complexities within women's stories of mothering through exploring how they engage with and/or resist dominant motherhood discourses and ideologies. As argued in earlier chapters, by reflecting on the experiences of Aboriginal mothers, and discourses of motherhood more generally, I am challenging singular and monolithic representations of Aboriginal mothers and mothering. The chapter is arranged under three themes. The first theme explores how the Aboriginal women were influenced by narratives of the 'good' intensive mother. The second theme focuses on highlighting the diversity within the

Aboriginal women's mothering practices — diversity that also embraces single motherhood without the involvement of family. The third theme explores the influence of intimate relationships on understandings of mothering. The fourth theme unpacks how the state has played a role in women's experiences of mothering.

The 'good' intensive mother: 'Dressing them nice, and always having their hair nice and, you know, checking teeth'

Feminist critiques of motherhood discussed extensively in Chapter 3 point to the prevalence of received notions of being 'the good mother'. This kind of good mother is constructed as child-centred and self-sacrificing (Ardenell 2000; Johnston & Swanson 2006; Rock 2007). As argued earlier, standards of 'good mothering' in this ideology are underpinned by a regime of intensive mothering. These dominant constructions put pressure on mothers to meet prescribed principles and standards, and then create anxiety that a failure to do so will result in judgement and scrutiny (Ardenell 2000; Goodwin & Huppatz 2011). Under this ideology, good mothering is regulated as 'white, heterosexual, economically dependent, and child-focused' with marginalising effects experienced by mothers who do not fit this norm (Goodwin & Huppatz 2011, p. 2). In this study, Aboriginal mothers' expressions of the 'good mother' can also be interpreted as informed by a fear of being scrutinised as 'unfit' in the context of child removal by the state.

The narratives of mothers in this study at times reflected dominant notions of 'the good mother', but this occurred alongside the valuing of multiple mothering ways. Although each mother's narrative is distinct, and extended families were at times fractured, I observed the women, who were now also grandmothers, talk about and practise mothering in fluid ways, that continued across the lifespan. For Aboriginal mothers in this study, there was scarce discussion of transitioning into or out of motherhood, as the experience was understood as not necessarily having a beginning or end. Although it could be argued that mothering never ends for any mother, there is, within nuclear family arrangements, a more distinct difference in the way in which the birth mother and grandmother roles are constructed. The extent to which care is given by Aboriginal grandmothers to grandchildren, and

Aboriginal siblings to one another, makes the beginning and end of the caring less distinct. This suggests that although the boundaries between child–mother–grandmother still exist, they are understood differently, with the provision of care more constant over time and with more fluidity in terms of who is caring for whom. As previously discussed in Chapter 7, mothering occurs in multiple ways, where caring for children is shared among and between families. These findings resonate with research about Aboriginal child-rearing practices discussed in Chapter 3 that show the ways children connect to many mothers (Ryan 2011; Yeo 2003). As well, Cutcher and Milroy (2011) describe the practice of Aboriginal mothers as involving networks of women who mother and who are also mothered. Having mothered extensively as children, many of the women do not talk about becoming a mother in a way that reflects and resembles dominant societal constructions of the experience of becoming a mother. For example, for these women, becoming a mother was not discussed as a distinct moment in life. The mothers expressed a consciousness about their role as mothers in ways that were universal, such as when referring to caring for any child in need, and in stories of mothering relationships with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

Mothers in this study also had a complex engagement with dominant discourses and constructions of mothering. The internalisation of intensive 'good mothering' ideology did manifest in the lives of the women. Their narratives reflected a gendered mothering ideology where there was an expectation that a mother would assume full responsibility for the care of children through significant investments in time, emotion, energy and resources. This commitment was expressed as part of a mother's responsibility and in the best interests of the child. Yet in contrast to 'intensive mothering' ideology, which positions men as financial providers, for these women being a good mother also encompassed being a mother who was working. Being the 'provider' for the family was emphasised and articulated by Helena and Mona, with both women working from a young age and maintaining financial autonomy and the role as provider within their marriages.

Women in this study also talked about mothering in ways that reflected dominant expectations of the 'good mother' in terms of having certain domestic skills, such

as cooking. When Lisa reminisces about her mothering role and the special times she has enjoyed with her child, she talked lovingly about providing food for her son and the friends that he would bring over. For these women, providing children with nurturing through food was a common mothering practice. When spending time with Lisa, I observed that she experienced a great sense of satisfaction from cooking. Often, she shared with me the process of how she cooked meals that were her specialty. Lisa told me that, as a child, she was given a large amount of responsibility for domestic duties within her family home. At times, she expressed some resentment about this and shared a sense of feeling undervalued. Yet it was also clear that she was very proud that she had had the opportunity to be taught domestic skills, particularly cooking, by her late grandfather. When talking about nurturing through food, I sensed a great deal of pride:

> Like hash browns, and I made that, and he brought one of his friends home, and I was like shame job 'Son look what I'm giving you for' – and it was a like damper and they could put vegemite or whatever on there and hash browns you know, potato stuff I made. And he sitting there 'oh make me one'. And my son had a feed, and he did, … and his friend was still sitting at the table slicing it and he turned around and he put vegemite or butter and jam and eating it you know, and he turned around and said to me, 'Oh Mrs Smith, can you write the recipe down so I can give it to my mother' (laughs). And I'm thinking, Your mother might been a racist woman and you got a recipe for damper[8]! That's black fellas' food (laughs)… and I said, 'I don't know how to write the recipe out, all I know is how to do it', and that's all it is. I can't tell everybody how I do it, cos it's just flour, flour, there's no measure'. And he just sat there, he was a big one, by the time he was finished only a quarter was left, and I said, 'Well you want to take the rest home dear?', and I said 'Son, let me know if they big eaters I make a separate one for 'em.' (Lisa)

Lisa showed an internalisation of hegemonic understandings of 'good mothering', which includes the provision of home-cooked food. However, in the above excerpt she also expressed an awareness of racist social constructions of mothering. For example, what is deemed to be a 'good mother' is not the provision of 'black fellas

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[8] Damper is similar to bread and has been a staple food for Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years. In arid regions it is often prepared using native seeds such as spinifex which is ground to make flour. This is mixed with water, flattened and cooked in hot ashes or a ground oven. See https://australianmuseum.net.au/blogpost/science/food-culture-aboriginal-bread or http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2013/07/11/3801235.htm

food'. Within Lisa's story emerges a consciousness of being perceived by non-Aboriginal mothers as a 'not good enough' mother, suggesting that she has experienced racialised judgements and additional pressure and strain when compared to 'good' white mothers. Although Lisa laughs off the idea that the mother of her son's friends may be unhappy to hear that her child was admiring an Aboriginal woman's food, she reaffirms herself as a mother who was committed to providing for her son, compared to other mothers who 'don't even worry about food':

> But eh I knew how to provide and I'm not saying that I had the good things for him but we still had the food in the house for 'em and I come across a lot of mothers that don't even worry about food, they worry about other things and um and so he grew up like that, sometimes I'll give him fast food but I didn't really like that cos I made other things for his recess stuff and kept them in my room and um that's how I, I got stronger as I moved on you know. When you get older you know, you know you got set things and you know you got to stick by it, especially because you are dealing with another human being, younger one, you're responsible you know. (Lisa)

Here, Lisa both supports her own capacity to be responsible and take care of her son while at the same time downplaying her level of providing ('give him fast food'). When she says, 'I knew how to provide' but follows this with 'not saying I had the good things for him', this could be interpreted as a tension, where she acknowledges her capacity but then doubts it, when compared with the dominant motherhood ideology about what counts as 'good enough'. Lisa also emphasises the significance of providing basic needs for her child, alluding to changing practices over time, in a context of 'getting stronger', 'older' and developing a deeper understanding about being 'responsible' for 'another human being'. Lisa is confident that although she may not have much, she will give openly to all children, trusting that this gesture will come back to her one day.

The women's stories featured common understandings of mothering and expressions of 'good mothering' through the significance of maternal–child bonds, the presence of love and the awe of childbearing and child-rearing. This finding challenges Atkinson and Swain's (1999) idea that family separation and removal have affected Aboriginal parenting through the loss of parenting confidence and skills. In this study, despite the mothers having experienced removal from their

families, abuse, or the death of their own mothers, they have mothered and continue to mother with powerful bonds and pride attached to their mothering role. For example, while Grace expressed a lack of confidence about not having guidance from her mother, this was not something she regarded as affecting her emotional bond with her children. Women in this study said that their experiences of family separation encouraged them to remain close, protective and nurturing of their children. Helena vividly articulates the 'powerful' bond and love of mothering:

> Ahhh... just the love that I felt for my kids and I know they felt for me. That bond, that bond that you get with them right from day one and, that's the most important thing and then after that it's guidance and you know, hopefully raising them to be good little adults... from good little children to good little adults. But yeah that love that you just, you know from the first time you look at that first baby it's just like... so powerful. (Helena)

Within this dialogue, Helena talks about her role as a mother and her understanding of her responsibility to raise 'good' children that grow into 'good' adults. She spoke to me about how she wanted to be able to provide for her kids in ways that she was not provided for as a child. She reiterated that she didn't want to 'spoil' her children but did not want them to have to experience the harsh conditions she did in her own childhood.

As a child, at the age of 13, Helena was sent away from her family to work after the tragic death of her father. Her mother relied upon the older children to support the family, and the strain that this placed on Helena was something that influenced her desire to lessen these responsibilities on her own children. Helena remarked upon her family's capacity to keep united and the role of her mother in keeping the family together, thwarting the separation of their family and the fear of having children removed by state authorities. She discussed the pressures placed on her family to demonstrate to the authorities that they were coping in these highly difficult times. Helena recalls the heartache experienced by her auntie, with her uncle dying in the same car accident as her father. Her cousins were all separated and removed from her aunty, who was judged by state authorities as not well enough to look after the children. In these circumstances, as a young girl, Helena

was compelled to hide her age and work, to look after her mother and siblings. While she shared this responsibility with some of her older siblings, Helena spent most of her time from the age of 13 working away from home. She felt that there was no choice in these matters and that caring for each other and financially contributing was part of being in a large, poor family. These past experiences have had a significant impact on Helena's imaginings of a better life for her children.

Mothering from a young age, working as children and self-sacrificing for the sake of the collective are seen to be the responsibilities that are required for the maintenance of a large Aboriginal family. As we see in Helena's story, mothering is carried out against a backdrop of immense grief and loss and intergenerational experiences of hardship. For Helena, it was important that as a mother she could be available for her children, as teacher and educator. She also placed importance on her children's physical appearance, to signify her success as a 'good mother':

> You know dressing them nice, and always having their hair nice and you know checking teeth and all those sort of things that you do as a Mum. (Helena)

Aspects of 'intensive mothering' ideology are evident in Helena's narrative as she emphasises the significant investment of time, energy and resources into her children. As an adult, Helena married before having children in a traditional nuclear family arrangement. She talked about having to resist her [Italian] husband's ideas of acceptable behaviours for his daughters and explained the intensity of her mothering role:

> I had to do all of that so you can imagine with four kids I was just taxi service, after school off to trainings, you know [daughter] trained twice a week, [son] trained twice a week and the other girls twice a week and it was just like running, running, running, running! (Laughs). And with the three girls and their netball on a Saturday you know they were all playing at different venues, and so I used to arrange with the coach to take one of them, then I'd take one watch for half an hour and then I race to this one, watch the end of it and pick her up and go and pick her up and that sort of thing. And my husband because of that, to him the sports wasn't important you know cos nice Italian girls just learnt to cook and wash and clean and then get married and raise more kids and you know. Its slightly different now, like no, I'm the boss now. (Helena)

What is evident in Helena's experience as a mother is that she has practised intensive mothering, where she is the mother who is always 'running' for her

children. While Helena may have internalised hegemonic constructions of 'the good mother' through these intensive practices of mothering, she also reflected upon how she practised as a mother in ways that could be considered resistant to her husband's imposition of gendered roles on his daughters. Gender oppression was not directly discussed by Helena, but she did allude to it when she described her husband's ideas about 'good daughters' and her resistance to these notions. It is conceivable that Helena had to some extent accepted the domestic role for herself due to lack of choice in her earlier life but she was not prepared to accept this for her daughters in the future. Helena was a key financial provider for her family of origin from her early teenage years, but her older brothers were also assigned the responsibility to provide for the family. In her married life, however, her husband was the main provider. Helena talked about resisting hegemonic understandings about nuclear family life and the gendered dynamics imposed on the family by her Italian husband. She discussed the fight she took up for her children to resist these views and explained her husband's belief as rooted in what he believed constituted 'nice Italian girls'.

Similarly, on the surface, Grace's narrative below could be interpreted as reflecting an intensive mothering ideology. Grace explains that she mothers as an ever-present, self-sacrificing mother whose whole world is her children. She contrasts her own style of mothering with another mother who she sees as prioritising closeness with her husband over her children. She argues that there are negative emotional effects of not 'being present' for your children, by providing an example of a child she was caring for running away because he felt deserted by his mother:

> To love my kids, do what I could for them and even lay down to put 'em to sleep because to make them feel comfortable you know ... I loved nurturing the kids except until they get a certain age and then they go 'oh Mum I'm going here, there'. That's when you lose a little bit, you lose them for a while. I felt that, the loss of um... I had a real sooky child, my second child was such a sooky child, I missed her terribly when she decided you know that boys were, you know, she left me for that while. So you know I miss that, I missed it terribly, but they were busy. They still love Mum but I lost that bit of extra time with 'em I suppose and whatever... I did miss them when they all grow up and busy with themselves. But no, I got 'em all back together so... Yeah, it comes back, but you don't know that at the time, you don't know that! It is loneliness you can't stop it, oh but yeah, it's true though... but you can't do

> nothing about it, it's just that, well I didn't realise that they come back anyway. I just thought oh! is this how it is now, back to loneliness. Because… my friend didn't, because she had a husband and they were such closeness together that their kids didn't get a lot of attention cos the husband and wife were such closeness together; cos I looked after her five when they went away for a holiday and one of her kids ran away from me and oh, I had to ring up the police and I said 'oh one of these children has ran away'… But he missed his Mum terribly I think… and they felt deserted I suppose. And why would Mum and Dad want to go away and leave me with somebody? I wanna stay with… but you still feel cut out, you know? (Grace)

It is apparent from this story that Grace as a married mother (and now grandmother) experiences strong connections with her children and centres physical closeness and nurturing in her mothering practices. This is presented as contrasting with her friend, who she refers to as having 'such closeness' with her husband. Her narrative suggests that Grace has internalised an intensive mothering ideology, believing that it is unfair for the mother not to prioritise her children. Yet there are other layers of complexity to her narrative that influence her experience of motherhood, such as when Grace talked about feelings of loss and abandonment within the mother–child relationship. When she said 'You lose them for a while. I felt that, the loss', Grace is referring to the overwhelming sense of missing her children and losing them as they grew older, and she talked about returning to the loneliness that she had experienced in her life prior to becoming a mother. Underpinning Grace's belief in the significance of intensive mothering is her own history of not being raised by her own mother and father. Grace did not have love and nurturing from her mother as a child, as her mother died at a young age. Her experience of being mothered as a child was presented as problematic, and she reflects on feeling muddled as the result of being removed and then abused under the care of her non-Aboriginal family. Feeling abandoned, lonely and distressed as a child, Grace's understanding of what it means to be a 'good mother', and the significance of being 'ever-present' for her children, is also influenced by her specific life history. Thus, the complexities of Aboriginal mothering exist within a historical context that is subjectively experienced within each mother's story and relationships.

Diverse mothering practices: 'You can't let family interfere with motherhood'

In Chapter 3, I explored conceptualisations of motherhood within the literature and discussed Western patriarchal notions of 'intensive mothering', as well as dominant constructions of Aboriginal 'multiple mothering'. The narratives of mothers in this research enrich these concepts by adding the influence of complex and varied life experiences into their constructions of motherhoods. Aboriginal mothering is discussed in Chapter 3 as occurring within extended Aboriginal family structures within complex systems of care, and that caregiving is shared among family (Muir & Bohr 2014; Ryan 2011). An understanding of Aboriginal family structures along these lines is noted in Aboriginal populations in Canada (Neckoway et al. 2007), as well as in Australia (Nelson & Allison 2000). In Canada, for example, Neckoway et al. (2007) remark upon the way that Aboriginal family bonds between adults and children entail multiple carers. They found that, within Aboriginal families, there are complex layers that are distinct from more dyadic mainstream structures — that is, those involving just two people. Research involving Aboriginal families in Australia has reported multifaceted arrangements of caring within families, where siblings as well as extended family have involvement in child-rearing (Nelson & Allison 2000). Speaking more specifically about Aboriginal mothering, and discussed earlier in Chapter 3, Atkinson and Swain (1999) examined contemporary Aboriginal Koorie practices of mothering, finding that despite the disturbance that colonisation has caused to Aboriginal family structures, children continued to be cared for in culturally meaningful ways by multiple caregivers. In my previous research with Aboriginal young people, I also found the importance of interconnections within Aboriginal families (Parkes 2013). In this previous study, which I raise in my discussion of mothering practices in Chapter 3, Aboriginal young people emphasised the importance of family and kinship interconnectedness and it was through these relationships that young people understood their identities. Adding to this, the extended family and connections to community were recognised as sites of resistance, pointing to the significance of Aboriginal family networks as spaces for nurturing, protecting, and reinforcing cultural identity (Parkes, McRae-Williams & Tedmanson 2015).

In contrast, Lisa's experience of single motherhood diverges from collective and relational understandings of mothering. Her narrative reveals conflicting beliefs about single motherhood practised within extended family and the effects that sharing care can have on relationships. Lisa's exposure to, and internalisation of, more 'white' constructions of motherhood can be interpreted as influencing her belief that 'You can't let family interfere with motherhood', revealing a personal move away from ideas about shared and extended family parenting. Lisa's internalised beliefs reflect aspects of what Andrea O'Reilly (2010b, p. 20) identifies as Western patriarchal motherhood, where the biological mother is assumed to be the only person who can provide appropriate care for her children. Yet Lisa's narrative also challenges this dominant ideology because, rather than placing value on mothering within a nuclear family and as a wife, Lisa values single mothering. Lisa shared with me that she was very proud to be a single mother. She often spoke about the advantages of single parenting in comparison to shared, extended or nuclear family parenting arrangements or relationships, believing that having more than one caregiver for a child would complicate mothering. It was her understanding that sole parenting meant that she could parent alone, which brought advantages, including limited interference from another person. Lisa also spoke of single motherhood as something she was very grateful for, adding that she noticed a special connection and bond in the relationship between herself and her son. After becoming a mother when she was very young, Lisa described her protective feelings associated with her baby, arguing that being a young mother had given her a unique mothering experience. As noted in Chapter 6, Lisa had mothered with an awareness of dominant Christian, white and nuclear family-oriented ideologies of mothering that influenced her sister to oppose her decision to mother on her own. Despite this, with the support of her mother, who gave her time to heal as discussed in the previous chapter, Lisa maintained her self-belief, that she had offered the best for her son, rejecting the stigma associated with sole mothering.

The positive account of sole motherhood expressed by Lisa sat alongside conflicting beliefs about motherhood held by other members in her family such as

her older sister. As previously noted, Lisa explained how her sister had tried forcefully to persuade her to have her baby adopted to avoid a perceived shame that would be brought upon her family because of her position as a young and single mother. Expanding on previous extracts, Lisa recounts in greater detail here the moment her sister came into the hospital with adoption papers ready for her to sign:

> I had the older sister while I was in hospital and I just had my baby you know... she came, with papers and documents because I was not married in the Christian way, and at that time that was in the days where she believed that I should have been married before I got pregnant. She frowned on me you know, and so that didn't help... then one day she walks into the hospital and she is standing there with all these papers and I said 'Oh what are they sis?'... 'Oh this is to help you, you know cos you're still young, adopt your son out'... My older sister you know!... I was there you know cos I was still in shock, um body was baby blues or something. And I was in shock and that ended up um, ended up she come and all them adoption papers, and because I was confused I was ready to sign 'em.... And my mother just went off her head ay! She was like 'You are not adopting my grandson out!' You know, so she just grabbed all them papers flung them in the bin, told my sister off... I've never spoken to her for ten years you know. (Lisa)

Significant within Lisa's narrative are the different perspectives about single motherhood within her family. Lisa recalled her mother advocating for her right to mother her child, while her sister held other assumptions about appropriate mothering. The above account demonstrates the complex contexts within which Lisa was mothering, which consequently led to estrangement from her sister. Lisa experienced her sister's beliefs as stigmatising and hurtful, evident in the tears that welled in her eyes as she reflected on this time and their relationship. This stigmatisation caused disharmony in her life, a sense of disconnection, and she deliberately separated herself and her child from her wider family. However, while she was exposed to the stigmatisation projected towards her by her sister, Lisa did not stigmatise her own experience. Lisa consciously moved away from shared caregiving, indicating a preference for mothering alone. By embracing sole mothering, Lisa has not substituted shared parenting for a nuclear family model, but presents a new construction of mothering, one which destabilises both extended and nuclear family constructs. What she has created is a reality where mothering alone is valued as a preferred and 'good' style of child-rearing, detached

from feelings of shame or stigma. In this way, Lisa has subjectively engineered ways of mothering to fit with her personal values and attitudes. There is some irony in this, as Lisa has detached herself from a shared mothering approach within an extended family because of the negative experiences she has experienced in relation to her sister's Christian beliefs. Religious colonialism is therefore somewhat ironically relevant to Lisa's rejection of shared mothering but also to her adoption of a more Western individualistic way of mothering.

My conversations with Lisa about mothering connect with studies that have examined the experiences of young Aboriginal single mothers. Larkins et al. (2011) found that young Aboriginal mothers living in Townsville[9], Queensland, seemed unconcerned about the social stigma and disapproval that might stereotypically be linked to becoming a young mother. Instead, they suggested that the Aboriginal mothers' experiences reflected the transformative potential of motherhood to bring about empowerment. This finding has also been noted by Senior and Chenhall (2008), who argue that motherhood (either young or single) in a remote Aboriginal community[10] may be seen positively by Aboriginal women, who feel that becoming a mother will lead to a more adult role in life, with more meaning and purpose. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, single motherhood is usually stigmatised because of its deviation from culturally entrenched and idealised notions of patriarchal motherhood within a nuclear family (Dowd 1999, 1995; Huda 200; Kelly 2010; Slaughter & Fineman 1995; Summers 2002; Swain 1995; Wolfinger 2014;). However, Lisa's narrative does not mirror the stigmatisation commonly experienced by single mothers within society; her self-assurance in positioning herself as single mother may also be interpreted as resistance to Christian and white patriarchal norms. This suggests that while stigmatisation may be pronounced, it is not necessarily internalised as a universalised experience.

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[9] Townsville is a region in North Queensland. 5.2% of the total population are Indigenous, with 70% of the population Aboriginal and 30% Torres Strait Islander. See https://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/about-townsville.

The remote Australian Aboriginal community in which Senior & Chenhall's research is set is in the southeast of the Northern Territory. The population makeup is roughly 900 Aboriginal people and 60 non-Aboriginal people (see Taylor et al. 2000, p. 18).

Therefore, dominant assumptions about single motherhood cannot be generalised since meanings of motherhood across race, class and culture are complex.

In contrast to Lisa, Grace was separated from her Aboriginal mother after her death when Grace was young. Following this, Grace's father remarried and she was removed from his care. Grace experienced a sense of being alone as she later mothered within a nuclear family and within her marriage to a man who succumbed to alcoholism. Grace talked to me about the isolation she experienced and the difficulties she had in maintaining connections with her husband:

> It's just harder together and in fact I just wished that he would go and he wished that I would take off then I suppose, but I wasn't moving without the kids and he wouldn't want the kids gone as well, no, cos he really loved his kids but he didn't put the time in for them and they understood that anyway. (Grace)

In the above narrative, Grace talked about being stuck in a nuclear family, where she wanted to leave and was unhappy, but that her happiness was sacrificed for the children. A sense of enduring loneliness and a lack of support was also related by Cindy:

> It was hard, I didn't have any support. I was away from my family, living in Adelaide at the time and my mother had already passed on … I didn't have anything from outside and counselling and support, like they have now they didn't have that then. … I just did things on my own, going to doctors and going to appointments and just a young couple and my husband was working and more or less just had to get on the best way that I could. More just isolated, I really was. (Cindy)

Reminding us that collective Aboriginal motherhood is not singular or universal, both Lisa and Grace experienced breakdown in their close and extended families, which affected their networks of support and influenced their mothering experiences. If Aboriginal motherhood is assumed to be built around extended networks of family, kin and community, where do the experiences of Aboriginal mothers who may not experience this fit? In the case of both women, an assumption that because of their Aboriginality they necessarily would have access to extended networks of care is challenged. Research about Aboriginal families often focuses on the complexity that lies within Aboriginal family and kinship systems in a traditional context (Bell 1980; Berndt 1950b, 1962; Burbank 1985;

Cowlishaw, Gillian 1978; Goodale 1971; Hamilton 1975; Kaberry 1936; McConnel 1930; Merlan 1986). These representations of the Aboriginal family are expressed as though the 'traditional' extended Aboriginal family is a static or universal structure. In doing so, these representations fail to adequately acknowledge the influence of colonisation and state intervention in restructuring the way in which Aboriginal families are understood and live in a multiplicity of ways today. This lack of acknowledgement of the multiple realities within Aboriginal experiences of family extend to motherhood and feed into the silencing of complex mother identities and caring arrangements. This can contribute to further marginalisation because Western assumptions about Aboriginal mothers having a network of supportive family surrounding them may conceal an unmet need for connection and support when mothering.

Intimate relationships: 'I've never been with an Aboriginal man'

More broadly, mothers in this research reflected on the ways in which different relationships in their lives impacted on their experiences of mothering. The mothers in this study reflected on their relationships with men, whether single or partnered, as being isolating. For example, Mona talked to me about her experience of being married,

> [my husband] did nothing for the kids because he was always on the road and I, I even said that time, I said you were more in love with the truck and the organisation that you working for... the only time you take notice of the kids when you're around is when you're telling em off and I said don't you dare tell em off in front of me, and cos I punched him in the face and gave him a blood nose once. I thought you bastard you come here try to be the father and you not having the responsibilities that I had to carry... [he] never once went to parent–teacher meeting, never came to see his kids play basketball and football and soccer, he never, I was always there for them... I was a single parent, and, and the one thing that he respected though, and he said when people said 'What's the magic formula for having three well behaved children like that?' and he said 'No, Mona takes the credit for that', he acknowledged that, which is good. (Mona)

In Mona's narrative, she expresses an experience of feeling like a single parent despite being in a partnership with her husband. This idea of being alone in a marriage and as a mother was discussed by other mothers in this study. Reflections on feelings of mothering 'alone' within a nuclear family resist dominant

constructions of the nuclear family as ideal, which I have discussed earlier in this thesis (Chapter 3). This reveals an irony where the isolation frequently associated with lone mothering is also associated with mothering within a nuclear family unit. While Grace perceived feeling supported through the 'mothers and babies' group she accessed, and the friendships she made there, there were many complexities in the recollection of her motherhood experiences. Grace shared with me that she felt she missed out on important guidance from her mother and wondered if having her mother around to guide her would have made her less naïve about personal relationships. Not knowing her husband was an alcoholic before she married him, Grace wondered if her mother would have been able to help her by giving her advice when making decisions in her life:

> But I didn't realise, I never thought I'd marry a drunk, cos I was very wary of that, you know I didn't see it, I didn't see he was an alcoholic, it's just sad, I feel that I would have loved to have known a lot more, I had no-one to teach me anything about anything, so that's what I've probably missed a lot of learning. I didn't know where to go to or where to get help from… where's the help? There was nothing, nowhere, there was just no help! You might get a lot more help now, I don't know how that all works, cos a lot more things are out there. (Grace)

Grace recalled this part of her life with a strong sense of feeling unsupported, 'without help' and alone as a mother. Grace persevered in a dysfunctional marriage, which may be interpreted as internalising beliefs associated with perceptions of a woman's duty to care for her children, a desire to maintain the nuclear family and to serve her husband. When we discussed this, Grace explained her decision as one of 'you make your bed, you lie in it'. This thinking may also reflect structural barriers that existed in Australian society at this time for women, where separation from a husband was taboo. Anna Haebich (2017) also points out that Aboriginal women have been subjected to the power of a colonial patriarchy in addition to more general gendered oppression, which has positioned them as inferior to white men and women. These negative constructions have encouraged exploitation and the abuse of Aboriginal women, limiting their spaces for action. These state coercions and constraints on choice and action have been explored in Chapter 2. Understanding the potential influence of these historical and societal conditions is important to consider in relation to Grace's experience of remaining in a

relationship that was troubled. Grace played down her husband's alcoholism by reasoning that her situation could have been worse if she was being beaten by her husband. This is something she evaluated as more damaging, noting that her life would have turned out much differently if this were the case. Thus, Grace reframed her relationship woes and the hardship in her life in a positive way.

It seemed that persevering with her marriage was not simply about keeping the family together but was also driven by empathy and 'getting help' for her and her husband. Grace's husband shared similar childhood experiences of loneliness and, because of this, she hoped that he may one day change. Remaining in a loveless relationship with the hope of change is not unique to Grace's circumstances. This perspective is also noted as a reason many women stay in violent relationships (World Health Organization 2012). Although Grace's relationship was not physically violent, there is a link between the ways in which women are emotionally affected by a partner's abuse and alcoholism in relationships. Research has found that women are torn between feelings of hope and fear, 'fear that the cycle would repeat, but hope that he would stay sober' (Wilson, Graham & Taft 2017, p. 121). This story captures the complexities of mothering that occur within the realities of intimate relationships.

However, being stolen by the state and separated from her mother and family has also had a significant impact on many different areas of Grace's life which, in turn, has influenced the way she views the world. Throughout her narrative, Grace shared with me that she frequently reflected on the meaning of 'love' and 'happiness', and she often returned to these notions either side of discussing difficulties or hardships in her life. Women's experience of motherhood is often ambivalent, where mothers' express contradictory feelings of love and hate towards their children (Lupton 2000; Miller 2007; Parker 1997), which ambivalence may also extend to experiences of mothering in the context of difficult relationships. Grace's narrative of her mothering as bringing her love and happiness must therefore also include the reality of her husband's alcoholism, which left her lonely and unsupported. This reveals the complexity and deeper meanings associated with how women often reframe their mothering experiences. When Grace says that

being beaten would be worse and tells me 'but you cope', we can see how her history shapes her subjective perspective and meanings of motherhood within the broader complexity of her life. This brings us back to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (1998, 2000a) idea that Aboriginal women and mothers have been imagined in singular ways through a white (male) lens that ignores these complexities, and that diverse experiences of motherhood are therefore not captured in dominant representations of the Aboriginal mother. Grace's experiences as a mother highlights that academics need to begin the work of deconstructing hegemonic ideologies of motherhood in order to challenge the marginalisation of Aboriginal motherhoods.

In talking with the women, I learnt that violence against Aboriginal women occurs in ways that are more complex than my original assumptions. Being influenced by dominant constructions of Aboriginal life (see Chapter 2), I had made an assumption of 'Aboriginal men beating Aboriginal women' yet this was challenged when I discovered from the women in this study that many had experienced violence at the hands of white men. By reflecting on my assumption, I recognised the power of stereotyping and popular media portrayals in demonising Aboriginal men. While issues of domestic violence did not dominate the women's narratives about motherhood, and were usually peripheral, when women discussed relationships with non-Aboriginal men these were often violent. Aboriginal families are living in a complex space of historically entrenched violence and trauma. This complexity is reflected in Lisa's narrative. When Lisa reflected upon her relationships with men throughout her life, she recounted experiences of considerable violence. She explained that because she was taught to fear Aboriginal men, she always went into relationships with white men. This fear of Aboriginal men is discussed in Chapter 2 and reflects segregationist and assimilationist policy discourses aimed towards 'whitening' Australia through the 'breeding out' of Aboriginality. While this was not disclosed by all women in this study, Aboriginal men have been purposefully demonised, which has probably influenced how Aboriginal women see Aboriginal men too (see Watson 2005, 2007, 2009). The state's construction of Aboriginal male violence towards Aboriginal women being

endemic in Aboriginal culture has given more power to white men and created more opportunity for violence towards Aboriginal women. In this study, Grace, Lisa and Cindy all shared experiences of violence, sexual assault or predatory behaviour by non-Aboriginal men. Lisa's perception of white men as better partners is therefore not only shaped by her experiences of seeing her aunties beaten by Aboriginal men but is also influenced in complex ways by colonial and patriarchal social messages. Lisa shared with me her feelings of disappointment that she had been told white men would be better, saying she felt misled because her relationships with white men had always involved abuse at their hands:

> I've never been with an Aboriginal man, I don't know why, I had the idea that if I go with an Aboriginal man, I've seen my aunties getting flogged, and I say well I'm never going with an Aboriginal man, but I've been going with white fellas and that's all they ever done. Yeah and I used to get flogged around like a golly wog, it's rough! … They cut me up and all, see I'll show you there's a bit of a scar there [shows a large scar from stab wound across her abdomen], cut me and said you know if you run from me I'll kill you, you know and I thinking no, and that's why I shy away from them. (Lisa)

This illustrates how Lisa had internalised a belief that white men were superior to Aboriginal men. While Lisa says, 'I don't know why I had the idea', suggesting she is not clear about where the message against Aboriginal men came from, she also recalled the influence of witnessing violence inflicted upon her aunties.

Hence, while dominant colonialist discourses have negatively positioned Aboriginal men in the past, it is clear that the construction of Aboriginal men in this way continues to the present day. Reflecting on this, I am reminded of Irene Watson's (2009, p. 3) comments in response to the Northern Territory[11] Intervention[12]. She called out the way in which violence, particularly against women and children has been misrepresented as endemic to Aboriginal communities. Watson has emphasised the role of the state in demonising

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[11] The Northern Territory (NT) is located in the central and central northern parts of Australia. Although the NT covers a vast area, it is territory rather than a state owing to its relatively small population of around 250,000.

[12] The Northern Territory Intervention was a response carried out by Australia's Howard government in June 2007. This reaction by government followed from the release of findings in the *Little Children are Sacred* report (see Anderson and Wild 2007), which claimed there were endemic levels of abuse and violence against Aboriginal children and women (see Watson, Irene 2009).

Aboriginal culture through policy responses associated with assimilation, but also clarifies how constructions of the benevolent state have worked to misrepresent Aboriginal men, with the state imagined as 'crusader and rescuer of Aboriginal women and children' (Watson 2009, p. 4, 2005, 2007). This becomes particularly evident when we look at state reactions to Aboriginal male violence towards Aboriginal women, where Aboriginal men are quickly vilified. Earlier contributions from Spivak (1999, p. 284) have also pointed to the replication of this phenomena in colonised India; that is, the depiction of 'white men rescuing brown women from brown men' (Spivak 1999, p. 284). Watson (2009) highlights that marrying white men was imagined as a pathway to escaping racial oppression and as an opportunity to access mainstream Australian society and its benefits. Yet for women in this study, white men did not turn out to be the panacea for violence that had been historically suggested to them.

Along with challenges in their relationships with white men, mothers in this study had also experienced family breakdown or family removal and often felt socially excluded as mothers. They often sensed that something was missing from their lives and experienced feelings of isolation, even if they now practised multiple mothering within systems of community and kinship support or had close family support. This is perhaps not surprising given that the intentions of colonial removals were to erase culture and identity (Cunneen & Rowe 2014). Therefore, the assumption that an Aboriginal mother will always be well versed in 'traditional' culture, surrounded by extensive networks of family and enriched with certain Aboriginal knowledges did not always apply to the mothers in this study (who belong to the Stolen Generations). As mothers who do not fit the stereotype of the 'traditional Aboriginal mother', some women expressed feeling inferior and questioned if they had anything worthwhile to offer their children and communities. This returns to the earlier discussion of representations of the 'traditional' versus 'contemporary' Aboriginal woman in Chapter 2, where I discussed the ways in which patriarchal and colonialist representations of Aboriginal women have layered meaning. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000b) described, the binary representation of 'contemporary' and 'traditional' has

privileged some Aboriginal identities and left other women with a sense of being 'culturally contaminated' (Moreton-Robinson 2000b, p. 75). This questioning of Aboriginality and mothering resonates with Carlson's (2016) writings about the politics of Aboriginal identity, where she points to the emotional and historically entrenched nature of claiming Aboriginality. There are tensions that inevitably emerge, as Aboriginal people have attempted to legitimate their identity and mothering practices both informally and formally. For women in this study who were stolen as children, this is further complicated through colonial circumstances that have produced insecurities associated with their sense of belonging. The women's mothering experiences expressed a certain paradox: they had strong interpersonal connections yet felt alone and isolated at the same time. Whether mothers were single mothers or mothered within a nuclear family arrangement with a husband, women still expressed a sense of mothering alone. This contrasts with portrayals in the literature about supportive networks of caring in Aboriginal families (Ryan 2011), suggesting that the experience of isolation within Aboriginal motherhoods may have been overlooked. Alongside this, women also had to resist stigmatising exchanges in their complex relationships with the government and 'welfare'.

Mothering and the state

As discussed in the literature review, Aboriginal mothering occurs under the surveillance and gaze of the state (Cull 2006; Lavell-Harvard 2006). Many of the mothers in this study have mothered with a sense that their mothering practices are under scrutiny by government authorities. In an earlier discussion of the removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers (Chapter 2), I point out that past policies have specifically targeted Aboriginal mothers, and have included the legislated kidnapping of Aboriginal children from their families (Elder 2009; Paisley 1997; Rudd 2008; Terszak 2016), leading to what is termed the Stolen Generations. As noted earlier, these actions were validated through the labelling of Aboriginal mothers as 'unfit'. Hence both mothers and children lived in fear of the state, which led to the intergenerational trauma and profound distress that continues to the present day (Atkinson 2002). The women who contributed to this

research all shared feelings of being monitored by the state and had an awareness of 'welfare', as they described it, predetermining their mothering as risky. However, there were differences in how these experiences with government were interwoven through the women's narratives, with examples of both positive and negative perspectives. For example, reflecting on Lisa's story again, different beliefs within her family have both normalised and stigmatised her experience of motherhood. Lisa's mother was supportive of her as a young single mother, although her sister strongly questioned Lisa's mothering capacity. However, these family tensions were not the only influences on Lisa's feelings of self-doubt about her mothering. When interviewing Lisa, it was evident that she believed that the practices of state institutions, such as family services, had caused her to question her mothering. As well, as Mona summarised in her reflections on her time living in rural communities and the stories she had heard from elders: 'Some welfares [service providers] did good and some did more damage than the others'. In the following section I will explore subthemes associated with both harmful and helpful 'welfare' from the women's narratives because there were particularly diverse experiences that were identified within the overarching theme of mothering and the state.

'Welfare' and the governing of mothers: 'Some welfares did good and some did more damage than the others'

When the women talked about their interactions with government, they most commonly used the blanket term 'welfare'. Women used this term broadly, to signify service providers, mothers and babies' groups, family services, inspectors monitoring their actions and homes, various state representatives with whom they had interacted and who removed them from their family, as well as state and federal government bureaucracies. While the women spoke of 'welfare' as the government structures, policies and services that had shaped their experiences and influenced their lives, there was complexity in their use of the term and how it was constructed. Though the term 'welfare' may at times connote a sense of help, this was not necessarily the way in which welfare was reflected in the women's experiences. In Australia, the welfare state was initially established as a safety net for the socially disadvantaged, and measures such as income support are one

example of the way in which the welfare state aims to provide for its most disadvantaged citizens (e.g. Aboriginal Australians, sole mothers etc) (see for example Carson & Kerr 2017, ch. 12). However, entitlements distributed through the welfare state have also been seen as problematic by some Aboriginal commentators. For example, an understanding of welfare as 'toxic' is a view conveyed by Aboriginal social commentator Noel Pearson. Pearson suggests that the passive distribution of welfare (that is, with no demand for reciprocation or responsibility) has compromised the wellbeing and values of Aboriginal people, stating that it has become part of Aboriginal mentality and eroded personal responsibility (Pearson 2000). Negative attitudes towards welfare recipients have been echoed more broadly, with Australian Liberal politician Joe Hockey creating social shockwaves in a speech to the Institute of Economic Affairs in London by pronouncing that 'the age of entitlement is over' (Hockey 2012). This points to shifting social attitudes, where the political rhetoric previously associated with welfare as providing help, now leans towards the idea of welfare as debilitating and therefore only conditionally justifiable (Mendes 2013). This debate also influenced the women's narratives in relation to welfare, where 'support' was often discussed as something that is conditional or where there was a sense of 'strings attached'. As I have discussed earlier in this thesis (Chapter 2), despite the good intentions of 'welfare', state engagements with Aboriginal mothers have at times produced traumatic and problematic outcomes. While the women's narratives do not necessarily echo the 'toxicity' that Pearson (2000) describes, they do point to dominant assumptions of what kind of help is determined as 'good' and how their mothering has been called into question by 'welfare'.

For the women in this study, the relationship between 'welfare' and 'the government' is intertwined in complex ways. The government performs the action of 'controlling or regulating a state, organization, or people' (Oxford English Dictionary 2017). In Australian society, the lives of all citizens are controlled in some way by government, with individuals perceiving the government as being both a help and hindrance. For many Aboriginal Australian mothers, relationships with government hold deeper meaning and tension associated with experiences of

unrecognised sovereignty, invasion and oppression. In the extensive discussion of state control and Aboriginal mothering in Chapter 2, I illustrate how, as colonised subjects, Aboriginal mothers have had their mothering specifically targeted and dismantled by the colonisers. This has shaped a specific kind of relationship with and reliance on government and welfare services. While the government has been seen to enact social responsibility through welfare as a response to Indigenous disadvantage (Carson & Kerr 2017; Gibson 1999), it has continued to play a role in the construction of Aboriginal people as 'the problem' and as the creators of their own disadvantage (Strakosch 2015). As Walter (2007, p. 162) explains, in a neoliberal society, the solutions to social problems are targeted at those people who are experiencing that problem first-hand. As I have argued earlier, Aboriginal mothers have been constructed as responsible for their own disadvantage, with the belief cultivated that Aboriginal mothers are 'unfit'. This has affected how Aboriginal women in this study have understood their mothering, producing feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Hence, mothers live with the contradictions and complexities of government that involve surveillance *and* supportive sources of 'help'. The analysis below elaborates on the tensions that mothers experience through the scrutiny and intervention of the state.

'Welfare' and harm

As noted earlier, the women in this study expressed living with a sense of government surveillance and always being under the gaze of the state. The size of families and having many children was expressed as a cause for concern, prompting government scrutiny and intervention. Mona discussed this as she reflected on the past,

> You wasn't allowed to have big families, the welfare would come in and take over then, you know, or the government would send the welfare. (Mona)

This lived experience of state surveillance and the impact that this had on mothering and Aboriginal family life was also expressed by Lisa. When Lisa explained her contact with government-funded family services as a young mother, she recalls the effect this had on her confidence as a mother:

> No, well they sort of said that well I'm a single mother, maybe she doesn't know what she's doing or something like that you know, I might muck up or, and that happening like that I felt, why they doing that? Don't they think that I could look after my own baby, you know… and I started questioning myself. (Lisa)

The significant impact on Lisa's sense of self and confidence as a mother is revealed in this extract. For Lisa, a sense of surveillance and the stigmatisation she felt increased her feelings of not being an able or 'good enough' mother. This vulnerability has links to her past where she witnessed government workers steal her cousins, and her memories of being told by her mother to hide in the willows and the reeds along the rivers to escape the state-sanctioned removal of Aboriginal children. The experience of children being taught to 'scatter and hide' from authorities to prevent removal is discussed in Chapter 2. The historical framing of Aboriginal mothers, highlighted by Wheeler (2006), as being beyond help, in need of help, or required to become more 'civilised' infiltrates Lisa's consciousness, causing her to question herself and her mothering.

Grace also talked about government in terms of the impositions of welfare surveillance and control. As a young child, Grace's mother became ill and died, with state authorities deciding that her father's new wife was not able to properly care for them. For her, welfare removed her right to see her father and she believed the government made the wrong decision to remove her from her father's care. Grace expressed a feeling of sadness that she was rendered powerless and wanted to stay with her father:

> I really desperately wanted love. See my Dad remarried which was very hard, hmm, and we weren't allowed to see him then and his family because welfare said she wasn't good enough for us… I didn't believe that cos I thought she was an alright person. (Grace)

The government control over her childhood life remained with Grace into her adulthood. She was frustrated at the difficulty she had relinquishing herself from the hold of welfare, recalling the time when she wanted to get married and was not given permission. Speaking of this as the time she tried to 'part from welfare', Grace said:

> Cos when I was 18, I could leave under welfare, actually you don't, you're not really parted from welfare until you, you think you are… but I got married just before I was 21… you have to still ask for permission from welfare! And they forgot to get back to me straight away and they were… "oh they were so sorry they forgot" they just forgot giving me permission, isn't that ridiculous? (Grace)

When Lisa and Grace talked to me about 'welfare' in their lives, they shared stories about feelings of being treated unfairly, restrictions on their freedom and a sense of a loss of autonomy and control. Lisa talked of the times when welfare workers would intrude into their home, and the compassion that she felt for her mother having to persevere through this invasion of her private life,

> And then they'd come and visit, put their white gloves on, and run on top of the door. And they'd look again… and I'd think oh man! I'm going to get thrown out the place! …You know any excuse to take us away from Mum. (Lisa)

In this account, Lisa points to the invasive practices of state surveillance that had been a part of her life. Her story conveyed a sense of insecurity about mothering through her belief that the 'welfare' would use 'any excuse to take us away from Mum'. When reflecting upon the different experiences that Lisa and Grace described with welfare, both women documented experiences of authority and control in their lives in ways that they deemed as unjust, involving a misrepresentation of help that had instead caused them harm. An understanding of this tension is discussed in the seminal work of Leslie Margolin (1997), who has also pointed to the way in which social welfare systems have constructed 'social work' as acts of helping, while simultaneously investigating and imposing dominant white, Western and middle-class values upon the poor. In discussion of the next sub-theme, I contrast my analysis of strained relationships with welfare with those that were conveyed as helpful or beneficial in mothers' lives.

Helpful 'welfare'

There were numerous contradictions and complexities within and across the interviews in relation to mothers' relationships with 'welfare'. Despite all the women experiencing or witnessing the trauma of being removed from families by governments, and a general understanding that government policy and actions

have affected their communities in devastating ways, many of the participants, in particular Cindy and Mona, indicated a preference for engaging with mainstream government service provision over Aboriginal-specific services. This was often mentioned in relation to contact with health services and came as a surprise to me, challenging my assumptions that Aboriginal mothers would be hesitant to engage with mainstream services. This assumption had been reinforced by the literature, which had indicated such a reluctance was widespread (see for example Herring et al. 2013; Kurtz et al. 2008).

Continuing with stories about the complex role of welfare in their lives, like Lisa, Grace also experienced feelings of being alone and isolated from family. However, unlike Lisa, who witnessed the removal of children, Grace experienced separation from her family herself at the hands of government. Despite the extensive negative experiences of both state removal and ongoing abuse that Grace endured as the result of government intervention in her life as a child, this did not prevent Grace from engaging with government services for support later in her life as a mother. These contradictions in relationships with government suggest that escaping the 'tentacles' of the state may be particularly challenging for Aboriginal mothers. While Grace has had experiences with 'welfare' in her past that have been harmful, she also endured her husband's alcoholism and explained that contact with government-funded family services had come as a form of welcome respite. Having access to such services provided opportunities for Grace to connect with other mothers and find happiness in her mothering experiences. Grace told me about time she spent at a mothers and babies group in her early motherhood years that provided her with opportunities for connection and friendship:

> I went to the mothers and babies place, yeah cos that's where I went to make sure everything was going ok. Yeah, I did that every week and seen all the mothers, they used to call it mothers and babies... I was definitely going there, cos I wanted to check that they were going ok. ... Cos my husband's mother was an alcoholic, so it was just no go there... And I met my friend when I had my third child, no when I had my second one, and she was the best friend ever [name]. I made a connection with her and she was such a help for me... she used to help babysit if I had to go somewhere and yeah. So she used to see if I was going ok... we used to go to the shop together, she used to... she was in a situation herself similar to mine, so we used to get on very well, just going to the shops together. We used to walk to the shops and shop, and you know

> with the kids, and the kids would drive you nuts (laughs). I got on really well with her and so that made happiness a bit more but yeah. (Grace)

For Grace, the chance to engage with other mothers was a much needed support for her to 'make sure everything was going ok'. Grace stated that she experienced a great deal of loneliness in her life before her children came along. This service provided by a government agency was a place for reassurance and enabled her to connect with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers and form friendships. A government policy initiative and government services provided her with possibilities for the development of friendships that supported her mothering and made her feel less isolated. There is an irony in the fact that the government was a mechanism responsible for removing family connections from Grace's life but also provided opportunities for social connection.

The 'state' may be distinguished in different ways, both as an overarching governing structure, but also as a range of agencies and services that operate under its discretion. Women's engagement with different mechanisms of the state was experienced differently, depending on how power relations were situated in their lives at the time. For example, Mona worked as a government employee at a school in a remote community. She discussed being involved with the school for 11 years and the independence and freedom this brought to her in terms of being able to support and advocate for young people. This points to the complexity of Aboriginal women's relationships with 'government', as a colonising and disempowering force, but also one of support. Specific statements from some of the contributors to the study point to an acute awareness of the government as responsible for causing pain in their lives, despite its benefits. For example, Grace says, 'Welfare just split us all, welfare took us... That was the saddest day', or when Valerie explained, 'Because of other government policies, she [her mother] lost her Mum very early'. Helena's reference to welfare struggles was reflected in her thoughts about mission life. The harm she experienced is conveyed when she said, 'The restrictions were just so bad there on the mission'. In this way, the government has operated in women's lives in ways where they feel that there is no escape from its authority (Goodall 1995; HREOC 1997; Lavell & Lavell-Harvard 2006). However, I have also

shown that mothers are using their own agency to find spaces within government (including through the support of services for mothers) that they can benefit from. This points to the resilience and strength of the Aboriginal mothers in this study who, despite histories of oppression by government, have found ways to both engage with and resist 'welfare'. Thus, accessing government services and supports has occurred alongside activism and opposition to state colonialist agendas and practices. For example, as discussed in previous chapters, grandmothers have a powerful role in advocating for social change and rallying community support[13]. Participants in this study have strived to actively influence decision making. For example, Mona talked about the critical roles she had performed throughout her life both in remote and metropolitan areas, with Cindy continuing significant work in relation to Stolen Generations and native title. Women's lives revealed complex engagements with governments that both hindered and helped their mothering and spurred everyday resistances to state practices of power.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the diversity and complexities within Aboriginal women's stories of motherhood, revealing that mothers both internalise and challenge dominant ideologies of the 'good mother', deepening constructions of 'intensive mothering' and 'multiple mothering'. It can be concluded from this chapter that the women in this study are mothering within multifaceted ideologies of motherhood/s and are forging unique subjective meanings of their own mothering. I argue that a lack of acknowledgement of the diversity of Aboriginal motherhood identities within the literature silences complex caring arrangements, with mothers who do not fit within normative constructs of 'good mother' being further marginalised. The women discussed abusive and isolating intimate relationships with white men and their feelings of mothering alone within a nuclear family. This finding challenges assumptions that all Aboriginal mothers are

[13] An example of this is the national network called Grandmothers Against Removals (GMAR) which began in 2014. The network is run by First Nations community members directly affected by removals and works to prevent ongoing Stolen Generations. The network has collaborated with NSW Government in an attempt to influence child protection-related decision making.

supported by extended kinship networks and family, while also resisting assumptions that mothering in the nuclear family is inherently superior or better than other arrangements.

In this chapter, I showed how experiences of mothering are shaped by women's historical and current relationships with 'welfare' and the state, highlighting how relationships with the state were often harmful and disempowering, but sometimes a source of support. The state has created a discourse that Aboriginal mothers are 'unfit' and has positioned Aboriginal mothers as responsible for their own disadvantage. State attempts to break down and undermine Aboriginal communities through deficit constructions of motherhood are detailed earlier in this thesis (Chapter 2). These colonising state practices have contributed to mothers' sense of fear and surveillance by government, while at the same time they must often depend on government help. In essence, the violence of the state and mothers' relationship with governments arguably resembles a cycle of abuse in some respects, with the government in the position of power, inflicting harm and yet providing help in ways that are extremely difficult for women to escape.

Reflecting on the operation of the state in Aboriginal mothers' lives, I have settled upon the notion of an 'unfit' state, where Aboriginal mothering has been sculpted as a problem and, as such, has produced an industry for the state to service. I argue that a discourse of Aboriginal mothers as 'unfit' has purposefully diverted attention away from the actions of the 'unfit state'. Agents of the state (including the media and service providers) have participated in a sustained public deception in relation to the contribution of Aboriginal mothers and are scapegoating Aboriginal mothers as culpable for their own hardship, which has concealed the government's own negligence and its pursuit of power over Aboriginal women's lives. Widespread acceptance of an 'unfit state' is likely to come up against considerable resistance and can be easily deflected because of Aboriginal mothers' experiences of support at the hands of governments. However, the current rates of child removal discussed in Chapter 2 tell a compelling story of the state's continued intrusion in the lives of Aboriginal mothers and communities. In the next chapter, I extend this analysis through an exploration of intergenerational traumas and

marginalisation that have influenced women's practices and perceptions of mothering.

9. Responding to the past

Introduction

Community elders, including grandmothers, play an important role in recounting the events of the past and responding to the effects of colonial state policies on Aboriginal families and communities (see for example Lohoar et al. 2014). The impact of historical trauma is significant to the understanding of women's fears and anxieties associated with mothering. As I have shown in previous chapters, the colonial legacy endured by Aboriginal mothers impacts how they mother in complex and communal ways. This final analysis chapter further considers how past experiences of trauma have influenced mothering and the development of protective and nurturing mothering practices. To explore this historical context, this chapter discusses a broad theme associated with histories of trauma, fear and anxiety and their effects on mothering. Due to the intensity and complexity of these experiences, I will explore this theme through a number of subthemes that include: experiences of removal from family; experiences of abuse linked to acts of protectiveness as a mother; experiences of death, grief and loss; approaches to concealing racism to protect children's identity; and concealing death to protect children from trauma.

Histories of trauma, fear and anxiety

The women in this study were all grandmothers who grew up in Australia's assimilation era. Two contributors to this study were directly affected by government policies that removed them from their families and homes as children. As I have discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), the removal of children occurred with varied intensity at different times and places. However, from 1910 to 1970, 'between one in three and one in ten' children were stolen from their families (HREOC 1997, p. 37). This figure is representative of the women of this study, where one-third of them (2 out of 6) were directly stolen from their families and communities. While two women were directly removed, another three women who contributed to the study had lived with a parent who had been removed from their family as a child. Others had witnessed the removal of loved ones or others in the

community. All acknowledged the long shadow that state-sponsored child removal policies had cast on their sense of security as mothers.

The 'Bringing Them Home' inquiry (1997) found that it was most common for Aboriginal parents who had been removed to endure anxiety when raising their children and to live with the fear that their children would also be forcibly removed. While these findings resonate with my conversations with the women, anxiety over raising their own children also manifested in a certain way that focused on nurturing and protection. The women in this study talked about mothering as bringing happiness into their lives through the love and sense of family they were able to derive from children. While the inquiry found that often history repeated itself, with children of those stolen also being removed from parents, none of the women in this study had experienced the removal of their own children by the state. These facts exemplify the diverse ways in which historical traumas can affect individuals.

Removal, abuse and protectiveness: 'Loving and caring and taking care of them 24/7'

Cindy was taken from her family as a young girl. As a member of the Stolen Generations Cindy was exposed to significant abuse, trauma and grief throughout her childhood. Being taken from her family is something Cindy felt reduced her opportunity to share the mothering of her children with other mothers. During her younger years, she endured being separated from her family and country and she reflected that this had changed her life course because, during her time as a mother, she had been living in the city, not close to family. She talked about 'overprotecting' and nurturing her children:

> Loving and caring and taking care of them 24/7. I believe that maybe I was too over protective and then when I look back understand why… I never had that experience of shared mothering, I wish that I did when I look back at my culture and my life. We got the same issues I think, the same way of nurturing our babies from the time they were born and breast feeding and change their babies, and change them and feed them and all that… so whether you are a monkey or a white person or a black person we are all doing the same thing, but sometime we might not have the same things. (Cindy)

As a survivor of removal and abuse, Cindy mothers in a way that is acutely attuned to the protection of her children. Through our conversations, Cindy described her own mothering practices as influenced by the trauma she herself had experienced in her past. She conveyed to me a sense of loss and a disappointment that she was not able to experience mothering in a way that was more closely connected with her Aboriginal family. She explained that being stolen impacted on her sense of belonging and identity throughout her life. This resonates with the literature from Indigenous academics, who have pointed to a loss of mothering knowledges associated with being removed and the interruption this has caused to the later sharing of Indigenous knowledges (Moreton-Robinson 2000a). Cindy described that the past had influenced the way she mothered her own children and conveyed her belief that if she had not been removed, she may have had a different, less isolating mothering experience. Cindy pointed to a universality of motherhood and nurturing when she said 'We got the same issues I think, the same way of nurturing our babies', and she also articulated historical and material disadvantages that could mediate a mother's experience when she said, 'We might not have the same things'. She understood that her past experiences of abuse influenced the way in which she experienced motherhood and the emphasis she placed on notions of protection. Cindy's story points to how, as a survivor of abuse, she has developed a heightened sense of protectiveness in her mothering approach, one which she described as 'overprotective', and which reflected a desire to prevent the trauma of abuse in her own children.

Like Cindy, Grace also talked about how surviving trauma had shaped her mothering practices. Grace was removed from her father as a child when her mother died and she experienced years of traumatic abuse. Grace also described the way in which the past had influenced how she understood protectiveness as a mother. She emphasised the joys of mothering and the need to protect her own children, which again alludes to her sense of mothering in the context of surviving past trauma.

> Oh, as a mother, I was just happy, I just, it's just like I knew what to do basically I think cos I was just happy. … That just made me feel happy, kids made me feel happy so I wasn't miserable… well the love that you just get from

> just having a child is beautiful on its own… I don't know I just felt wonderful that I had a baby and I knew that that was someone to love and look after, you protect, especially protect. I was very oh, more devoted to time to protect them from (laughs) anything I think. Not easy though. (Grace)

Grace understood that her role of 'protector' in the context of mothering was influenced by her past experiences of feeling unhappy, afraid and alone. Motherhood brings happiness into her life, which she contrasted with the unhappy times of being removed from her own parents and family. Grace spoke about being very protective of her children and often stressed how she wanted to protect and be there for her 'kids'. The idea of protection was something that Grace emphasised as her primary role as a mother. However, she also acknowledged that it is 'not easy though', alluding to the realities of an unjust world, as also discussed in previous chapters.

It could be assumed that all mothers aim to protect and nurture their children. In the literature, dominant theories of attachment suggest that a secure attachment is developed between mother and child through protective feelings and emotions (Eltringham & Aldridge 2002; Goldberg et al. 1999). A study by Buchanan et al. (2014, p. 722) considers the mother–child relationship in circumstances of domestic violence, pointing to the specific nature of protectiveness in abusive contexts, where fear may cause mothers to 'respond with heightened protective feelings, thoughts and actions' towards their children. While Buchanan's study talks about mothers' protectiveness in active circumstances of domestic violence, from my discussions with women in this study, it was also abuse that had occurred in the past (childhood and adolescence) that caused heightened protectiveness throughout motherhood. Thus, Grace expressing her desire to protect her children has complex meanings that are intertwined with the abuse she experienced, and the continuing effects of historical colonial state policies on her life. The sexual and physical abuse that Grace had experienced as a child contributed to her being fearful that the same harm could come to her children and this generated fears and anxieties that shaped her protectiveness towards her own children.

Grace talked about mothering in ways that suggested her past experiences had informed her interpretations of protectiveness as a mother. She constantly

'worried' but then came to realise that 'you can only protect so long' when her children became older and went out with their 'mates'. While she has described her initial engagement with mothering as imbued with feelings of 'love and peace', she also spoke of the anxieties she experienced as her children grew older and left home:

> …but I was a bit see, to me I was a bit more like a protective, I was, I'd be worried about other things… When they went to school then I was worried about that too, I used to go and meet them you know, 'til they were old enough to come home themselves. But I always wanted to be there, so therefore I didn't do anything else I don't spose. … Well I just feel that its love, love and peace and yeah. I felt love and peace when I had that child, when it was just me and the children it was just totally love and peace, I was just no worries for that time… until they get that older age then its fright its really… what do you do? That's when I got that 'Oh what am I gonna do with this boy?' (laughs). That beautiful son that you want to pull, but I tell you they're hard to hold when they're ready to go out a door, then it's really not the easiest thing to hang onto somebody, well you think 'Where you gonna go? What you gonna do? What reason do you wanna go?' (laughs),'I wanna see mates and I just think 'Well that's fair enough, but you can only protect so long, then they gotta make their mind up, but you still fight, you still fight. (Grace)

Throughout our conversations, Grace returned to the idea that she believed it was her primary role as a mother to protect her children, and it was from her children that she gained a sense of happiness and peace in her life. From our conversations, I was able to understand that Grace cherished the closeness from the love that she gave and received from her children. However, Grace also talked about the challenge of returning to feelings of unhappiness and loneliness when her children were not by her side. She reflected on this transition period, when children leave home:

> …But you can't do nothing about it, it's just that… well I didn't realise that they come back anyway, I just thought oh! this this how it is now, back to loneliness. (Grace)

In these words Grace expresses an emotional shift at the time when her children left home, and then realising that 'they come back anyway'. There is a great deal of research and literature that considers the transition into motherhood and the process of becoming a mother (Choi et al. 2005; Gatrell 2005; Miller 2007, 2011; Sevan 2012). Within this work there is some attention to parental separation (divorce), and the 'empty nest syndrome' more broadly (Glen 1975; Harkins 1978;

Mitchell 2006; Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009). Research exploring the transition experienced by mothers during the later stages of motherhood is receiving more attention recently (Francis-Connolly & Sytniak 2015; Green 2016). Trish Green (2016) considers women's experiences when adult children leave home by sharing a personal account of this transition and the emotional shock that caught her by surprise when her children left. She explained how her mothering was so focused around preparing her children to leave that she had felt personally unprepared. However, much of the literature on transitions in the later stages of motherhood assume a Western middle-class position; it does not fit the understandings of Aboriginal women who have experienced systemic removal and abuse. Feelings of abandonment as a child might resurface for them later when their grown children leave home. For Aboriginal mothers in this study, their children brought them feelings of 'love and peace' — feelings that often transitioned into protecting and 'fighting' for them as adults — but, importantly, in the context of a history of profound intergenerational grief and loss.

From my discussions with some of the women in this study, particularly Grace and Cindy, who identified as being members of the Stolen Generations, I have come to further understand how motherhood provided a sense of family identity and belonging, counteracting past feelings of isolation. Women expressed feelings of loneliness in their childhood when they had experienced loss, abuse and trauma, as well as when they were parted from their children as adults. It is common for children who have been abused to experience pronounced feelings of loneliness, fear and distress (Falasca & Caulfield 1999). However, as Grace has described, it was through motherhood that she was able to ease her anxieties and find happiness. Williams' (2006) discussion of complex trauma suggests that the development of secure attachments, such as those Grace has developed with her children, can support a person to develop resilience. This has been found to safeguard survivors of trauma against some of its most damaging consequences (Herman 1992; Kagan 2004). However, the loneliness aroused in later stages of motherhood, when children become more independent, may re-traumatise mothers who have already experienced trauma (such as Grace), triggering

memories and the return of loneliness. For Aboriginal mothers, trauma and motherhood are intertwined and associated with being stolen, the fear of being stolen, mothering under surveillance, and child removal. For the women in this study, this points to how abusive colonialist discourses and practices are influencing mothers' lives throughout the different stages of motherhood.

Experiences of death, grief and loss: 'Look how they stand up to it!'

Women in this study experienced trauma and grief and loss in their lives in different ways. While for some of the women removal and abuse had significantly shaped their protective mothering practices, for others it was the experience of grief and losing the people close to them that had deeply influenced the way they understood mothering. For example, Valerie lost her daughter, who was a young mother, through murder. She described surviving incredible grief and loss in her family through 'pretending' to feel strong:

> …And it's taken me a lot to realise that the uniqueness, and I guess the beautiful part of this story is that with my daughter that I lost, she was my first daughter… And I think being there when she came into the world, and being there when she went out of it, and everything that she went through… I know that sounds sad but it's not really. It helps you just to remember everything that… well you would know what it's like when you have a baby, and see them live through everything, you see all the things that make it hard for them, you think are they going to make it? Are they not going to make it? And something like that happens and you're there… My grandson is a constant reminder of that, every day, so it just brings back to me the need for Aboriginal women to just, even when they're not feeling that strong, to pretend that they're feeling that strong. Because I think it's just, it makes it easier for us to get through all of those difficulties when we approach it in that way. And I see that in all of the women in my life, my aunties, my grandmother, my mother, sisters, it's incredibly tough if you have a conversation with them about all the grief and loss, and all the horrible things in their lives. Look how they stand up to it, and look at the amazing job they do, and not only for themselves but for other people. (Valerie)

Recalling the story of her daughter's death is incredibly painful for Valerie — but she reframes it as a recurring event in Aboriginal women's lives, making them stronger. When she first shared this, I was unable to fully understand what Valerie meant. The notion that she was able to find anything positive in this story was truly remarkable. I found it hard to fathom and it was something that I came to realise was an incredible strength and resilience, of a kind I had not encountered

before. As Valerie described the experience of seeing her daughter's life from start to finish, she explained to me that she felt fortunate to have witnessed her daughter's whole life, something that most mothers miss out on if, as expected, they pass away before their children. I interpreted this as a way of reframing her daughter's death in order to gain some personal strength out of the tragedy. When talking about her worries for the future of her children, she discussed her love and concern for her grandson. When reflecting on the grief and loss she had experienced, she recounted that Aboriginal women have to be strong, to survive. She takes this beyond her own experiences to 'all of the women in my life, my aunties, my grandmother, my mother, sisters, it's incredibly tough'. She emphasises their collective strength and ability to survive. 'Look how they stand up to it, and look at the amazing job they do, and not only for themselves but for other people!' In that way Valerie found meaning in her own life and in her mothering by focusing her narrative on the strength of all mothers, the resilience of families and the importance of coming together to support and protect one another.

Concealing racism, protecting identity: 'There was nothing to be gleaned by lumping that on the kids'

As previously discussed, women in this study responded to mothering anxieties, racism and trauma by developing protective mothering practices. As they were all older, the women also recounted historical experiences of racist state policies that had impacted their lives in traumatising ways. For example, Valerie shared with me what it had been like for her growing up under government protectionist policies on a mission, where her family was unable to go on holidays without a 'special certificate'. Valerie learnt about certificates later in life because her parents had concealed such regulations from her. She explained the complex balance her parents had to mediate between engaging in 'tradition' and cultural practices (such as having 'proper corroborees' and 'business in the creeks', referring to cultural customs such as men's, women's and 'sorry' business) and contemporary expectations (such as going to school):

> ...I did a bit of teaching in [rural town], then I moved back to [remote community], where my family and connections are on my father's side... we were familiar with the culture, and the traditions, the stories of the region... So there was a strong connection to land, and the stories around [remote community]. There still is... I identified quite a bit through tradition... and at that time when we were young, they were still conducting proper corroborees, and business in the creeks... so we were privy to that. [At the] same time we'd already been introduced to a more contemporary life. And my father encouraged that we need to fit in, and we need to go to school. So you can understand why a lot of Aboriginal people found it really hard at that particular time, it wasn't easy to swing one way or the other, particularly when there was so many rules, and regulations around it. I remember, because we were mixing with non-Aboriginal people there, in fact we had very good relationships with them that have lasted the test of time. But I think I was 11 years old when I realised that the only reason we weren't going away during school holidays, and things like that, was because we were still very much a part of that system. We were overseen by government, and you needed a special certificate to be able to get on the bus to go out of [remote community] and go for a holiday. There was a process that because we were Aboriginal ... at the time I didn't realise... I had no idea... that that kind of government intervention was going around my life that would have a serious impact on me for the rest of my life. I didn't know that, I just thought that even the white kids were subject to this... I think that my mother and father probably knew better what was going on, but in their wisdom realised that there was nothing to be gleaned by lumping that on the kids. (Valerie)

This is a complex account. Valerie shares that 'government intervention...would have a serious impact on me for the rest of my life', alluding to the effects of colonising state policies. When she talks about her restricted movement, Valerie mentions balancing 'tradition' knowledges and 'contemporary life' and that 'it wasn't easy to swing one way or the other, particularly when there was so many rules and regulations around it'. Her movement through different spaces and in different ways speaks to the complex ways that Aboriginal identities have been influenced by the imposition of colonial policies, and that these policies affected the parenting practices of her own mother and father. Valerie explains that the encouragement she received from her parents to 'fit in' and prioritise education was a protective strategy to minimise her experiences of fear and racism in the world around her. The fear of being seen to not fit in, or the idea that fitting in and being educated would lead to a better chance in life, resonates with Australia's assimilationist and protectionist policy eras (see Chapter 2). This shows how conforming to white ways would have minimised the need for surveillance and therefore reduced parenting anxiety within Aboriginal families. State policies

insisted that Aboriginal people integrate into white culture, which was 'encouraged' through educational interventions that were based on colonialist and racist assumptions (Moreton-Robinson 2000b). Valerie believed that her parents were guiding her on this path; they were protecting her and giving her the best chance of survival in what was a predominantly white world. Valerie recalled this in terms of the difficulty in living in between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds.

When Valerie said 'At the time I didn't realise' and 'I had no idea', she revealed her naivety about the extent of the racism that was going on around her, and that she only realises this now with the benefit of hindsight. This highlights the invisibility of white privilege, as it is not only unacknowledged by those who hold it but can also be obscured from individuals who are subjected to its oppressiveness (Sullivan & Tuana 2007). However, as Alison Bailey (2007, p. 77) explains, 'Ignorance is often an active social production', and in terms of racial oppression, it operates to actively produce racism and to purposefully exploit the marginalised as a way of maintaining the power of whiteness. Connecting with Valerie's comments about not knowing and her parents' attempts to conceal incidents of racism to protect her, I am drawn to Bailey's point about the way ignorance manifests as a strategy to deal with oppression as a way of 'avoiding or delaying harm and preserving a sense of self' (Bailey 2007, p. 77). Thus, Valerie not knowing about the 'special certificate', or her parents concealing this from her, served as an act of protection from the potential harm of racism in her life.

Valerie now understands that her parents' actions were aimed at protecting her self-esteem, dignity and self-worth and shielded her from the knowledge that racist systems were operating all around her. It is also significant to acknowledge that Valerie expressed relief that her parents protected her or hid such harsh realities from her. In the context of a colonial history, the protectiveness of Valerie's parents was an attempt to lessen the impact of racist policies and practices. This concealment enabled Valerie to continue to have significant friendships and interactions with non-Aboriginal people in her life. It is likely that Valerie's parents' experiences of disenfranchisement, oppression, racism and discrimination

influenced their decision to hide or protect their children from these racist realities. Questions such as: What information do I share with my child? and, At what age do I share it, so that my child's wellbeing is protected? take on particular meanings for those who have experienced the racism of colonisation and its many levels of dispossession and oppression. This is suggested by Valerie when she said, 'But in their wisdom [they] realised that there was nothing to be gleaned by lumping that on the kids'. The mothers in this study were similarly thoughtful about how they mediated the effects of racism and worked to protect their own children's self-esteem and identity. They spoke about how they attempted to shield their children from the multiple blows of a racist world for as long as they could, even though they knew they could not control all their children's experiences and shield them from racism forever. The decision to conceal racist government policies to create a safer reality for their children is, arguably, an act of protectiveness. However, concealing knowledges to protect children operates against a backdrop of oppression, racism and discrimination; it illustrates a particular kind of protectiveness that today's Aboriginal mothers are compelled to live with and perpetuate.

Concealing death, protecting from trauma: 'They wouldn't put our little brother's coffin in the church.'

As previously discussed, women in this study spoke about the way in which mothers responded to experiences of racism, trauma, grief and loss through protective mothering practices. Throughout my discussions with Mona, she often reflected on the many deaths that had been endured by her family. She recalled the grief of her mother losing three of her children as toddlers. She described herself as a 'really inquisitive kid'. In one of our interviews, Mona shared with me her memories of the time when one of her brothers died and how she had a strong sense that something was wrong. Here she recalled trying to find out what was going on:

> ...that was really sad period at one stage because one of our little brothers died right... Mum was pregnant ready to have a baby and she got a call to come and pick our brother up see and when she got there, they said sorry he passed away last night. He died, he caught the pneumonia and he went in there with his ears and I think... it was really depressing. And I remember when the manager

> and the supervisor… there was banging on the door and I was really inquisitive kid, jokey, sense of humour, playing tricks on everybody… we had a lovely growing up with Mumma and Daddy… I remember Daddy was coming into our room and picking us all up one by one and put all the kids in the double bed, and then he sat by the big open fire and a big open fireplace and he sat there… I can see him wiping his eyes you know, and so I said 'Dad, what's the matter Dad?', the other kids sound asleep but Mona the inquisitive one, want to know the ins and outs of everything, and he said 'No you go back to sleep baby, you go back to sleep'. And then when they brought the body to [rural town], because we were the only Catholics in [rural town], cos there was Lutherans and Church of Englands and you know different ones… they wouldn't put our little brother's coffin in the church… I remember seeing Mumma and Daddy both crying and Mumma said 'Go out and play, be a good girl and go out and play', and I said 'What's the matter with you Mum?' Where the other kids take no notice, but not this child… I always remember that little table in the middle of the floor with the white sheet and it must've been folded over a white table cloth or something, I don't know what it was, but it was white, and the little white coffin was on there. (Mona)

This account highlights the exclusionary practices of church institutions at the time that on this occasion failed to support and acknowledge the incredible grief and loss experienced by an Aboriginal family. In Australia, Aboriginal people are almost twice as likely to die prematurely as non-Indigenous Australians, with significantly higher child mortality rates (ABS 2017; Zubrick et al. 2010). The Indigenous population in Australia can be expected to live on average around ten years less than non-Indigenous people (ABS 2010). This disparity in overall life expectancy explains the elevated levels of grief and loss associated with unexpected and/or early death that Aboriginal mothers in this study were regularly exposed to. In the above narrative, Mona describes how her parents tried to protect her from the trauma of her brother's early death. She provides a description of a mother and father attempting to conceal trauma and protect their children by not directly discussing it. It seems that Mona knew what was happening, as she recalled strong images of the loss of her brother and did not forget the racism and exclusion of the family by the church. However, at the same time she also remembered her mother trying to avoid telling her about the death as her way of not burdening her. Mona's parents were attempting to protect and shield their children from the compounding grief that is often associated with experiences of multiple family deaths.

However, Mona's parents also engaged in 'togetherness' practices that is a response to the experience of racism and the frequency of trauma, grief and loss in their children's lives. The support and comfort of family closeness and connections is evident when Mona remembers how her father was 'picking us all up one by one and put all the kids in the double bed, and then he sat by the big open fire and a big open fireplace and he sat there'. Mona's portrayal reflects the way her father brought the family together as a way of providing comfort and closeness at times of grief. This coming together with family is argued to assist him to heal from the grief and loss of his young son, but more broadly, emphasises the significance of family togetherness and healing practices in her family also undertaken by her father.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the varied and complex ways in which mothers have developed protecting and nurturing mothering strategies that respond to the past, in the context of their own family histories. Women in this study shared their fears and anxieties of mothering, which interrelated with racism and different kinds of trauma such as removal, abuse, death, grief and loss. Traumatic events and oppressive conditions experienced by women in the context of a history of racism and colonialist state policies have influenced the ways in which mothers make meaning in their lives and identities as mothers. For mothers of the Stolen Generation, past experiences of removal and abuse have shaped their practices of protecting their children. The women recount how their relationships with their children provide them with a sense of belonging and family connection. Aboriginal women have been mothered and continue to mother through incredibly difficult circumstances — and do so with admirable strength and resilience.

While it may be argued that all mothers protect and nurture their children, dominant theories of attachment that centre the relationships between mother–child in a nuclear family from a white middle-class perspective do not mesh with the experiences of women in this study. An understanding of maternal protectiveness has been explored in the literature in relation to mother–child

relationships; however, this has most often been in relation to domestic violence and from the experiences of Australian non-Indigenous women (Buchanan, Wendt & Moulding 2015; Wendt, Buchanan & Moulding 2015). My findings emphasise the importance of understanding the meanings and practices of protectiveness and nurturing in the specific historical contexts of the Aboriginal mothers' lives — lives that are imbued with social injustice, grief, loss and trauma.

In the final and concluding chapter, I provide a summary of the main findings of this thesis, outline the new knowledge developed through my enquiry and consider the implications for research more broadly.

10. Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis has explored Aboriginal Australian women's diverse experiences of mothering through my engagement with a 'Granny's Group' for three years, with six women as the core contributors to the research. This chapter draws together the findings from this research and points to implications for future research, policy and practice. It begins by summarising the socio-historical contexts of the Aboriginal mothers' lives. The discussion then moves on to the relational ontologies of care captured in the lived experiences of the Aboriginal women in this study. It highlights the role the state has played in constructing and constraining Aboriginal motherhood. From this position, the chapter argues that mothering for women in this study has provided them with a profound site of strength and resistance.

The socio-historical context of Aboriginal mothering

In chapters 2, 3 and 4, the experiences of the Aboriginal women who took part in this research were set within the context of patriarchal and colonialist constructions of motherhood. As a social concept, I have argued that motherhood is associated with many assumptions that predominantly stem from Western patriarchal understandings of the world. From this positioning, a 'good mother' is usually assumed to be 'white' middle-class and married, and this is intrinsically linked to conceptions of the nuclear family and a constraining of women's roles to the realm of domestic labour. In the contemporary era, being a 'good mother' within this framework of understanding is assumed to involve an 'intensive mothering' regime (see Hays 1996). In this regime, the mother is required to be wholly self-sacrificing, giving all of her time, money and love to the care of others. I have argued that this way of understanding motherhood continues to be normalised within contemporary Australian society, as evident in patriarchal ideology that is foundational to many institutional structures and practices. Hegemonic motherhood in this sense can be understood as reflecting the ideal of being a white, middle-class, married, intensive mother. In this thesis, I have

considered how colonialist ideologies of race and white superiority have influenced constructions of Aboriginal Australian motherhoods. I have argued that Aboriginal motherhood from within a patriarchal and colonialist framework has been constructed as singular, 'other' and inferior. Within racist media discourses and government policies in Australia, there continues to be a persistent deficit framing and problematisation of Aboriginal motherhoods. In contrast, I have shown through this research that motherhood is understood and practised by Aboriginal women in terms that extend beyond hegemonic understandings of motherhood to challenge gendered and classed patriarchal assumptions and unequal power dynamics.

Mothering and ontologies of care

One of the key findings of this research is that the mothering experiences of Aboriginal women were influenced by generationally transmitted cultural knowledge as well as dominant hegemonic constructions of motherhood. This was evidenced in the findings that some of the women reflected models of 'traditional' Aboriginal motherhood described in previous literature, including the assumption of mothering responsibilities, and obligations towards children of their sisters or other culturally defined kin (Atkinson & Swain 1999; Gale 1974; Hamilton 1981b). This Aboriginal cultural construction of motherhood is often referred to as 'multiple mothering,' where a mother exists within extended kinship structures and where responsibilities of care are shared by extended family members (Atkinson & Swain 1999; Cutcher & Milroy 2011). Yet for the women in this study, their mothering experiences did not wholly reflect the role of the mother according to Aboriginal kinship obligations and social organisations, nor were they confined to or constrained by a biological nuclear family structure. Rather, mothering extended outwards for them through multidirectional networks that included mothering grandchildren, mothering siblings, mothering nieces and nephews, and mothering children in the community (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal).

Embodied within these multidirectional networks of mothering were aspects of 'intensive mothering' discourses and practices, when some women described a

'good mother' as being responsible for the best interests of children through the investment of time, emotion, energy and resources. They understood their own mothering expectations and experiences from an 'intensive' mothering position and constructed their mothering identities as centred on the care of others and self-sacrifice, when for example, they cared for and accepted many children and ensured that their basic needs were met. Mothers offered this care despite their own situations of disadvantage and struggle and attached pride to this responsibility. However, the ways in which mothers in this study were self-sacrificing were different from those seen in 'intensive mothering' regimes because their mothering was not limited to the nuclear family, to the care of biological children, or to the home. Mothers understood their responsibilities for caring for children in terms of offering acceptance, compassion and time in more collective ways. Mothering was constructed by the women in this study as providing an 'open door' to everyone's children. The women therefore understood mothering as a responsibility to community, a role inherently involving caring for others within and outside of the family. This is distinctive from normative constructions of mothering, where biological mothering is prioritised and reinforced as the mother's primary responsibility. Within these normative constructions, the focus of mothering is on building children's capacities for achieving social and financial independence, reflecting culturally established qualities of success. While the women in this study had internalised some components of the intensive mothering regime, and placed value on certain individualist notions of self-reliance, they also valued shared caregiving. This reflected a different way of being in the world, where mothering operated within broad conceptualisations of community and family that understood closeness, connectedness and acceptance as essential to human development but also included elements of self-sacrifice usually associated with intensive mothering.

The mothering identities that the women forged for themselves therefore did not fit neatly into either dominant Western constructions of motherhood, or 'traditional' Aboriginal motherhood models presented in the literature. This study has shown that Aboriginal mothering does not necessarily occur within the

security of an extended kinship structure or a social context where the care of others (particularly children) is shared. This means that Aboriginal mothering cannot be assumed to fit neatly within secure kinship networks, just as it does not fit within traditional nuclear family structures. My research has shown that Aboriginal mothers take on intensive mothering roles and offer primary care to any number of children, adults and community members. Definitions of caring and primary care within policies and programs that privilege dominant constructions of motherhood therefore can fail to respond adequately to the lived reality and support needs of Aboriginal mothers. This can be seen in Australian Government policy such as the 2019 'Family Assistance Guide', which defines the primary carer as a member of a couple who is identified as having greater responsibility for the children, and a parent as either natural or adoptive. Parental responsibility is defined here as the duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that parents have, by law, in relation to their children (Australian Government 2019). This demonstrates singular white notions of motherhood and disregards, or fails to account for, different ways of multiple mothering and the diverse support needs of women as mothers. Such a construction of family and parenting is conceptually narrow and fails to capture broader conceptualisations of and approaches to caregiving. Moreover, it draws from social policy responses and legislation that privilege white and Western ethnocentric notions of family. Future policies and programs need to recognise the diverse and flexible ways that Aboriginal mothering occurs, in order to provide meaningful programs and supports that are accurately attuned to their needs. As well, policy making processes need to include meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to engage with family policy and program development.

The role of the state in constructing and constraining Aboriginal motherhood

Significant to this thesis has been an exploration of Aboriginal women's relationship to the state, which has historically been one of coercion and control. Aboriginal mothering has occurred under the surveillance and scrutiny of the state, with the fear of state intervention and child removal always present. The women

articulated the past harms that negative state interventions and constructions of Aboriginal motherhood had laid on them personally. They mothered with an awareness of the close attention they regularly received from state authorities. The women also drew attention to their concerns regarding the criminalisation and imprisonment of Aboriginal children and highlighted that often interventions were inappropriate and framed by a deficit perspective, whereby social services viewed them as in need of 'help' rather than taking a position that recognised strength and resilience. It was clear through their narratives that they attached many negative experiences to state intervention while also at times acknowledging that they had obtained valuable support from some services. The women's relationships with 'welfare' (that is, government social services) were consequently fraught with complexity and contradiction because they perceived the state as both a source of harm and of potential help. Experiences of support and harm from state interventions were so entwined in the women's lived experience that teasing these elements apart was challenging. Hence, some individual mothers' narratives despised the state but spoke with approval of certain engagements with the state. This finding reveals the complexity of mothers' relationships with government intervention in their lives and the importance of avoiding assumptions that Aboriginal women are primarily fearful and distrusting of state initiatives or else wholly embracing of them; rather, these mothers had a continuum of experience with state intervention.

The women in this study, as citizens of the Australian nation, have been compelled to exist within the context of deficit state constructions of their motherhood, with the 'tentacles' of the state being wholly inescapable. As with mothers in society more generally, Aboriginal mothers in this study have had little agency in changing these power relations and have always mothered within this societal regime of power. It is unreasonable to expect that mothers would have the time or luxury to reflect on these power relations and how they might be challenged in their everyday endeavours to provide care to others. However, as a researcher, I am in a privileged position and have the opportunity to deeply reflect on such matters. While the women acknowledged that their relationship with the state is

complicated, it is only through doing research such as this that it becomes evident there is a continuing denial of the role of the state and its associated institutions in undermining Aboriginal mothers through deficit constructions of Aboriginal motherhood. A significant recent example of this is the framing and implementation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), which was considered warranted by the Australian Government, but has since been extensively criticised as an extreme response reminiscent of the protectionist policy era. Altman's (2009) reflections on the current 'Closing the Gap' policies in Australia also emphasise the contradictory nature of the state and its interventions; they emphasise how the state concurrently intends to bring order while ignoring its historical role in producing 'chaos'. The state's failure to make visible its own actions enables the continued construction of Aboriginal mothers as 'the problem' and in need of help, with implications for the state's production of useful, pertinent research, policies and practices.

In this thesis I have argued that defining Aboriginal motherhood necessarily involves creating boundaries, which can exclude diverse experiences of mothering within research, policy and practice. A focus on defining Aboriginal motherhood as a singular experience is problematic because while it may operate as a mechanism to challenge dominant discourses of the 'good white mother', it also has the potential to exclude the lived realities of Aboriginal mothers that are really quite diverse. The reinforcement of singular and culturally essentialist identities not only conceals diversity but continues the oppression and marginalisation of the many and varied Aboriginal mothering identities that exist. In contrast, this research has provided a space to hear unique and diverse meanings, values and experiences of Aboriginal mothering. Within this space, boundaries have been challenged and the recognition and negotiation of intersecting influences on mothering have been explored. Aboriginal mothers in this study have been shown to practise and experience mothering in ways that are influenced by their very personal histories and experiences; all of them in different ways have been affected by continuing social inequality and by the processes of a patriarchal and colonising society.

Mothering as a site of strength and resistance

While the literature previously discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4 often talks about histories of trauma, grief and loss and the impact of being stolen as damaging to mothers' capacities to develop loving bonds with their children, this was not the finding of this study. Many of the mothers in this study reframed their trauma through telling stories that reinforced their values of remaining connected to one another. This raises questions regarding the dominant focus in the literature on attachment and bonding theories; these are linked to Aboriginal responses to colonisation and its impacts, suggesting a need to critically examine dominant assumptions and to resist dominant Western ideas about mothering. Yeo (2003) has argued that there is a lack of culturally appropriate assessments regarding the bonding and attachment of Aboriginal children, stating that assessments are based on dominant understandings of intensive good mothering practices and fail to consider historical, cultural and spiritual contexts. However, Yeo's work also tends to describe Aboriginal child-rearing and mothering practices in a singular way, while the findings of my study indicate that they are varied and diverse. My study does, however, point to the importance of exploring the implications of dominant ideas of attachment and protection that shape deficit constructions of Aboriginal motherhood. This finding is most important when considering the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system in Australia (see also Featherstone 2016).

Based on my findings, I argue that it is essential for mothering 'assessments' to include more complex considerations of individual experiences and diverse meanings within Aboriginal motherhoods. Each mother in this study had a unique story and experience, and it is imperative that oversimplification into categories of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal mothering is avoided, to ensure that binary and cultural essentialisms do not continue to be reproduced within contemporary state policies, programs and services. Despite the diversity within the mothers' experiences, all women emphasise the supports provided by their families and communities and the experience of surviving through adversity. Motherhood was expressed by women in this study as bringing them the love and connectedness

that was stripped from them through being removed from their lands, communities and families. They talked about the difficulties they had endured as children and how this had shaped their urge to protect and nurture their own children. In contrast to negative constructions of a singular 'unfit' Aboriginal motherhood, the experience of mothering for the women in this study was one of strength, resilience and resistance.

The key purpose of this thesis has been to challenge hegemonic individualist constructions of the homogenous 'good mother' as intensive, white, middle-class and Western. For women in this study, notions of a 'good mother' were about a kind of collective care that included mothering beyond their biological children. Mothers attached a sense of pride and success to their capacity to mother and provide care in the community. However, I have also shown how some Aboriginal women can draw on individualist constructions of mothering and focus on the mother–child dyad as empowering, such as happened for a single mother who felt judged within her Aboriginal family through their Christian ideologies. This points to the fluidity of meanings about motherhood, where historical conditions and cultural values come together to shape diverse experiences of mothering. Hence, I have highlighted that while mainstream notions of the 'good mother' can have marginalising and stigmatising effects, Aboriginal mothers do not necessarily attach such stigma to their motherhood experiences. For example, single or lone mothering was not understood as inferior to mothering within a nuclear family arrangement and was even embraced as a special way of mothering. A significant finding of this research is also the way in which Aboriginal practices of mothering support the mother and child. For example, mothers who leave their children are usually represented as neglectful mothers, yet for many women in this study, the practice of multiple mothering provided mothers time away when they needed to heal, and this was seen as being valuable, free from shame or stigma. For the women in this study, allowing mothers time to heal was valued, not stigmatised. This finding therefore challenges dominant constructions of intensive mothering, and destabilises conventional notions of good and bad mothering. A good mother was conceptualised as one who cares for others and for herself in reciprocal ways,

allowing a flexible mothering approach that responds to a broader and more complex sense of need and intergenerational healing. Multiple mothering can also be understood as a response to the effects of colonisation, supporting mothers to heal from trauma, grief and loss. These diverse understandings of mothering are complex but significant in challenging dominant normative discourses within society that promulgate only white middle-class interpretations of the 'good mother'.

Through engaging with the narratives and experiences of the Aboriginal mothers who have contributed to this study, I challenge dominant assumptions and highlight the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal mothering. By demonstrating how Aboriginal mothers are required to navigate many different motherhood ideologies that operate in society, I have been able to make visible how they negotiate different constructions of Aboriginal motherhood. In this final section I consider in more depth the practical implications of the research.

Implications for research, policy and practice

Through this thesis, I have drawn attention to the many ways that the state has controlled and operated as a surveillance mechanism in the lives of Aboriginal mothers. While this study was funded by a domestic student government scholarship, it was not constrained by any government interest. However, it is important to acknowledge the ethical dilemma faced by a researcher in the context when funded research is influenced by state interests. My analysis points to the need to consider whether the state is prepared to actively invest in an interrogation of itself as a problem that is contributing to the marginalisation experienced by Aboriginal mothers. And, if the state were to do this, how would it do it and where would it start? Future research could continue to reverse the deficit gaze upon Aboriginal mothers by interrogating public denial about the diversities, complexities, strengths and resilience of Aboriginal mothering in the context of continuing practices of state oppression. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, to reverse the gaze on Aboriginal mothers as 'unfit', future research should focus on

the 'unfit state' and how government responses to Aboriginal mothering can be examined and transformed to improve the social conditions of Aboriginal mothers.

This thesis raises implications for social science, social work and human service practice in relation to the evaluation of 'successful' and attached mother–child relationships, especially within white and Western institutions of the state such as child protection services. Featherstone (2016) has argued that the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system in Australia is a direct result of assessments that evaluate Indigenous children as being in greater need of 'protection' than non-Indigenous children. This study has found that ideological accounts of intensive mothering have an impact on how Aboriginal motherhoods are practised and understood. As well, it has further confirmed that destabilising state institutions is essential in endeavours to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal families.

The importance of supportive extended family networks and multiple mothering emerged as a strong theme in this research, and this aligns with previous research (Atkinson & Swaine 1999; Yeo 2003; Ryan 2011). Yet, a key finding of this research is that the women also expressed an experience of mothering alone, irrespective of whether they were single mothers, lived in nuclear family arrangements or extended family structures. The feeling of mothering alone complicates the perception that Aboriginal mothering occurs within supportive and extended networks of care (Ryan 2011). This indicates that Aboriginal mothers' isolation and loneliness may be something that has been overlooked by practitioners. This thesis points to the need to question and further explore how assumptions about the existence of extended family networks in Aboriginal communities may operate to conceal an unmet need for family and community support in the context of mothering. This highlights the importance of funding Aboriginal peer support groups to generate increased opportunities for families to build local community networks. Aboriginal families require investment in spaces of peer support that capacity build, that are not based on assumptions of deficit, are not highly managed, and that avoid measuring for tangible outcomes beyond the provision of a supportive space. For Aboriginal workers to be fully effective it is also necessary

for service providers in state institutions to be willing to engage in being uncomfortable. Practically, this might mean increasing investment in the employment of Aboriginal people in management and strategy positions, to progress a move towards Aboriginal support spaces that are free from state surveillance and control, with an awareness of pressures that are often placed on managers and support workers to behave in certain ways. What is critical is that the state steps away from influencing the behaviours of managers, workers and communities and that Aboriginal leadership is trusted, adequately resourced and supported (Hunt 2013).

Throughout this thesis, I have strived to acknowledge and reflect upon the limitations of my own position, how I benefit from structures of white privilege, and how this influences my world view and can create certain biases. I have critiqued my position of white power and privilege, practices of dominance, as well as colonialist and patriarchal ideologies and structures that potentially shape mothering practices, to challenge dominant motherhood ideologies and to reverse the deficit gaze on Aboriginal mothering in Australia. The role of white women researching with Aboriginal women is highly critiqued, and owing to this, there is a reluctance for white women to research in this space. I can attest to this through my own experiences. However, in order to contribute to advocating for a socially just society, it is critical for researchers to undertake activist research, to challenge the dominance of deficit thinking about Aboriginal mothers, both outside and within Western academia.

Authentic partnerships and dialogue are critical to the process of improving the way in which Aboriginal mothers are treated in Australia. To address inequality, joint political projects that necessarily involve alliances with Aboriginal communities are required. In current partnerships between Aboriginal communities and the state, alliances are formed but the relationship is never equal. In this regard, there is an evident nervousness emanating from non-Indigenous state institutions, as while they may pursue engagement opportunities and aim to develop partnerships, the outcomes are inevitably destabilising for the state. The conventional mechanisms of the state insist upon management, definition,

monitoring and evaluation of relationships to the point where the relationship is never equal. As the power will always sit with the state, for these alliances to be effective and for authentic partnerships to be formed, it is important for the state to expect and welcome some destabilisation and to establish a way of working together with Aboriginal people using less control. In such a freer space, Aboriginal people might talk more openly about the issues that matter to them, rather than being invited to environments and engagements that pre-empt needs and prescribe outcomes. When considering the notion of an alliance, further consideration is needed about what it might actually mean to support Aboriginal communities to define and pursue activities and ideas of significance to them. Such an alliance would involve policy makers and program developers recognising and challenging invisible constructions of whiteness and power through self-reflexive frameworks. It would also involve a willingness to engage with colonialist state assumptions. Before 'consulting' about Aboriginal people's perspectives, it is critical to provide an inclusive and flexible environment and develop relationships that support the voices of Aboriginal people, to discover what it is that they want from the state and how they want a relationship to function.

Conclusion

This thesis challenges the deficit framing of Aboriginal mothers as unfit. I have argued that negative constructions of Aboriginal mothers are shaped by colonialist and patriarchal ideologies that have discredited Aboriginal mothers and supported white dominance in Australian society. This research has destabilised notions of a singular motherhood identity, showing that identities for Aboriginal mothers are shaped in complex ways through diverse experiences, cultural ontologies of care, as well as through complex and varied engagements with colonialist control. Throughout my PhD journey, the significance of challenging constructions of Aboriginal motherhood has been reinforced for me. On a number of occasions when non-Indigenous people have asked me what I do, I have responded that I am a PhD student researching and working with Aboriginal mothers. I am at this stage met with similar reactions, such as the gasp of 'That must be so hard!' or the supportive 'Good on you!', affording me martyr status. Then there is a silence when

I elaborate that I am challenging the idea that Aboriginal mothers are unfit, when I talk about the things I have learnt and the privilege of having the opportunity to hear the personal stories of Aboriginal mothers. My own awareness of the pervasiveness of negative constructions of Aboriginal motherhood within dominant cultural assumptions and institutions has only grown throughout this journey, confirming to me the enormity of the task at hand. How do we start to change public perceptions when the discourses we are attempting to challenge continue to be so prolifically expounded by a colonialist state highly invested in justifying its continued dominance over Indigenous peoples? As white Australians, we have a responsibility to stand up and confront the continuing impact of our power and privilege. This thesis intends to contribute to this advocacy by centring and making visible the diverse voices and perspectives of Aboriginal mothers.

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