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An Institutional Ethnography of Aboriginal Australian Child Separation Histories:  
Implications of Social Organising Practices in Accounting for the Past

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A Thesis Presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Sociology

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis entitled “An Institutional Ethnography of Aboriginal Australian Child Separation Histories: Implications of Social Organising Practices in Accounting for the Past” has been composed by me, and has not been accepted in any previous form for a degree in any other institution or university. The work has been done solely by me, and all quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information have been acknowledged.

Signed

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Jennifer L. Peet

August 2014

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## Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
BTH	Bringing Them Home (Report)
BTHOHP	Bringing Them Home Oral History Project
CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
CPP, The	‘The Conceptual Practices of Power’
ECM	Extended Case Study Method
EM	Ethnomethodology
EWAP, The	‘The Everyday World as a Problematic’
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
HREOC	Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission (Australia)
IE	Institutional Ethnography
IEASP	‘Institutional Ethnography: a Sociology for People’
IEP	‘Institutional Ethnography as Practice’
IErs	Institutional Ethnographers
IM	Indigenous Methodologies
NLA	National Library of Australia
PC	Politically Correct
RCIADC	Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
SNAF	Standard North American Family
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
SSSP	Society for the Study of Social Problems
T-Discourse	Text Discourse
TFF	‘Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring Ruling Relations’
TRC	Text-Reader Conversation
UN	United Nations
WSCTI	‘Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations’
WWII	World War II

## Abstract

How we come to know about social phenomena is an important sociological question and a central focus of this thesis. How knowledge is organised and produced and becomes part of ruling relations is empirically interrogated through an institutional ethnography. I do this in the context of explicating the construction of a public history concerning Aboriginal Australian child separations over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in particular as it arose in the 1990s as a social problem. Particular attention is given to knowledge construction practices around the *Australian National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from Their Families* (1996-1997) and the related *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* (1998-2002). The once separated children have come to be known as *The Stolen Generation(s)* in public discourse and have been represented as sharing a common experience as well as reasons for the separations.

Against the master narrative of common experience and discussion of the reasons for it, this thesis raises the problematic that knowledge is grounded in particular times and places, and also that many people who are differently related and who have experiences which contain many differences as well as similarities end up being represented as though saying the same thing. Through an institutional ethnography grounded in explicating the social organising activities which produced the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project*, I examine how institutional relations coordinate the multiplicity and variability of people's experiences through a textually-mediated project with a focused concern regarding the knowing subject, ideology, accounts, texts and analytical mapping. Through this I show how ruling relations are implicated in constructing what is known about the Aboriginal child separation histories, and more generally how experience, memory, the telling of a life and the making of public history are embedded in social organising practices.

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## Introduction

### Qualitative Research and the Social Organisation of Knowledge

This research is part of a qualitative methodological and ethnographic history which has used various approaches to investigating social life in the social sciences. This tradition has undergone changes and maintained continuities (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont 2003). One of the key features of the changing qualitative methodological practices which arose in the 1960s and subsequently, significantly influenced by feminist critiques as well as post-structural theories, is that these made central the question of and claims about located and situated knowledge production (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont 2003). How we come to know about social phenomena is an important sociological question and a central focus of this thesis. My research takes off from this position by examining ruling relations (Smith 1987) constituted in activities that work to socially organise knowledge in a situated context using a qualitative constructionist methodology: institutional ethnography (Smith 1987, 2005, 2006). I do this in the context of explicating the construction of a public history around Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> Australian child separations over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which came to the forefront of public knowledge in the 1990s. Particular attention is given to the Australian *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from Their Families* (National Inquiry) (1996-1997) and its official *Bringing Them Home Report*, and subsequent actions involved in the creation of *The Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* (BTHOHP) (Adams 1998-2002). The once separated children have come to be known as *The Stolen*

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<sup>1</sup> The term Aboriginal is used in this thesis interchangeably with Indigenous to mean Australia's First Nations people. The term 'Indigenous' is used in some of the literature due in part to the criticism that 'Aboriginal' implies a singularity that does not accurately reflect the complex cultures of various Aboriginal groups in Australia. However, I predominately use the term Aboriginal because it is the dominant term used in the BTHOHP texts, including by Aboriginal people themselves.

*Generation(s)* in public discourse. The personal accounts that make up the BTHOHP collection is the core data-set I am working with, in concert with other related material.

How I take up the sociological question ‘how do we come to know’ in relation to the particular public history that has been generated about Aboriginal Australian child separations requires a discussion of how I came to research this in the first place. This chapter details how, as a post-doctoral student, my experiences and location in the academy helped create a critical edge to organising my engagement with the research, the methodological routes I made use of and how the chapters in this thesis engage with the process and its product.

Drawing from feminist literature (Stanley & Wise 1993, 2006; Addelson 1994; Code, Mullett and Overall 1988; Connell 2007, 2011; Gordon 2008) and particularly from the works of Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006), ideas about the experiencing subject and their location is critical to knowing, what can be known and how knowledge-claims are made and responded to. Knowledge is located, situational and constituted in time. My doctoral research stems from early work I conducted in my Master’s programme. I entered the programme, which had the limited time-frame of one year, with only a vague area of what I wanted to research. I was interested in exploring ideas about identity and the construction of self in relation to people who were permanently separated from biological family members. This interest arose out of my own experiences as an adoptee and I was curious to sociologically engage related questions (not auto-ethnographically) about how people go about constructing a sense of self when one does not know where one comes from, and in which identity is experienced as a result of a particular kind of ‘biographical disruption’. I raise my experience and my intellectual curiosity about this because it links up

analytically with how I came to view the Aboriginal Australian child separation narratives as a topic for investigation.

Edinburgh streets and their rows of charity shops are places for recycled bits of people's lives. I was a few months into my Master's programme, when I was walking along Causewayside and my eye caught the cover of a book on top of a stack outside a charity shop. The title was *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation* (Mellor and Haebich 2002). I began to flip through the book, reading bits and came to find that the book was concerning Aboriginal Australian child separations across the twentieth century and there was a 1995-1996 National Inquiry about this. I was unfamiliar with Australian history beyond the popular knowledge that it was settled as a British penal colony.

*Many Voices* detailed the oral history project which was a formal response to the National Inquiry recommendations. The book incorporated interview passages about removal/separation processes, the adults telling of their separation experiences including about Australian children's homes and institutions, being in foster care and for some being adopted by Anglo/European Australian families. In reading this text, I 'recognised' their telling about not knowing where they came from and how they narrativised their life stories in relation to that. These 'recognised' tellings, although having no direct referential relationship with the people, culture or historical events concerned, ties into a central idea of this research. This is that particularities that become known in common are produced, by turning a particularity into a tellable object and thus recognisable and 'the same' to others who were not there. Although there is some serendipity to my 'finding' this research area, there is social organisation that shaped what I 'noticed' and 'recognised'. For £3.00 I bought the book and on the way from Causewayside back to the academy, my research began.

I constructed a data-set of the oral history project interviews which are archived at the National Library of Australia through online orders. I had a guide to the collection and had produced from it this body of material, but initially I had no clear direction on how I was going to proceed. I started by using a couple of research strategies with my materials, such as Mauthner and Doucet's (1998, 2003, 2008) Voice-Centred Relational method<sup>2</sup> and a modified version of Connell's (1995) approach used in *Masculinities* by adapting it to narrative analysis approaches outlined by Riessmann (2008). However, ethical questions regarding research practice raised through my engaging with Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006) work lead me to rethink and reformulate the object of my inquiry. Ideas about the social organisation of knowledge examined through an institutional ethnography became for me the most useful conceptual framework to examine how the Aboriginal Australian child separation experiences have been worked into public history. There are two core aspects of these histories that need to be raised here: 1) In order to responsibly use the BTHOHP material for research interests, it is imperative to know how it is organised. To take up these interviews as data without understanding their underpinning organisation has severe consequences for research and knowledge-claims which might not be consonant with its original organisation and premises for this. And 2) understanding how people account for what happened back then in the removals, under what material conditions their accounting for this occurs, and the social relations implicated in organising their accounts, points to a more nuanced and complex history about the separations than what the standard public narrative provides. An alternative understanding of how and what can be known about the separations entails critically interrogating relevant contemporary discussions about child welfare practices and policies concerning the past and what happened in it.

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<sup>2</sup> I took this method up in my Master's dissertation and I discuss this in Chapter Three.

The public history that constitutes *The Stolen Generation(s)* has at its core the assumption of a common experience, and I argue that this has required the multiplicity of the actual experiences involved to be simplified and coordinated into a standardised narrative, by the activities and operations of ruling relations. The weight of the standardised narrative positions people in these histories into a binary of ‘victim v. perpetrator’ and has entailed treating stories deriving from personal accounts as though less complicated than they are and fitting a ‘shared experience’. As my research will show, the politics in accounting for the past around the ‘Stolen Generations’ is contentious. The accounts the interviewees in the BTHOHP tell about their lives are part and parcel of the social and political framework that both forms and builds upon the historical context for such accounts. And this framework has involved both a narrative framing and also within this the operations of institutions and the relations of ruling associated with them and which coordinate, in this example, *The Stolen Generation(s)* discourse. However, the social relations and social ordering which the public histories of the Aboriginal Australian child separations emanate from and contribute to are not fixed, for they are located in time and change over time. Investigating how *The Stolen Generation(s)* is constituted as a social problem and examining the how of its assemblage has involved me in making use of the analytically grounded concepts and methodology of institutional ethnography as developed by Dorothy Smith and others (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006).

To do this is to make clear the processes of social organisation that have been rendered invisible, made absent, removing them from the everyday taken for granted and instead showing the workings of the ruling relations involved. I do this through focusing on the accounts people provide, for such organisation and ruling relations are recoverable from close attention to the representation of subjectivities within the BTHOHP interview materials. That



is, the focus of my attention is on how the accounts of subjectivities are put together in the way they are and consumed as if their production came about independently.

Institutional ethnography in my research investigates whether, in what ways and to what extent the ‘public history’ of the Aboriginal Australian child separations is saying the same thing as, or something different from, the array of different people's experiences and the varied accounts that are usually seen to compose ‘it’. That is, the assumption is that the public history is formed in an additive way, and has been composed by adding all the composing experiences together to arrive at the bigger picture and thus ‘the history’ of those events. However, unlike most research around these separation histories, I am not investigating and trying to answer “what happened?” Rather, I take an analytical approach derived from ideas about post/memory (Stanley 2006) and institutional relations of ruling (Smith 1987, 1990a, 1990b) to suggest that attention should be given to the processes of public memory-making and history-making involved, exploring how individual accounts are made by such processes, whose accounts count and in what ways, and whether and in what ways there may be silences within the resultant public history. This necessitates exploring the sociological question: How do institutional relations in the context of *The Stolen Generation(s)* and the accounts the former children have provided coordinate the multiplicity and variability of people’s experiences? This thesis concerns the ruling relations that work to organise the production of knowledge about the Aboriginal Australian child separation histories; and I use the methodology of an institutional ethnography to interrogate the ruling relations that both produce and shape the accounts of the experiences people have provided in the BTHOHP context, and which also produce and shape what can be known in this context.

In Chapter One, I detail the wider context of and conversation about the Australian past in relation to understanding how the public discourse and National Inquiry about the separations

arose when they did in the mid-1990s and some of the social relations that organised those discourses and actions. This includes looking at the personal troubles and public problems that span colonial and postcolonial times in Australia and which played an important role in constructing the child separations as a social problem in the 1990s. The historical context and the actions that occurred previously are part of the ‘now’ of telling and the analysis of this, and not its backdrop (Abrams 1982). The contestations and actions described in Chapter One became constituting social relations that hooked sequences of action together, eventuating into a public call for an official reconciliation process between indigenous and settler Australians, with the Aboriginal Australian child separations issue and the National Inquiry becoming a constitutive part of this.

In Chapter Two, I provide a developmental account of Dorothy E. Smith’s (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006) ideas around ruling relations and the social organisation of knowledge as key characteristics of an institutional ethnography (IE), and I also explore how others have taken it up. The central argument that Smith (1987) makes and which I take up in this research is that knowledge known in common is the result of differentiated particularities of everyday life which are objectified through coordinated organisation by ruling relations. Social relations, in the form of activities, are expressions of ruling relations that are constituted by a complex of coordinated regulations and controls that organise people’s experiences from ‘somewhere else’ and not the experiential context itself. I conclude the chapter by introducing those characteristics about IE that are most interesting to explicate the ruling relations that organise personal accounts in the BTHOHP.

Chapter Three discusses how I arrived at using IE after experiments with other methodologies and why I found IE to be an appropriate and ethical methodology to use. I also provide discussion on how I proceeded with taking up an IE and differentiate it from some

‘common’<sup>3</sup> IEs done by others. This includes shifting the standpoint and centralising the experience of reading and expanding discussion of analysing personal accounts in relation to ideas about narrative and memory. I explore here the crucial question that, if knowledge is located in the particularities of people’s lives and in time, then how is it that multiple people come to be represented as saying the same thing about child removal/separations over much of the twentieth century? To ask this question in no way denies that the separations took place, nor does it deny lives lived out in particular ways as a result of the separations. What it does do is provoke and question how complex particularities and nuances about the separations eventuate as an objectified history that is known in common. Utilising a problematic, a research question or entry-point and a suitable methodology and data to investigate it, the chapter discusses some key aspects of IE that I take up, concerning the knowing subject, ideology, personal accounts, texts and mapping. I then discuss the IE analytical procedures I use in analyses that explores ‘Text Reader Conversation’, ‘Ideological Circle and Code’, and ‘Mapping’.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the process of my data collection in relation to the BTHOHP’s own construction of data. Also I discuss the organising activities that went into the development of the project. This includes links with various approaches in oral history interviewing as well as archival practices, in relation to the BTHOHP’s catalogue summary which served as a finding aid in my data collection process. I analyse the BTHOHP catalogue summary to show how it is ideologically organised and how this impacts reading the archive for data collection purposes.

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<sup>3</sup> I will discuss characteristics of a ‘common’ institutional ethnography in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Five presents my analysis of ruling relations that work to coordinate the organisation of two BTHOHP personal accounts through the experience of reading. My analysis looks in-depth at two interviews. The first interview is that of Rita Wenberg, who was removed as a child in New South Wales; and I examine the social organisation of primary narratives and their transformations into ideological narratives to show the ruling relations that organise this account. The second interview is that of Reginald Marsh, who was a former government administrator in the Northern Territory implementing the Commonwealth of Australia's welfare policy. I examine how this account is ordered and organised ideologically through multiple texts that regulate an accounting of 'what happened back then'. Both interviews concern the post-WWII time period. For both interviews, the experience of reading is made central to the analysis and I highlight challenges in carrying out this process. By showing the social relations that work to organise these personal accounts, I discuss the knowledge that is produced as a result, and this helps broaden the current scope of literature about the child separations, particularly the implied material conditions of violence, health, gender and labour relations, and generally the role of the state in relation to the poorest class.

In Chapter Six I operationalise key IE characteristics taken up in Chapter Five to show how they can be utilised to read across multiple texts of a large scale data-set to discover the social organising activities that coordinate multiple personal accounts as 'joined up' to the same complex of relations that rule them, and I argue, are indexical to the wider BTHOHP collection. To accomplish this, I further analyse seven interviews in the BTHOHP to read across the texts for the social organising properties that constitute their ruling relations.

Chapter Seven provides analytical reflections in reading through the research text and the social organising practices that are implicated in this research context. The chapter points out key IE features and how I reformulated and operationalised them as a whole across the research text which reveals implications about research processes and the more nuance and complex histories about the Aboriginal Australian child separations.

A National Inquiry has taken place, personal accounts have been collected, monuments including one in Canberra have been constructed, compensation schemes in three states (Western Australia, Tasmania & Queensland) with a statute of limitations have begun, a national Apology in 2008 was given, biographies have been written, plays presented, and museum exhibits created. It is interesting to note that the National Library of Australia has not had a BTHOHP exhibition in its library in Canberra where the archive is located, but selections from its main exhibition and ‘Sorry Books’<sup>4</sup> have been borrowed by other libraries for exhibition (Peet Fieldnotes 8 July 2010). All of these sequences of action have occurred, but the question remains of whether they show any more than what the mainstream discourse provides. What can an institutional ethnographic analysis of these personal accounts reveal about the ruling relations that are implicated in constructing what we know about the Aboriginal Australian child separation histories? And more generally, how are experience, memory, the telling of a life and the making of public history, embedded in social organising practices? The Chapters that follow address these important sociological questions.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Sorry Books’ are accumulated comments and artistic expressions responding to the new public history about the Aboriginal Australian child separations. These were collected at various ‘Sorry Day’ and other commemoration events concerning these matters (Peet Fieldnotes 8 July 2010).

## **Chapter One**

### **Personal Troubles and Public Issues of Aboriginal Australian Child Separations**

#### **Introduction**

This doctoral research is a sociological inquiry into the social processes of how and in what ways situated 'private troubles' (an individual's values and/or their behaviours that are perceived as threatened) are transformed into being seen and responded to as 'public issues' (Mills 1959) (that is, as a publically acknowledged cause or value generally held and perceived as in some sense challenged or threatened). The thesis is an investigation into the making of a public issue which takes into account the construction of social problems, the knowledge of and limits in knowing about these, and also the links, gaps and fragmentations between personal experience, memory, the telling of a life and the making of public history.

C. Wright Mills (1959) has emphasised the attentiveness that needs to be given to history, biography and social structure in investigating the transformations occurring between the 'private' and 'public'. However, the term 'personal life' is used here instead of the restrictive normative one of 'private', which often invokes an individualistic frame of thinking and has traditionally been used in culturally restrictive ways (i.e., regarding the claimed interiority of self and gender norms). In contrast, the term 'personal life' as proposed by Smart (2007:28), is used because it "...does not presume that there is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency," and also it more fully represents the variability of connectedness and relationships and their location in specific socio-cultural contexts and in time. Personal life includes an ontological and epistemological assumption of 'second-person thinking', as argued by Baier (1985, 1986), and treats knowledge as that which is 'known in common'. In common with many feminist social scientists, Smith (1999) theorises the

personal as always in relation to another person and so is seen in terms of intersubjectivity, rather than subjectivity.

Personal/private life is a historical reality but only makes full sense when understood in relation to public life (Prost 1991). The particular shift from personal troubles to public issues discussed in this thesis is empirically mapped out through an institutional ethnography (Smith 1999, 2005, 2006). Commonly, the transformation or development from personal to public history is understood as linear, in one direction, and referential to direct experience. Others may argue that personal as well as public history is a representation, a reconstruction of the past which informs the present, but with the present necessarily informing the past that is reproduced anew (Lowenthal 1985; Hablwachs 1992; Stanley 2006). By whom and how such accounting of the past is accomplished and legitimised is of great sociological interest, not least because it can often be intensely contested. In contemporary Australia, the social processes involved in accomplishing an accounting of the past is revealing, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal Australian child removal practices in the twentieth century (Adams et al 1998; HREOC 1997; HREOC 1999; Haebich 2000; Mellor & Haebich 2002; Manne 2001; Windschuttle 2009), the focus of my research.

At the core of this research are the social organising practices that work to produce transformations of personal life narratives into 'cases' which exemplify a particular public issue. I investigate this through analysis of the National Library of Australia's *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* (1998-2002) (BTHOHP). This project and its data together act as a textually-mediated space in which highly public and political debates are addressed concerning Aboriginal Australian child removal histories. The BTHOHP collection consists of 340 interviews. These include interviews with Aboriginal Australians who were separated/removed from their families, interviews with part-Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people involved in the care of the children and the processing and enforcement of removals, and variously positioned interviewers. The BTHOHP arose out of a recommendation in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* Report (BTH Report), which was the official response to the 1995-1996 *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (National Inquiry), with the removed children now known in public discourse as *The Stolen Generation(s)*. Reverberations and contestations concerning their removals continue to mark public and political life in Australia around the personal troubles and public issues surrounding these events. For example, debates in the 2000s between various institutional settler and indigenous leaders, community members and governmental agencies' actions and policies, are linked to a standardised public knowledge of *The Stolen Generation(s)*. Some of these debates concern current compensation schemes in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania (T. Solonec 2008, pers. comm., 18 February; Souza et al 1998). Additional debates concern a return to a 'mission idea' of remote hostel education for children and youth in order to protect current generations of children from the hard social realities they face (Maiden 2008; Commonwealth of Australia 2011; J. Greaney 2010, pers. comm., 12 June). And lastly here, some aspects of the debate connect with a new approach for expedient pro-adoption policies (Murphy, Quartly & Cuthbert 2009).

The BTHOHP data provides a unique opportunity to investigate what Smith (1987) has termed 'ruling relations': the social organising/coordinating activities that make up the institutional complexities helping to construct such troubles, and in which they become instances of relations of ruling because of their effects if not necessarily the intentions of those involved. This is to view *The Stolen Generation(s)* within the framework of a social problem concerning a public issue. The intention of the thesis is to help expand knowledge



about the removals, starting from and going beyond personal experience as a sole factor in understanding the social and political processes involved in creating this as a public issue. Ruling relations are “...conceived as emerging historically as an objectified order of relations differentiated from the local and particular” (Smith 2001:161). Ultimately, as Smith (2005) has articulated in her work, the sociological project should be *for* people, and not merely *about* people. This requires a methodology that maintains a focus on the presence of the individual (both interviewee and interviewer, in this case in the context of the BTHOHP) throughout the research and produces knowledge that explicates the relations that people cannot ‘see’ and which are often taken for granted. *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem and the public narrative that it entails today has eventuated in knowledge about it being largely taken for granted. Smith’s (2005) methodological approach, my critical use of it, and its application in this research, are fully set out in Chapter 2. My research investigates and theorises the complex relations which have been rendered invisible and focuses on the personal accounts collected by the BTHOHP. These have been highlighted in public discourse and are now seen to ‘be’ in a fundamental sense the history of these events, yet are nonetheless part of its organisation. My research also argues that new knowledge about these events - both the removals and the subsequent processes of history-making - should be produced in a concrete, situated and ethically defensible way and with specific attention given to the ways in which the generation of knowledge has real material consequences. How to responsibly research, inquire and interpret how the institutionalisation of *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem was put together requires an analytical gaze of a particular kind. I now move on to explain more about what this consists of.

Following on generally from the works of Mills (1959), Abrams (1982), and more specifically of Spector and Kitsuse (2001 [1977]) Smith (1987; 1990a; 1990b; 1999; 2005),

Marx and Engels (1976) and Marx (1977), I view the construction of *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem as having emerged historically in time and over time and it remains as an ongoing historical process. The social relations producing it are the concern of this doctoral study. As well as taking seriously the issue of time and history, it also turns attention towards what is often a grey area of social life lying between agency and structure. The importance of understanding the social historical processes surrounding Aboriginal Australian child removal practices is undoubted. And as Abrams (1982) has argued concerning the purpose and practice of historical sociology, the intention should be, not to provide a 'historical backdrop' or 'social context' to contemporary accounts of a social problem, but rather to make the processes and practices of knowledge-making the subject of the research. That is, the focus should be on the social organising practices that construct *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem. A social problem in this research is understood as a claims-making and collective activity and not a personal condition (Spector and Kitsuse 2001). Spector and Kitsuse (2001: 75-6) define a social problem in the following way:

...[w]e define social problems as *the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions*. The emergence of a social problem is contingent upon the organization of activities asserting the need for eradicating, ameliorating, or otherwise changing some condition. *The central problem of a theory of social problems is to account for the emergence, nature, and maintenance of claims making and responding activities*. [original emphasis]

My research does not aim to generate a theory of social problems. Its focus is rather concerned with mapping and theorising how individuals, groups, organisations, public bodies, ventures such as the BTHOHP, and also this research too, produce through their social organising practices the activities which Spector and Kitsuse (2001) see as eventuating in the construction of a public issue and a social problem. *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a

social problem is conceptualised as a constructed ongoing collective activity (while at the same time acknowledging the irreducible facts and real consequences to such activity), and it can usefully be engaged with analytically and epistemologically by utilising Smith's (1987) concept of ruling relations. I now move on to examine some of the ongoing activity and social actions over time that have worked to accomplish some of the claims-making activity involved in producing *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem.

### *Contesting the Past in Australia*

Public awareness of Aboriginal Australian child removals (from Aboriginal families to Anglo-Australian care) did not start to crystallise in mainstream Anglo-Australian consciousness until the late 1980s and more significantly the 1990s. When it did, for the mainstream it was in the form of severe 'shock' and what was articulated as complete ignorance that such occurrences had happened (Probyn 2009). The mainstream popular narrative of such events narrowly positions those removed as possessing a shared common experience involving such things as: victimhood, stolen or lost cultural identity, institutionalised, sexually abused, subject to slave-like labour, assaulted, and suffering from physical and mental health problems throughout life. The result has been that the people who had such experiences have been categorised and termed as the 'Stolen Generation' with all the moral underpinnings and homogenising assumptions this term carries with it. This includes being pitted against the progenitors and enforcers of removing policies and the complicity of carers in a process driven by racist ideological intentions, according to the popular master narrative of what was involved. The master frame of collective suffering and a common experience has produced a solely negative view of the experience, sidelining alternate, benign or positive aspects that might have occurred along with the negative. The ruling relations involved in *The Stolen Generation(s)* discourse both before and after the publication of the BTH Report is

represented as a totality of negative experiences. However, this research makes clear Bulbeck's (1998:10) point that "one can be simultaneously disabled and enabled by the same signifier status." My research argues that the relationship between those who were separated/removed and other actors involved in the process, including care of the children, was actually more nuanced and complex, while in no way denying the collective violence involved or the agency of the children and their parents (and it builds on Peet 2008).

An example of such nuances can be seen regarding the role of Bill Gray (1999), who was a patrol officer in the Northern Territory between 1962 and 1973, who has maintained relationships with the former children who were removed over the lengthy time which has passed since the removals in Darwin. As Gray's interview reflects, the police too were affected by the implementation of policies they did not necessarily agree with; and also some Aboriginal communities did not consistently display animosity towards those doing the removals. Gray's account shows a more complex relationship existing between individuals and communities; and although he agrees with the mainstream narrative that the policies were not 'good' at the time, this does not mean that subsequent actions after the removals were entirely discreditable to the officials involved or to wider social intentions. His interview also comments that he has seen strong families of formerly separated Aboriginal children emerge, families that have contributed to the Darwin community, and suggests that the removals in and of themselves were not solely responsible for post-removal problems (Gray 1999).

The way in which *The Stolen Generation(s)* phenomenon and discourse about the Aboriginal Australian child removals coalesced in the 1990s needs to be understood in the framework of wider controversies regarding the contested past of Australia, some of the commonly argued aspects of which concern dispossession, convict history, frontier violence, oppression of aboriginal people, modernity (including the role of the academy and intellectualism) and

national identity (Attwood 2005b; Reynolds 1996; Hughes 2003; Windschuttle 2009; Moses 2004; Haebich 2000; MacIntyre 2010; Connell 2007; Tranter and Donoghue 2007). Less articulated in a concrete way in the literature within the child removal context, and regarding which the BTHOHP and related materials are revealing, is the role of class and also the oppression of women generally (among both settler and indigenous communities), and that the child removal processes were caught up within these broader under-acknowledged social relations (Peet 2008).

As an indigenous and settler society, Australia and its mixtures of peoples is a highly politicised culture which is often dichotomously positioned around self-determination, land and cultural rights and national identity politics. This involves among other things exclusionary and inclusionary policies of the past and the present. The contemporary cultural politics of childhood, involving both local and global critical discourses and activities around ‘stolen’, ‘disappeared’ and ‘lost’ childhoods (Van Krieken 2010; Buhler-Niederberger and Van Krieken 2008; Postman 1982; Stephens 1995; James and James 2008), has played out in these wider political and cultural frameworks and impacted on *The Stolen Generation(s)* discourse. Such ideas often mesh the personal with the public and in Australia are particularly manifest as ‘cultural wars,’<sup>5</sup> particularly so regarding *The Stolen Generation(s)* narratives and the public Apology<sup>6</sup> for those events. Subsequently, attention has turned to what has been depicted as the social problem of Aboriginal ‘dysfunctional communities.’ Manifestations of

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<sup>5</sup> There are debates concerning the merging of culture and racism as a new form of ideology. This points to cultural differences being represented and practices as a way of carrying out the old work that race once did. According to Balibar (1991, cited in Huggan 2007:160), the new cultural/racism “fits into the framework of ‘racism without races’... It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions.”

<sup>6</sup> See the Australian Commonwealth for details on the official Apology: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>.

this have been inscribed into the Northern Territory Report *Little Children are Sacred* (Adelson and Wild 2007), resulting in the Northern Territory Intervention, the South Australian *Mulligan Reports* (Mulligan 2008; 2008a) concerning child sexual abuse, as well as political mobilisation around separated and institutionalised Anglo children from their families, who have come to be known in public discourse as ‘The Forgotten Australians’.<sup>7</sup> As Pierce (1999) has noted, it is interesting that the Anglo Australian public has had a difficult time imagining the social and psychological outcomes of child separation for Aboriginal people, when Anglo Australian society could have related this to its own anxieties about lost Anglo children in the Australian frontier. This is consequently a missed opportunity for critical reflection and understanding. How people have engaged with the idea and actuality of separating children from their families links over time into a host of social relations that span colonial and post-colonial<sup>8</sup> times in Australia.

#### *Australia and ‘National Inheritance’*

Dorothy Smith's ideas about ruling relations and the usefulness of an institutional ethnography for investigating grounded instances of these will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two. However, I want to call attention at this point to the basic ideas involved and point to relevant features of them. 'Ruling relations' are the coordinated activity and social organising practices of individuals as institutional persons that work to standardise and differentiate orders of relations in society. What are some of the ruling relations involved in

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<sup>7</sup> Although not linked in a concrete analytical way in the literature, Anglo/European Australians and British Child Migrant children were also separated from families and placed into institutions. See <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/apology-to-the-forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants>.

<sup>8</sup> There are arguments that Australia is not post-colonial state. Huggan (2007:27) expresses this argument as: “white Australia is postcolonial with respect to its former British colonizers, it remains very much colonial or neo-colonial in its treatment of indigenous peoples.”

talking and writing about this contested history of *The Stolen Generation(s)*? Showing this involves interrogating who is talking (writing, showing...), framing what kinds of discussions, and regarding which resources of this ‘talk’ are employed, omitted, rejected or forbidden. In essence, these are the organisational activities and processes that make the history of *The Stolen Generation(s)* a social problem. Some important questions arise from this. How have the relationships between individuals, societies and action, both Australian settler and indigenous, been understood historically and how has this changed contemporaneously? Is the organisation of such relations implicit in the contemporary constructions of the contested past? And why is the making of *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a public problem so little investigated? Typically, discussion of *The Stolen Generation(s)* immediately goes into the problem of race-based legislative and policy practices that embody ideological factors. However, my doctoral research, using the words and understandings of removed former children and also former officials themselves, shows that removal practices were more nuanced, complex and at times ad hoc than this suggests or contemporary history has acknowledged.

The socio-cultural and moral implications of such practices and what was originally understood as an ‘aboriginal’ problem has changed over the decades. Some of the key features that are currently discussed in the literature concerning child removals narrowly address former British colonisation and the consequent particular characteristics of the nation-state Australia. This has produced a contested past concerning the recognition and treatment of various groups of Aboriginal people, not as part of the social organisation of Australia itself, but as the backdrop and context for this. As a result, little attention has been given to the social organisation of knowledge in this context, the personal experiences involved, or subsequent actions, which are instead treated uncritically, elevating them as

though entirely and straight-forwardly referential. Whether one agrees with arguments concerning the problems with referentiality generally and in relation to the removals specifically, it is still notable that *The Stolen Generation(s)* literature has been remarkably silent on the social organisation of removed people's lives, the material conditions which enabled agency and structure to interweave and produce the discourse that has eventuated. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1976) argued, we should empirically explore the social conditions that people find themselves in, because it is within those conditions that the actualities of life lie, and it is the interweaving of agency and structure that grounds the making of knowledge and action about this. Marx (1977) in *Capital* and Marx and Engels (1976) in *The German Ideology* stressed the empirical analysis of the actual, located, material conditions and activities which work to compose each person's own history:

The way in which [people] produce their means of the actual means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production. (Marx and Engels (1976) in Fromm 2004:10) [original emphasis]

*What* and *how* they 'become' as people, in this instance as a member of *The Stolen Generation(s)*, is an important matter to understand. How does someone know to think of themselves as part of *The Stolen Generation(s)*? Understanding how types of persons and kinds of social relations are constructed requires an appropriate analytical stance towards the material conditions that constitute the social organisation of *The Stolen Generation(s)* phenomenon. Although some aspects of the construction of this particular social problem may appear on first sight both straightforward and extreme, Chapter 5 will provide a detailed



analysis of some of the material conditions and circumstances that underpin the ruling relations in this context.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century in Australia, and also internationally, social and racial engineering in varying forms was used as an acceptable and legitimate means for those in power to control and colonise Aboriginal and other first nations peoples (Reynolds 2005).<sup>9</sup> From the creation of the Australian Commonwealth in 1901, each state in the Commonwealth maintained its own laws and policies towards Aboriginal people within their respective borders (Reynolds 2005; Haebich 2000). This was not always as an extension of practices introduced during British colonial rule, however, for transition from British colonial control over Aboriginal affairs led to new legislation by the individual Australian states and territories post-1901 (Mellor and Haebich 2002; Haebich 2000). Within this transition, and through many decades following, the promotion of a ‘White Australian’ policy by Anglo Australian political and social organisation in the individual Commonwealth states and territories led to Aboriginal populations being subjected to social and racial engineering programmes. The policies and practices involved and changes to these over time show how this occurred. The state of Western Australia, for example, exemplifies in its policies various social and racial engineering schemes that can be found in other Australian states and territories and which operated around ‘biological absorption,’<sup>10</sup> ‘assimilation,’<sup>11</sup> and

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<sup>9</sup> Reynolds (2005) discusses global trends of racial engineering in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup> A.O. Neville, the Chief Protectorate of Aborigines 1915-1940 in Western Australian is often pointed out as an influential proponent of what has been termed ‘biological absorption’ which is a eugenics theory characterized as ‘breeding out the Aboriginal race’ (Haebich 2004; Aboriginal Legal Service 1995). This theory surfaces throughout the BTHOHP interviews as a way of talking about ‘what happened back then’.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout the twentieth century there were element of assimilation ideas concerning the state welfare and Aboriginal people. However, there is a political and economic shift that moves policy post-WWII to a more defined assimilation policy and away from a eugenics one of pre/during-WWII of Aboriginal populations into Anglo Australian society. One of the proponents of the formal assimilation policy was Prime Minister Hasluck (Marsh 2000). The pre- and post-WWII policies are discussed in Chapter Five through analysis.

‘integration’<sup>12</sup> (Haebich 2004, 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2000). Within the individual states and territories, reserves<sup>13</sup> and missions<sup>14</sup> were set up to control the management of Aboriginal populations, while Anglo organisations connected to evangelical movements had a related approach for managing Aboriginal populations, often at the time characterised as forms of ‘native welfare’ but seen very differently now.

Although these aspects of the history of *The Stolen Generation(s)* are important, it is not enough to approach them as if the practices and policies involved came out of a vacuum. Contested meanings over land and cultural possessions have arisen ever since the 1788 encounter of the British Empire<sup>15</sup> with Aboriginal communities and the British Empire’s claim of *Terra Nullius*<sup>16</sup> (uninhabited land) over the possession of land that is the contemporary Australia, which was initially (with some exceptions, particularly regarding what is now South Australia) settled by the British as a penal colony (Hughes 2003). The British crown’s claim to *Terra Nullius*, and also regarding whose cultural system and rights are to be privileged or violated, are key aspects of the ruling relations involved in discussions

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<sup>12</sup> The integration policy is based on Aboriginal agency and participation in the wider Australian society that recognised Aboriginal cultural traditions. Aboriginal and the wider Australian society were to be integrated without state interference but with strong self-determination aspects of choice (Aboriginal Legal Service 1995).

<sup>13</sup> The reserve system was a state directed and funded programme for relocating Aboriginal people to reserves/settlements for education, labour and collective living away from the towns (Aboriginal Legal Service 1995; Haebich 2004). Children were often located and educated on segregated sections of the reserve with minimal contact with adult family members (Aboriginal Legal Service 1995; see also Moreton-Robinson 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Although similar in some of the structures and effects of the reserve system, the Christian based missions were independent yet received state subsidies for the care of the Aboriginal people placed there by the state (Aboriginal Legal Service 1995).

<sup>15</sup> For various thematic expressions on the meaning of the British Empire, see Stockwell (ed.) (2008).

<sup>16</sup> The British crown applied *Terra Nullius* to their claim to land in the encounter with what became Australia. The Latin term means ‘land that belongs to no one, or uninhabited land’ and does not mean land with no people. From the British crown’s economic and legal structures, *Terra Nullius* is linked to the concept of land ownership as it was practiced in agrarian societies in Europe at the time and this differs in the way Aboriginal groups associated with the land as conservators (Attwood 2005).

about *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem. Australia is a relatively new nation, established as a Commonwealth in 1901. However, the aboriginal cultural communities as a first nations people and their relationships with the land and interactions with other cultural groups from Asia, both before and after colonisation (social relationships often neglected in the literature when discussing settler and indigenous issues), goes back thousands of years (Jensen 2005). The process of nation-building often invokes myths (i.e., the Anzac phenomenon) which can become a form of political mobilising for patriotism, ignoring injustices, standardisations, and valorising the writing of national history from a particular viewpoint. The historical processes<sup>17</sup> of removing Aboriginal children from their community of family members has become a poignant aspect of what has been called the ‘history wars’ (MacIntyre 2003) over ‘national inheritance’ (McKenna 2009) and national identity in Australia.

The contested past of Australia, in which the child removals are now an important part, exists within a wider discussion than has previously been published on. Although there are a host of ruling relations cohering around the complexly contested past of *The Stolen Generation(s)*, I have chosen an innovative way of entering a discussion on the Aboriginal child removal histories. My entry point is the social organisation of knowledge. The resulting analysis explores the ruling relations implicated in making the Australian past, and more specifically regarding the child removal practices as a social problem. It does so through adopting a broad framework concerning how the organisation of knowledge has been generated by individuals as institutional persons. This includes those participating in the BTHOHP, the intimately connected role of nation-building practices, the academy in its wider socio-cultural relationships, including in relation to modernity (with a focus on the development of the

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<sup>17</sup> There are arguments that removals still disproportionately occur among Aboriginal children and youth yet under welfare practice and incarceration (See Briskman 2003; Gare 1999).

social sciences locally and globally), the 'Australian Legend' (Ward 1958) and different ways this has been breached or fractured, are all complexly interrelated in the articulation of *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem. The actions and material conditions involved, transformed in different ways and at different points in time, are woven into a particular cultural and political landscape in Australia, and are also connected to global relationships that impact on the local. Connell's (2007) *Southern Theory* illustrates various forms of the ruling relations which have been manifested and transformed over time in different social and political frameworks and which are involved in making possible *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem.

### *Modernity and 'The Australian Legend' Challenged*

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive account of all the links that make up a complex history. The nation state of Australia emerged out of British colonisation; within this, and then subsequently, Aboriginal Australians have occupied a very particular position in the Anglo Australian imagination, not only concerning the nation-building project, but also within global theorising regarding modernity. Part of Connell's (2007) argument about the development of 'Northern Theory' (with its power, privilege and dominance) is that this is a result of what she calls 'colony-metropole' theorising.<sup>18</sup> Connell persuasively argues that the development of the social sciences and the Comtean idea of linear progress formulated an unequal relationship in knowledge generation. This relationship not only informed subsequent settler and indigenous relations locally, but was also transformed into northern hemisphere conceptions of modernity and used to 'describe' northern hemisphere societies.

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<sup>18</sup> For recent developments of the strategic importance of sociology understood from periphery societies, see Connell's (2011) *Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change*.

The crystallisation and claim of Northern Theory, which has its roots in assumptions about the Other in colonised parts of the world including Australia, also turns its analytical gaze back on colonial societies as well as towards postcolonial ones. European modernity theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (such as Spencer, Comte) saw social change as a form of social evolution from ‘primitiveness’ to modern technological advance. Nineteenth century theories of modernity also linked the social evolution trajectory to Australian Aboriginal communities as well. For example, Aboriginal communities were perceived as homogenous, rather than possessing highly complex social and cultural structures; as primitive in terms of technological and intellectual capability; and at the turn of the twentieth century were thought to be ‘dying out’ (Connell 2007; MacIntyre 2010). The development of the social sciences at the same time theorised and analytically utilised this perception of Aboriginal Australian primitiveness to inform northern hemisphere theorising of social change (Connell 2007). Aboriginal people were viewed as a data source, for instance as evidence of primitiveness as in Durkheim’s theory on religion and modernity, where he uses ethnographies conducted by Spencer and Gillen in the 1890s of the Arrernte people in Central Australia (Connell 2007). Durkheim’s central theory on religion and modernity is still used, although many readers are unaware that the theory derives from assumptions about the social organisation of the Arrernte as primitive and selected because its social and cultural relationships were perceived as untainted by non-Aboriginal groups.

The notion of ‘progress’ can be conceptualised as one of the ruling relations that works to construct a way of talking about what happened ‘back then’. But merely to say that the ideology of modernity explains the whys and wherefores of a host of individual actors would be a simplification of social relationships over time. Individuals in their everyday practices cannot be homogenised as though people are automatons merely enacting ideologically-

induced behaviours. People are not walking ideologues, and such narrow ways of thinking about *The Stolen Generation(s)* are unproductive. It is better to grapple with the complexity and nuances by recognising that the people involved are not just institutional entities, but are labourers, functionaries in institutional economies, learners, educators, family members, friends and so on, and they occupy these positions in a range of different ways. Conceptualising individuals as complex persons, instead of being what Garfinkel (1967) calls ‘cultural dopes’, changes the viewpoint and brings into sight forms of ruling relations that illuminate circumstances, provide a different picture and change knowledge about the child removal histories.

Under ‘native welfare’ legislation and practice, surveillance and control over Aboriginal people meant that both their public and personal lives were scrutinised by those in the Anglo Australian institutional hierarchy (native administration, welfare officers, station managers, missionaries, etc.). This does not necessarily mean that those in the hierarchical power-structures acted solely for ideological purposes or with ill-intent. However, as Foucault (1984:66-67) has argued concerning the affects of administering power, “...power had to be able to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behaviour.” Aboriginal people often needed permission to move, marry, get a job and buy property. Also a number (the precise number is much debated) of ‘mixed-race’ Aboriginal Australian<sup>19</sup> children were separated/removed from families and placed into Anglo Australian care (institutions, adopted and fostered out to Anglo Australian families) (Haebich 2004; 2000). This fact cannot be disentangled from the ruling relations that coordinated the child

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<sup>19</sup> It is necessary to define what is meant by the problematic term ‘mixed races’. It is popularly used in these histories to represent Aboriginal and Anglo/European as the ‘mixed race’ that were separated (Kennedy; Briskman 2003; Moses 2004). However, there were many migration groups who mixed with the Anglo/European and Aboriginal Australians, such as Chinese, Indian, Singalese, and Indonesian groups (Marsh 2000; Moy 2000).

removal histories. Although separation/removals were practiced across all the states and territories in the Commonwealth, from 1901-1962 the individual states and territories of Australia maintained their own independent legislation over the welfare and the rights of Aboriginal populations within their respective borders. Consequently, state and territory practices on removals will have differed at different points in time. These practices seem to have been perceived in early twentieth century Australia as a necessary 'peaceful' means towards furthering modernity; and understood in this way, they supported the appearance of a seamless connection to Russell Ward's (1958) articulation in *The Australian Legend* of what was a unique form of Australian national identity during the first half of the twentieth century. According to MacIntyre (2003: 10),

The *Australian Legend* relates how the experience of the convicts, bushrangers, gold-diggers, drovers and shearers of the bush interior gave rise to a national ethos that was practical, laconic, suspicious of authority, impatient with affectation, sympathetic to the underdog. This was an interpretation that located the national character on the frontier where civilization met nature, and was remade by the encounter [and] [I]t nurtured a collectivist mateship.

In the Anglo public imagination, this representation was understood to be, and for a while was taken for granted as, the informative and inclusive history of Australian 'national character'. This has been described by McKenna (2009) as the 'national inheritance' of Australia as passive, peaceful and seamless transition of Anglo colonial society to an Australian postcolonial one. This narrative would in the late twentieth century eventually be challenged and dismantled.

But there has always been resistance by Aboriginal people to Anglo settlement (Moses 2004; Reynolds 2005), as well as some Anglo Australians objecting to and involved in activism against colonising practices towards Aboriginal people (Cole, et al. 2005; Moreton-Robinson

2000). Challenges to the 'Australian Legend' eventually gave rise to acknowledging that the imagined peaceful, passive colonisation of Australia over 200 years actually encompassed a convict history that did not encourage mateship but instead perpetuated circumstances of violence, a violent frontier (Hughes 2003; Reynolds 2005) and a legendary history that 'vanished' the oppression of woman and patterns of misogyny (Damousi 1996; Elliott 2005; Dixon 1976). Such criticisms interestingly were not at the forefront of *The Stolen Generation(s)* discourse. The Commonwealth's 1962 granting of citizenship to Aboriginal people, and the 1967 referendum amending the Constitution to transfer power from the state to joint responsibility with the Australian Commonwealth over Aboriginal affairs (Moreton-Robinson 2000), are marked as a turning point, particularly with regard to ending child removals based on 'race' (Briskman 2003). The context of increased local Aboriginal recognition and activism in the late 1950s through 1970s was part of a 'liberal consensus'<sup>20</sup> that reflected a broad movement from an assimilationist policy to one of integration. As Sutton (2009:17) describes it,

The new consensus was that these communities should be free of mission or state governance, self-managed through elected councils and relatively autonomous. Land rights would ensure their inhabitants security of tenure and, where possible, a source of income. Traditional culture would be encouraged, not discouraged. Pressures to assimilate to a Euro-Australian way of life were racist and should be curtailed.

Within this consensus, Aboriginal child welfare activism and international movements concerning children and childhood up to and during the 1970s helped produce a new kind of discourse. In this the cultural politics of Aboriginal Australian child removal histories began to coalesce into stronger political action, also affecting other broader Aboriginal political frameworks. It contributed as well to breaking 'The Great Australian Silence,' which

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<sup>20</sup> See Sutton (2009) for a full analysis of the liberal consensus and its decline.



structurally positioned Aboriginal people as marginal to Anglo Australian society (Stanner 2009). Challenges to the 'Australian Legend' now had increased significantly.

Political and social changes in Australia in the 1970s allowed for greater outlets for the efforts of individuals and groups involved in organised social actions that worked to prevent Aboriginal families from breaking apart, whether from the 'forced' or the voluntary separation of children. It is worth noting here some of the reasons for the removals according to Mellor and Haebich's (2002:6) review of participants in the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project*:

The reasons for separation might have included, especially earlier in the twentieth century, solely racial grounds – children were removed because their skin was considered light enough to be integrated, after institutionalisation, into white society. Separation might also have followed claims of neglect, whether children and their families disputed or agreed with the assessment. Some interviewees had been removed under due process through the Children's Courts but firmly believed that they had been treated unjustly as they had been well cared for by their families. Also included were children relinquished by mothers following protracted negotiations with Government officers.

According to Haebich (2000:563-564), the evidence of increasing public awareness, action and opposition to the Aboriginal child removals can be traced throughout much of the twentieth century:

A search through seventy years of our daily newspapers uncovered hundreds of stories, letters and photographs that deal with it. There are the familiar celebratory photos of 'mission children' visiting the 'big smoke,' stories of adoptions of 'cuddly black babies' by white families, and reports on removal policies and legislation. There are also heart-rendering stories of Aboriginal parents fighting to keep their children as well as editorials and letters condemning removals.

Although resistance and opposition to removing children from Aboriginal familial and cultural ways of living is evidenced over time, the 1970s shows a clear increase of activism regarding Aboriginal rights and also child welfare rights. But at that time, the loaded term ‘The Stolen Generation’ had not yet made its way onto the political agenda. In the 1970s, greater exchanges between Aboriginal organisations, both nationally and internationally, and national governmental agencies took place (Haebich 2000). The emphasis on self-determination within decolonisation processes globally fed into the already existing Aboriginal rights claims in Australia that centred around, on the one hand, Aboriginal recognition of rights to land, minerals and intellectual property (with both national and international judicial claims being made), and on the other hand, the rights of the child and childhood.

In 1976, the first Australian Adoption Conference was held in Sydney. This was the first national child welfare space in which Aboriginal Australian women spoke to Anglo Australian audiences about the social, psychological and cultural impacts of Aboriginal child removals, in an attempt to influence public policy away from placing Aboriginal children with Anglo Australian families (Mellor and Haebich 2002; Haebich 2000; Briskman 2003). This conference was a catalyst for action to implement a new approach, North American in origin, to promote a policy of ‘same-race’ adoptions. Rosemary Calder (2000), a journalist covering the conference and following its impact, suggests in her BTHOHP interview that the conference changed the thinking of social welfare agencies and that of adoptive parents, and also was empowering for Aboriginal community leaders regarding what they could do within their communities. Around this momentum of debating ‘the best interest of the Aboriginal child’, there were ‘child rights’ movements occurring globally, which were fostered under the 1959 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child as well as the 1979 United

Nations International Year of the Child. Locally and globally, there was a mosaic of efforts re-formulating what characterised a child, childhood and their relation to the state. Despite critiques about the influences of Western-style child rights movements, the increased focus on conceptions of childhood and children's rights impacted on the social spaces in which Aboriginal child removals could be discussed, constructed and reconstructed. According to Murphy, Quartly and Cuthbert (2009), from the 1970s and for the next thirty years there developed an anti-adoption culture which favoured child placement within extended families and lengthy out-of-home care until 'biological families' were capable of a child's return. By the 1990s, the National Inquiry and the subsequent formation of the standardised *Stolen Generation(s)* narrative seemed to solidify the notion of culture rights over adoption rights (based on past practices). However, debates around approaches to adoption, particularly with regard to the personal welfare of children and the growing interrogation of what has been termed 'dysfunctional communities' and the 'decline of the liberal consensus' (Sutton 2009), increased. By the mid 2000s, the once impossible policy (at least during the previous 30 years) of removing children from 'unsafe' families and their communities had returned to the public agenda (Murphy, Quartly and Cuthbert 2009; see also House of Representatives Standing Committee on Human and Family Services 2007).

The term 'The Stolen Generation(s)' was coined by a non-Aboriginal Australian academic, Peter Read, in his 1981 pamphlet, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1833-1969*. This addressed what Read described as scarcely discussed issues at the time, with the occurrences of Aboriginal Australian child removals (Read 1999)<sup>21</sup> not yet in the public imagination. In the early years of the 1980s, the term 'The

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<sup>21</sup> Read was also a co-founder of the New South Wales Link-Up organisation. Although Aboriginal activists incorporated his work into their agendas, Read's claims are not without controversy (See Attwood 2005b, 2008).

Stolen Generation(s)' began to be used, but it did not immediately take on what according to Attwood (2001) is its present status as *moral shorthand* until the 1990s.

The 1980s saw another controversy over the accounting of Australian history in the lead up to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anglo settlement. The preparation for the bicentennial event was plagued by controversies over how to represent this history in light of the varying arguments regarding its settlement, convict history, colonisation, invasion, violent frontier and celebration aspects as well as the perpetuation of a 'white guilt' industry and ideas about 'black vengeance' (MacIntyre 2003). Historians played a key role here through trial-and-error as they learned to use the media to their advantage. However, the relationship between historians and the media was usurped by journalists in a way which transformed how history would be later understood regarding *The Stolen Generation(s)* phenomenon.

The 1980s showed an increase in organisational efforts to prevent discriminatory policies and practices within family and child welfare, as well as connecting child welfare policy to disproportionate levels of Aboriginal juvenile delinquency and Aboriginal deaths in custody.<sup>22</sup> Organisations such as the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in the late 1980s and 1990s pushed for a national inquiry concerning Aboriginal child removals, as did Link-Up. According to Briskman (2003), Link-Up was established in various states and territories to aid formerly removed children with family searches and reunification playing a significant role in political mobilisation around what I interpret to be the idea of 'displaced childhoods'. The 1989 United Nations Convention on

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, as Haebich (2000) has noted, although there was an increase in organisational efforts in the 1980s, the public awareness that she documents in the previous seven decades was in decline referring to this as 'national amnesia' concerning the child removal/separations until the 1990s.

the Rights of the Child eventually also fed into the cultural milieu surrounding the cultural politics of childhood on the national level.

### *The Reconciliation Agenda*

The 1991 report on the outcome of the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1989-1991) (RCIADC) linked a significant proportion of Aboriginal deaths in custody to child removal experiences (RCIADC 1991; Briskman 2003; Haebich 2000; Mellor and Haebich 2002). The outcome of this report, in concert with the wider controversies described above, was a governmental response that crystallised into calls for an overarching reconciliation process, of which the 1995-1996 *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* was a part. As Matthews and Aberdeen (2008:90) comment, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was created and functioned from 1991 to 2000 under federal legislation to “administer the process of reconciliation [which] emerged out of the RCIADC as a response to ‘routine victimisation and disadvantage of Aboriginal people.’” As a result of CAR’s and many other organisations’ actions, in 1992 the then Prime Minister Paul Keating called for a process of ‘Reconciliation’ with Aboriginal Australians (Attwood 2005a). The ‘Redfern Speech’, as it is now known (because given in the Redfern area in Sydney to inaugurate the UN’s International Year of Indigenous Peoples) proposed a formal reconciliation approach which recognised Anglo dispossession and also said that the Commonwealth government together with indigenous leaders would work to legislate away settler and indigenous inequality. This was a top-down approach. Other more grass-roots organising was occurring at the same time. The 1994 *Going Home Conference* held in Darwin brought together indigenous community members and leaders with government officials and CAR representatives from across the nation. This provided a clearer articulation of the making of the social problem of child removal practices

over the twentieth century and went further than RCIADC's approach to links with removals. The conference debated access to archival information, compensation over removals, rights to land and social justice (Karu Aboriginal Child Care Agency 1996).

As part of the top-down reconciliation put in progress, in 1995 the Federal Attorney General appointed the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to conduct a *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (National Inquiry) (HREOC 1999). Although set up by the Keating Labour government, it was carried out under the Liberal government led by then Prime Minister John Howard, who rejected the 'Sorry Campaign' that was demanding the Commonwealth government apologise and say 'Sorry' for the child removals (this was however actualised by then Prime Minister Rudd in 2008). In a decade that witnessed numerous 'victim testimonies' and formal truth commissions globally (Kennedy 1998, 2008; Attwood 2005a), the National Inquiry was not a binding judicial scheme in which findings would be legislatively focused, responsibility affixed, and courses of action determined like some elsewhere in the world. In the midst of the National Inquiry, in the media, the academy, popular literature and the arts, the divisive debates characterised as 'history wars' (MacIntyre 2003) occurred concerning responsibility and denials, and through the 1990s and 2000s these too fed into mainstream Australian society's awareness of the Aboriginal child removals. The National Inquiry was conducted on a voluntary basis and accepted position reports from individual states, territories and organisations, with the only confidential oral testimony taken being that coming from those who claimed to have been 'forcefully' removed as children (HREOC 1997, 1999). No other actors in the child removal processes were given space to present their accounts.

One significant result was that the National Inquiry became increasingly seen as the arbitrator for the moral consciousness of this aspect of Australian history – a popular approach toward accountability. The National Inquiry, lead by Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, read 1,000 accounts received from around the country and took 535 testimonies (HREOC 1997). The Australian Commonwealth’s National Inquiry findings were set out in the 1997 BTH Report and provided 54 recommendations for the government to consider, around what was perceived by the mainstream as a public indictment of past policies and actions (HREOC 1999). The day the BTH Report was presented in Parliament, May 26, is now commemorated as an annual ‘Sorry Day’ (in addition to the eventual February 14, 2008 national apology ‘Sorry Day’). In spite of the overwhelming public fascination and seemingly moral support for the National Inquiry to provide a space for those subjected to such policies, the BTH Report and the new ‘Stolen Generation Thesis’ did have its critics (Windschuttle 2009; 2006). In particular, criticisms were made concerning the testimony being from only a limited set of the actors involved (those ‘removed’ only), lack of reliable historical research on the topic at the time, limited budgets for states and territories to expediently research their respective histories, and also lack of clarity in the BTH Report, including distinguishing between pre- and post-war policies (Manne 2001; Sutton 2009). One could go further and also add to the critique issues stemming from how the National Inquiry interviewed people. The BTH Report was criticised for only focusing on negative things, and this is partly a result of how the interviewees were organised into what I term ‘processed persons.’ The National Inquiry interviews across the nation were and carried out by different affiliated officials and organisational interviewers. Mellor, the former Director of the BTHOHP, in an interview I carried out (Peet Fieldnotes 11 July 2010), stated that the interview process in New South Wales and ACT was limited, interviewees waited in a line, people were given only 15 minutes to convey a grievance. With a grievance understood as how someone was ‘wronged’

in this context, implicitly the grievance structure sets the stage for interviewees to give emotional/painful accounts. According to this interpretation of the testimonial process, I argue, they were treated as ‘processed persons’. The National Inquiry results not surprisingly focused around accounts which were traumatic. The structure of the National Inquiry process also had the unfortunate consequence of solidifying the notion of victimhood.

The first recommendation of the BTH Report specified that a collection of testimonies, oral stories, should be collected from various Aboriginal people impacted by or involved with the historical Aboriginal child removals between 1910 to the 1970s (HREOC 1997). In response, in December 1997 (as a result of some of the National Inquiry criticisms), the Commonwealth Government modified this recommendation to include oral stories from other non-Aboriginal actors involved in these processes, and allocated such a project to the National Library of Australia (NLA) with a budget of A\$1.6 million to produce a “...rounded oral history project to collect and preserve stories of Aboriginal people as well as others others [*sic*] involved in the process of child removals” (National Library of Australia: n.d.). Adopting a similar title, the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* resulted in the collection of 340 audio recorded and transcribed interviews from many Aboriginal Australians who had been separated/removed from their families, and it also includes accounts by non-Aboriginal people involved in the care of the children and the processing and enforcement of the removals. Although these interviews span a huge scope of different involvements (those who were removed, carers of the separated/removed children, missionaries, patrol officers, welfare administrators, adoptive and foster parents, a British migrant orphan, children of parents who were removed, doctors, activists, teachers, journalists and others), there are silences too (e.g. Indigenous mothers, Indigenous and Anglo fathers, those who acted and perpetuated formal violence and so on). Some of these silences



may derive from cultural reasons, age, death, incrimination, the fact that this was a government project, and the way in which the NLA recruited participants. However, there are still silences and these have to be reckoned with analytically in my institutional ethnography. Also, with such a multiplicity of accounts, what can be generalised from them, to what extent, and, crucially for my research, by what means is the BTHOHP socially organised?

### **The Research Approach, Ruling Relations and Text-Mediated Discourse**

The theoretical statement that life is complex (Gordon 2008) must always be taken into account sociologically, combining as it does the constructed and the material, the seen and unseen, factors that work to create social relations. How ruling relations work to define *The Stolen Generation(s)* as a social problem matters, including because this is not solely a constructed matter. That is, there is an irreducible reality here that children were removed and separated from their families, and various differently located people participated in those separations. People lived out their lives in the resulting material conditions, and indeed still live out their lives within the framework of the resulting biographical trajectories and some particular policies and practices are still generated by *Stolen Generation(s)* narratives.

The coalescence of different child removal histories into the homogenised *Stolen Generation(s)* narratives resulted from these being institutionally coordinated as a social problem by multiple organisational actors and over time. The idea of a 'social problem' as used here sees it as a claims-making activity and not a personal condition (Spector and Kitsuse 2001). Chapter Two will detail the epistemological, ontological and analytical aspects of the broad social constructionist approach I adopt and the usefulness of this for understanding the ruling relations of *The Stolen Generation(s)* phenomenon. The analytical

data regarding this works to document claims through text-mediated discourses such as the BTH Report (1997) and the BTHOHP (1998-2002), and as Smith (1993: 334) has put it:

Actual problems are embedded socially and are located and appear *as problems* in the context of socially organized courses of action. In this, local problems and the social relations in which they arise become hooked interpretively into public discourse.

In Chapter Two I will set out the foundations of the methodology that my research is based on. Chapter Three will set out how I take up the methodology in relation to my research before moving on, in the chapters following, to present and analyse the research data concerning the BTHOHP.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Development of Institutional Ethnography**

#### **Introduction**

A methodology, understood as a strategy in the research context, is a resource that guides and anchors a researcher's work in exploring and explicating a problematic. According to Dorothy E. Smith (1987), drawing on Althusser, a problematic in its basic form exists as a social relation and is therefore an activity and not a concept or theory. Smith's (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006) development of this relation regarding the social researcher and the inquiry process, the activities of members of society in contexts in which they are the knowers of their everyday world, and the 'everyday world as problematic', is the focus of this chapter. As a methodology is taken up and applied, the social organisation of knowledge concerning any social phenomenon will always have in-built assumptions about the relationship between epistemology and ontology, about social and political culture and so on, including as enacted in the research and writing process. The development of a research methodology does not occur in a vacuum, and understanding any given methodology and its underpinning assumptions requires understanding where such assumptions come from, how they are developed, their purposes and problems. And it also has to be understood in the context of the social relations that organise it.

In relation to my research, what follows is an explication of Dorothy E. Smith's institutional ethnography (IE). Through this I provide a developmental account of its 'character' and key themes informing this, because it has been established and built over a lengthy period by a number of successive detailed contributions from Smith. This enables me to explore its changes over time. Institutional ethnography as a methodology is not just one choice in a

series of sociological options, depending on what the researcher intends to investigate. Rather, it is a much larger project: it is a strategy for an alternative sociology, a project that Smith continues to develop and build on (Smith 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006). There is no specifically delineated beginning or origin to IE. It developed from a succession of thoughts and ideas that were located in the actual doings of many people and the social relations they found themselves in. For my purposes, a chronological approach to examining Smith's work and its key ideas is extremely useful, and I shall focus primarily on her five published monographs and one edited collection. These publications are building-bricks in her thinking and they present ideas, personal and intellectual experiences and so on, and each was originally published as linked journal articles. Through a critical review of these publications I explicate the development of Smith's institutional ethnography, including an institutional ethnography workshop held at the Society for the Study of Social Problems' Annual Conference in August 2011 as part of my discussion on how IE is being taken up and also challenges to it. The following Chapter then provides an examination of how IE is used in my own research.

### ***The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology (1987)***

Although published in 1987, the content of *The Everyday World as Problematic (The EWAP)* is the culmination of previously published material from the early 1970s to its publication date. This early work stemmed from an engagement with the women's movement and a sociological concern with the experiences of women, including Smith's analytical reflections on her own experiences as a single working mother, a female academic in a male dominated academy, and the conflicts and challenges these things posed in the discipline of sociology. Smith's work is committed to discovering the social by explicating how and in what ways particular experience is shaped and organised. The starting point is the actual material

conditions that people find themselves in and participate in; this then becomes an extracted standardised experience and is eventually subsumed into abstract categorical knowledge that is known in common. Smith's (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005) central argument concerning these social processes is that the organisation of knowledge is coordinated by ruling relations. These are extra-local activities and practices, infused with power and ideology, which subordinate the particular everyday and everynight experiences of people within a generalised objectified knowledge. Smith's approach pursues the investigation of the social world in the activities of people, which are hooked into differentiated social relations that are both visible and invisible, local and extra-local.

*The EWAP* is a critique of the practices of 'established' or standard sociology as developed in North America and which in varying degrees has influenced the discipline globally. Accepting that sociology's project is the pursuit of systematically understanding the social relations that make up societies, for Smith the development of disciplinary categorical imperatives has produced huge epistemological and ontological obstacles that get in the way of its accomplishment. Smith's critique in this book addresses five key factors in knowing the social. The first is that sociology has developed through its ruling practices, producing a view of society which has objectified and eliminated particular experiences by taking for granted an abstracted and 'male' gender organisation of the relations of ruling as 'how it is' and is the basis of knowing the social. The second follows and is that the social relations that govern sociological practice have a gender subtext that subordinates women's and also the particularities of other people's experiences too. The third is that this gender subtext has a connection with the structures and practices of capitalism. The fourth is that ruling relations organise a differentiation of social consciousness and as a result people, particularly women, have to shift between different forms of consciousness in their everyday activities, depending

on the social relations that arise. And fifth, in modern society, texts of different kinds are interwoven – intertextually – and produce an objectified extra-local differentiated textual domain which voids particular experiences and which is treated within sociology as though actuality.

Critiquing the ruling relations which sociology has organised itself around is not enough. Smith's intellectual and political project in *The EWAP* extends to providing an alternative sociology from the standpoint of women, a standpoint that begins in the everyday activities of women's experiences and looks at those activities as organised and coordinated by ruling relations. People are located and inevitably provide different perspectives on social phenomena, but what is important for Smith (1987) (and also for my research) is to explicate the difference and similarities in how such experiences are organised by the same complex of relations. As Smith (1987: 78) has stated, "to begin from such a standpoint does not imply a common viewpoint among women. What we have in common is the organization of social relations that has accomplished our exclusion." Proceeding from a women's standpoint, this works towards *discovering* the social. The social is always in motion and is situated, located and organised. The object of inquiry is to look at *how* the social is put together, which Smith argues is primarily through the intertextual medium of texts, and through this she wants "...to make a sociology that will look back and talk back" (Smith 1987: 8). At this point in the development of her thinking, Smith calls this alternative approach to inquiry a sociology for women or a feminist sociology.

*Sociology, Ruling Relations and its Gender Subtext*

The historical trajectory of mainstream sociology developed within a conception of knowledge which still permeates assumptions about the 'nature' of knowledge and derives from the Enlightenment tradition (e.g., Descartes, Kant and Locke). In this, the knowing subject is an autonomous individual understood as a rational 'man' who can objectively know the physical and social world and is also conceived as a detached, objective, unfeeling observer. As such, the perceptual senses and experiences the individual has are seen to be transcended in order for the end product, 'knowledge', to attain objectivity, certainty and universalism (Addelson 1994; Code, Mullett and Overall 1988). It is also no coincidence, Smith proposes, that women have been excluded from a male culture that claims objectivity as a natural base for knowing the social world, for women have been denied access and space to own their ideas in the production of 'currencies of thought.' Relatedly, she looks at the organisation of society as it has developed in western Europe, arguing that:

... women have been excluded or admitted only by a special license granted to a woman as an individual and never as a representative of her sex. Throughout this period in which ideologies become of increasing importance, first as a mode of thinking, legitimating and sanctioning a social order, and then as integral in the organization of society, women have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant or adequate to express their own experience or to define and raise social consciousness about their situation and concerns. (Smith 1987: 18)

The effect, if not the intention, is silencing and absence of women in the making of their own culture and their participation in a culture that produces their exclusion, a situation that is markedly different from men. North American sociology, Smith's particular focus, has developed around claims of objectivity and is imbued with the male standpoint, which is however represented as neutral and universal and having the authority invested in the neutral/male voice. This regulates 'what counts' regarding what is said or read in sociology;

and consequently what is taken to be neutral in sociology is generated around the social organisation of a male voice *a priori* privileged over that of women. Women are perceived as inhabiting a social category that is something other from the neutral/male base.

The objective approach dislocates particular experiences and subjectivities and creates a standardised order of social relations. Utilising research practices that encompass this form of objectivity brings with it, knowingly and unknowingly, the social organisation of its making, and the silencing that comes with this. Importantly, then, the researcher should recognise, as Smith (1987:19-20, my emphasis) does, that,

...the ideological apparatuses are part of the larger relations of ruling the society, the relations that put it together, coordinate its work, manage its economic processes, generally keep it running, and regulate and control it... These positions of power are occupied by men almost exclusively, which means that our forms of thought put together a view of the world from a place where women do not occupy. The means women have had available to them to think, image, and make actionable their experience have been made for us and not by us. It means that our experience has not been represented in the making of our culture. *There is a gap between where we are and the means we have to express and act.*

The male standpoint represented as universal conceals the manufactured social organisation of its authoritative position. The disjuncture between particular and standardised knowledge practices making the social world, Smith argues, is linked to the development of capitalism. The gender subtext of social relations has indeed a foundational link to the capitalist mode of production and is related to an organisation of knowledge that extracts from the material localised relations in society to produce extra-local forms of knowledge. It is therefore important to inquire into this transformation of particular localised knowledge, by looking for and exploring disjunctures in the social organisation of knowledge.



*The “Line of Fault,” Ideology and Marx*

Smith’s work picked upon the idea of a bifurcated consciousness while she was still a PhD student at Berkeley. Later, in *The EWAP*, she sees a bifurcated consciousness for women as closely related to the conceptual categories developed in the academy, where gender divisions in how the social is conceived and practiced were marked. Women are absorbed in the male organisation of the academy and of sociology but also have to attend to managing a home and raising children. Her analytical reflection on the ensuing disjunctures reworked Marxian ideas, perceiving women as experiencing their everyday and everynight lives in a fractured way, shifting between consciousness of a male organised structuring and understanding of society, and of women’s actual material conditions and everyday knowledge of their lives. The recognition of bifurcated consciousness has developed into Smith’s analytical concept of the “line of fault,” the starting point of inquiry as a problematic. It is the location from which the disjuncture(s) that fracture or rupture women’s particular experienced social consciousness is initially identified, and “From this starting point, the next step locates that experience in the social relations organizing and determining precisely the disjuncture, that line of fault along which the consciousness of women must emerge” (Smith 1987: 49).

The line of fault for Smith anchors ideology as an activity, as a set of practices producing a differentiated structure in the social organisation of knowledge about the social world. Within the social sciences, the concept of ideology has developed and been understood in multiple ways (e.g., Eagleton 2007; Mannheim 1936). For Smith, ideology is an activity and practice and her ideas are adapted from Marx (not Marxism) and in particular Marx in

*Grundrisse* (1976)<sup>23</sup> and *Capital* (1977) volume one, and Marx and Engels's (1976) *The German Ideology*. Smith (1987: 55) comments that:

Marx and Engels held that how people think about and express themselves to one another arises out of their actual everyday working relations. Their view is not, however, as simpleminded as it has sometimes been represented. Their analysis shows how the ideas produced by a ruling class may dominate and penetrate the social consciousness of the society in general, and thus may effectively control the social process of consciousness in ways that deny expression to the actual experience people have in the working relations of their everyday world. It offers an analysis that shows how a disjuncture can arise between the world as it is known directly in experience and as it is shared with others, and the ideas and images fabricated externally to that everyday world and provided as a means to think and image it.

This analytical process of gaining a material understanding of ideology points to organising practices which dominate and often determine people's lives in ways that are not visible to them:

Ideologies take for granted the conditions of ruling-class experience. They give social form to its interests, relevances, and objectives. In its specific historical character ideology builds the internal social organization of the ruling class as well as its domination over others. (Smith 1987: 57)

My research takes up the materiality of ideology by examining how the public history of *The Stolen Generation* narratives has been produced, by whom, for whom and what silences are encompassed in accounting for the past, which add up to understanding, "...where the social forms of consciousness come from" (Smith 1987:54).

Ruling in Smith's (1987:56) work always expresses the organisational activities that "...manage, administer, organize and otherwise control." The control of ideas is to be understood materially, not abstractly. As Smith (1987: 57) puts it, the "...control over the means of production and disseminating ideas and images..." in institutional processes,

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<sup>23</sup> The *Grundrisse* monograph was the first draft of Marx's work in *Capital* (1887) (Mandel 1976).

including in my research regarding the National Inquiry and BTHOHP, is then subsequently acted upon. The important point for her is that the coordination of institutional processes is ideologically mediated. It is the task of the social researcher to discover the disjunctures involved and explicate the ideological production of consciousness and the inevitable silences that go with it, because “the silence of those outside the apparatus is a silence in part materially organized by the preemption, indeed virtual monopoly, of communications media and the educational process as part of the ruling apparatus” (Smith 1987: 57).

### *Texts and the Social Organisation of Knowledge*

Broadly understood, texts are “...an ideological structured mode of action - images, vocabularies, concepts, abstract terms of knowledge...” (Smith 1987:17), and thus are foundational to Smith’s ideas about an alternative form of inquiry into the social. Texts initiate active material practices by people and future sequences of action. Smith’s more recent work, discussed later, more concretely articulates the relationship of texts to the organisation of the social world, but even in this first book: “texts are the primary medium (though not substance) of power [and] ...are the property of organization rather than of individual” (Smith 1987:17, 212). As she points out, the actions, thoughts and images that make up social life are not spontaneous: they are produced and texts play a pivotal role in the production.

### *The ‘Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Methodology’*

People are experts of their own lives, although they may not fully know how aspects of them pass beyond their direct experience and are further organised. This is the starting point in understanding how experience is organised and made external to the local setting of everyday

experience and its telling. The organisation of everyday experience between the actuality, and the organised world of ruling relations arises as a problematic around the line of fault, requiring materially examining how the social world in given situations and localities is put together. Smith (1987:89) discusses at some length the sociologist's role in discovering the everyday social world from such a problematic, commenting that:

Rather than explaining behavior, we begin from where people are in the world, explaining the social relations of the society of which we are a part, explaining an organization that is not fully present in any one individual's everyday experience.

Investigating the everyday world as problematic proceeds from experience, from the day-to-day social relations between individuals rather than from the discourses and abstracted concepts that dominated sociology of the time. This discovers a 'state' that is in fact in motion and which mainstream sociology is not geared to recognise: "The conceptualisation of the problematic is intended to 'hold' a relation between the sociological subject and a (possible) sociology...in which the latter may become a means to disclose to the former the social relations determining her everyday world" (Smith 1987: 98).

The analytical concept of a problematic does not mean a problem, then, and nor does it conceive the everyday world as an object or phenomenon of study in a social research process. Smith helpfully proposes that a problematic should be viewed as an analytical tool that focuses the researcher's initial gaze on the disjunctures that exist between the actuality of social life and how it has been organised and put together. This returns to the idea of the line of fault – the disjunctures, the initial set of questions or puzzle about the rupture between lived experience and its social organisation. The problematic is the starting point of an inquiry process, it articulates the line of fault, but not at the level of abstracted concepts or theory. For Smith (1987: 91), the purpose of a problematic is "...to relate to the sociologist

and the sociological inquiry to the experience of members of a society as knowers located in actual lived situations...”

Smith’s approach starts from the individual owning their experience and from this explores how that experience is organised in relation to and by means of the extra-local. To illustrate the centralising of the subject, this book provides a sketch map representing women and the complex social relations that organise mothering in the context of ‘single parents’ and schooling. It has become referred to in IE discourse as the ‘Hero Map’ or ‘small hero’ and is a widely used form of representation in IE ‘mapping’. Locating the knower in the everyday world, and tying the presence of the subject to the research analysis, “...pulls what we know as the ‘microsociological’ level of the everyday world and the ‘macrosociological’ level, which we make observable as ‘power elites,’ ‘formal organization,’ ‘stratification,’ and the ‘state,’ into a determinate relation” (Smith 1987: 99). Here the located knower is central to making discoveries about the social world, something which shows an influence from Marx and Engels, but more directly still from academic feminist work of the time. Starting where people are, and explicating from this the ruling relations that make up the social world, focuses on discovering how the social world is put together and how it actually works in framing and impacting social life. Smith (1987:134) argues that, “... the object of our inquiry is the social relations establishing the matrices of such differences.” This requires particular methods of observation, writing and thinking.

#### *Methods of Observation, Writing Texts and Thinking*

For Smith, the researcher’s role cannot be separated from what is observed. The social organisation of the researcher’s observation, writing and thinking are implicit in the inquiry process. Smith (1987:111-112) argues that established sociology conceals this organisational

link and she alternatively proposes a “...method of inquiry giving ourselves as inquirers and our subjects a presence in our methods of writing sociological texts.” She also provides a vivid example of the way sociological observation can suppress subjects, fail to take into account its own privileged positions, and consequently produce suspect knowledge-claims:

Riding a train not long ago in Ontario I saw a family of Indians: woman, man, and three children standing together on a spur above a river watching the train go by. There was (for me) that moment – the train, those five people seen on the other side of the glass. I saw first that I could tell this incident as it was, but telling as a description built into my position and my interpretations. I have called them a family; I have said they were watching the train. My understanding has already subsumed theirs. Everything may have been quite other for them. My description is privileged to stand as what actually happened, because theirs is not heard in the contexts in which I may speak. (Smith 1987: 112)

This example shows that starting from the language of discourse leads to what Smith terms ‘institutional capture’. She stresses that we should analytically proceed with recognition that we are operating in the same social order as that which we are examining:

She is thinking in discourse terms; she makes her observation not as something merely noticed, or as a remark to a fellow passenger, but as one that gets written, which *intends the discourse of sociology*. The relevances of the discourse isolate as an instance, as something to be told. The account she writes... is specifically structured by these as well as by the silences of those who are also present. The ‘structure’ of the observational moment is implicit in the account. (Smith 1987: 116, my emphasis)

This is an important point generally, and specifically regarding my research context given the very structured political discourse around who can research whom concerning indigenous lives and circumstances. In later work, Smith develops these ideas and makes clear that the categorising practices around observation, writing and thinking that pervade sociological discourse are a consistent part of the ruling relations that organise and rule our understanding of the social world. In *The EWAP*, Smith (1987: 117) points out that,

The unspoken relationship between sociologist and those she observes is hidden in the conceptual practices that externalize their activities and practices as properties of structures or systems, and reinterprets the daily actualities of their lives into the alienated constructs of sociological discourse, subordinating their experienced worlds to the categories of the ruling.

These developments concerning standpoint, texts, ruling relations, observation, writing and thinking are brought together as an institutional ethnography.

*An Alternative Sociological Inquiry: Institutional Ethnography*

The field of sociology is often taken for granted. The existing sociological discourses, foundations, historical developments, relevances, publishing criteria, concepts and so on are the accomplishment of the internal social organisation and working practices of the discipline. Variables such as ‘mental illness’, ‘juvenile delinquency’, ‘poverty’, and indeed ‘gender’, do not exist out there but are products of the relations of ruling formed by sociology’s conceptual practices. Against this, Smith (1987) proposes an alternative methodology developed from the standpoint of women, how the world has been put together for women, which maintains the presence of the individual subject, and it requires an alternative mode of inquiry and knowledge-making. Smith calls this alternative feminist sociology Institutional Ethnography (IE). The purpose of IE is clear and is to “...explicate generalized bases of the experience of oppression. Hence it offers a mode in which women can find the lineaments of the oppression they share with others and of different oppressions routed in the same matrix of relations” (Smith 1987:154). IE begins from a particular standpoint and therefore is understood to be taking sides. As Smith (1987: 177) points out, “the discovery of an objectively existing social process is thus, through its capacity to generate bases of experience, seen *from such bases of experience*. The aim is to disclose the social process from within as it is lived.”

The terms 'institution' and 'ethnography' are not used the same way as in mainstream sociology. The use of "...'institutional' and 'institution' is meant to identify a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus..." (Smith1987:160). The term ethnography is also used differently from its mainstream variant. Smith (1987:157) argues that "the relation of the local and particular to generalized social relations is not a conceptual or methodological issue, it is a property of social organization", and so in IE the notion of ethnography commits the researcher to looking at how the social world in given situations and locations is put together and 'how it works'. Earlier I introduced Smith's (1987) concept of institutional capture in terms of how a researcher's work is organised and bound to descriptive language and concepts. The concept of 'work' is important in IE and has links with ethnomethodology in understanding work as an activity and practices engaged in by members and not an abstracted idea.

The notion of work also addresses IE's underpinning epistemology and ontology, explored by Smith in *The EWAP* through discussion concerning validity. As a methodology, IE must be empirically valid, and the criteria of validity for Smith is particular to IE and how it understands the social world. The validity of an IE investigation, she suggests, can be gauged by asking whether, under these particular circumstances and material conditions, and considering the complex social relations and apparatuses of ruling that the researcher discovers, the analysis is valid or not. Validity is not 'the' truth, but how the presence of an authorised account has been organised. Also Smith's alternative methodology, rooted in an ontology and the procedures used to explicate ruling relations, should not be understood as an orthodoxy. This would run counter to its formulation as a mode of inquiry with the goal of discovery. The discovery aspect is continued in Smith's next monograph.



### *The Conceptual Practices of Power (1990)*

Smith published two monographs in 1990. The first for discussion is *The Conceptual Practices of Power (The CPP)*. The focus here is on Smith's further explication of ruling relations as social organising practices. Three key themes concerning this are elaborated more concretely in *The CPP*. The first explores how ideological conceptual practices work in 'established' sociology. The second highlights the significance Smith gives to textual reality and its implication in the organisation of the social world, looking at knowing versus knowledge, textual time, facticity and the organisation of accounts, and 'reading through texts.' The third is Smith's ideas about ideological practices and narratives.

#### *Sociology's Ideological Conceptual Practices*

The very idea of a discipline implies organisation. As with other disciplines, sociology is governed by ruling relations that are ideological in character and material in form. Smith uses the term ideological here to characterise practices that objectify and work to suppress actuality through organising the way the researcher thinks, observes, reads and writes their texts. Working within a discipline orients the researcher to a particular field already framed by what is considered to be relevant and valid for the discipline. Smith (1990a:15) points out that social researchers, "...find out how to treat the world as instances of a sociological body of knowledge. The procedure operates as a sort of conceptual imperialism," and this links back to the notion of institutional capture discussed earlier. Among other things, this removes the researcher's own positionality, thereby producing an objectified social world wherein the researcher's own practice is not seen as an important organising factor in understanding a social phenomena under investigation. Rejecting the dominant streak in research that

alienates subjects, and alternatively proposing a 'reflexive materialist' inquiry from a women's standpoint, Smith suggests:

... is more in the nature of a reorganization of the relationship of sociologists to the object of knowledge and of our problematic. This reorganization involves first placing sociologists where we are actually situated, namely, at the beginning of those acts by which we know or will come to know, and second, making our direct embodied experience of the everyday world the primary ground of our knowledge. (Smith 1990a:22)

Throughout Smith's work, experience is presented as something felt and embodied, but this does not mean it is not subjected to predetermined organisation arising from somewhere else other than the specific location. Nor is experience something that is solely subjective, interior, and standing in referential relationship to what is expressed about it. Smith therefore does not focus on or make an object of experience as 'reality' but seeks to show the existence of different ways of experiencing and knowing. She emphasises that:

We must not do away with them by taking advantage of our privileged speaking to construct a sociological version that we then impose upon them as their reality. We may not rewrite the other's world or impose upon it a conceptual framework that extracts from it what fits ours. Their reality, their varieties of experience, must be an unconditional datum. (Smith 1990a:25)

Reflecting on this, I recognise now some of the uneasiness I have had about my earlier research but could not pinpoint at the time. This came, I now realise, from taking sociological knowledge for granted and appropriating people's experience by taking it out of the context which occasioned it and subordinating it to disciplinary frameworks, and I discuss this further in Chapter Three.

### *Ideology, Concepts and a Materialist Method*

A claim to objective universal knowledge is rooted in the idea that valid knowledge transcends particularities; consequently any notion of a standpoint, whether from class, gender or racial positions, will invalidate the objectivity criteria. Smith (1990a) articulates a women's standpoint as an 'insider's sociology.' A sociological practice must start from where we are because "we are always inside what we think about" (Smith 1990a:51), and "to begin from the standpoint of women is to insist on the validity of the inquiry that is interested and that begins from a particular site in the world" (Smith 1990a:33). She also rejects the claim of established sociology that ideological detachment through 'objective' practices can reveal the social. For Smith, what detached objectifying practices actually reveal is sociology's organisation and concealment of its own ideological stance and the accompanying practices that authorise what is treated as valid or invalid knowledge. By contrast, what IE wants to know is the actuality of the everyday, not to rediscover pre-existing categories.

For Smith (1990a), disciplinary objectifying practices work against understanding the organisation of the social world, because these practices 'disappear' knowing subjects and conceal the methods of reasoning that are embedded in claims of objective knowledge. She insists that knowing subjects cannot be separated from the known, there is always a relational link even when denied or obscured. However, while the ideological practices in sociology subsume agency, within IE:

The ideas, concepts, and categories in which the ordering of people's activities become observable to us are embedded in and express social relations. (Smith 1990a: 38)

The approach of *The CPP* relies on the analytical ideas of Marx in drawing attention to terms and categories that are effects or expressions of social relations and ideological in intent and effect:

*Ideology* names a kind of practice in thinking about society. To think ideologically is to think in a distinctive and desirable way. Ideas and concepts are not ideological. They are ideological by virtue of being distinctive methods of reasoning and interpreting society. (Smith 1990a:35-36)

Consciousness as understood by Marx and as articulated by Smith in *The CPP* is inseparable from the actual activities of people's lives and ideology as materially-based practice. However, according to Smith (1990a:51-52), Marx "... stops short at the investigation of the social relations and organization of consciousness," while Smith further develops her ideas regarding consciousness in a later monograph. In *The CPP* she highlights Marx and Engels's idea that consciousness arises in the actual activities of individuals, while ideological practices differentiate social relations and work to order forms of social consciousness that are separated from the actual.

Smith uses the term 'ideological circle' to illustrate Marx and Engels's classic 'three tricks' of ideological production. This sees the subject disappearing and being replaced by an abstract concept that acquires agency of its own and is used as conceptual currency in the social sciences. Smith's (1990a:43-44) version of the 'three tricks' is as follows:

Trick 1 Separate what people say they think from the actual circumstances in which it is said, from the actual empirical conditions of their lives, and from the actual individuals who said it.

Trick 2 Having detached the ideas, arrange them to demonstrate an order among them that accounts for what is observed (Marx and Engels describe this as making "mystical connections"...) )

Trick 3 Then change ideas into a ‘person’; that is, set them up as distinct entities (for example, a value pattern, norm, belief system, and so forth) to which agency (or possibly causal efficacy) may be attributed. And redistribute them to ‘reality’ by attributing them to actors who can now be treated as representing the ideas.

For Smith (1990a:53), this three-step is the key practice in established sociology by which “sociological procedures legislate a reality rather than discover one.”

What is Smith’s alternative? The basics are to begin from a women’s standpoint, to develop an insider’s sociology which preserves the presence of the subject, and reveals how the social is put together by explicating the social organisation of ideological practices that conceal actuality. For Smith, people are at work in accomplishing social forms of knowledge and they are ‘doing knowing,’ with social forms of knowledge accomplished from their activities. Inquiring into how knowledge is accomplished is not to be carried out abstractly, but instead regarding the actual activities of individuals and by exploring how the ordering and co-ordering of people’s lives accomplishes particular knowledge. The mediated character of the social world is crucial here. As Smith (1990a:56) points out, Marx assumed a “... direct relationship between category or concept and relations expressed.” However, her work fundamentally questions the organisation between the two. How do we come to know? The new materialist approach provides “... a method of exploring the everyday social relations without constructing an alienated world of abstractions” (Smith 1990a:61). For Smith, we live in a complex mediated world and exploring the mediations that differentiate the social world and produce different social forms of consciousness is central to Institutional Ethnography.

*The Mediated World: Textual Reality and the Social Organisation of Knowledge*

For Smith, to know something in common means there is a social process at work structuring and concerting this commonality. For her, textual reality is the dominant medium for ordering social relations and producing knowledge in the contemporary context. What Smith brings out in *The CPP* is how texts mediate the social world by presenting knowledge that is specially organised through ruling relations in situated contexts and vested in texts of many kinds. Reading and interpreting texts consequentially brings the subject into a set of relations that she or he cannot see and which are concerned with producing facts and factual accounts, with Smith seeing social relations as an “effect of social organization.” The ‘fact’ is the “...externalized object of knowledge” (Smith 1990a:69), creating facticity by linking the actualities of experience to statements expressed about the experience.

The social organisation of facts and factual accounts can be explored by, firstly, looking at how an account has been produced (which I understand to mean on a more formal level), and secondly, looking at ways in which reading and interpreting an account are socially organised (which I understand to mean more informally). In practice these overlap but are separated out for illustrative purposes, and both are subject to the organisation of ruling relations. Smith provides a sketch of this social process, which will be addressed as it relates to my research regarding the National Inquiry, BTH Report and BTHOHP in the next chapter, and it takes up Smith’s (1990a:71-72) position that,

...there is no event, no ‘what actually happened,’ prior to the moment that the observer enters with an interest in making a record, a report, a story. Between lived actuality and the factual account are the socially organized practices producing the account. At some point, after various drafts, the account is fixed in textual time and enters the social organization of its reading as factual.

## *Accounts*

The actuality of a person's life at some point comes into contact with the social organisation of accounts and how they are produced. An account or story about experience is part of a social process which both helps pre-structure such accounts, and it also helps mold the process involved. Smith suggests that a person's actual experience is subordinated to the "standpoint of the text" (Smith 1990a:71). The "standpoint of the text" is later termed by Smith as involving a "Boss Text" (Institutional Ethnography Workshop 2011), an idea discussed later in the chapter.

There is a point at which an account is subordinated to the standpoint of an academic text and is coordinated with others in a structured process and is fixed in what Smith terms 'textual time.' She states that "the account comes to stand for the actuality it claims to represent. In the context of the social organization of its reading, it becomes a virtual reality. The text is stabilized" (Smith 1990a: 74). I understand this moment to be when the ideological circle, a completed textual reality, becomes closed. But of course, how the text is taken up, read and interpreted then continues the process of the social organisation of an account. Smith (1990a:75) also points out the temporality of textual accounts:

The temporal structure of such institutional practices and procedures is built into the factual account, but its institutional ground is invisible. At the point at which textual time is entered, the account is detached from its past and stands as if it had a direct and simple relationship to the event it tells.

Analytically addressing this 'textual time' problematises the production of an account, not in terms of whether it is truthful, but in terms of revealing the underlying social organisation. Researchers can procedurally 'read through' an account to reveal the social organising practices in the coordination of "what actually happened/what is" in it. For Smith (1990a:

79), a common problem in sociological research is that “the relation between the account and what it speaks of is treated as unmediated.” However, there are procedures that can be used to “read through the text” to understand some of the social relations that mediate a particular textual reality. In *The CPP*, Smith (1990a:79) emphasises that “facticity is essentially a property of an institutional order mediated by texts,” while the second monograph she published in 1990, *Texts Facts and Femininity*, goes further into exploring what these procedures are and I will discuss this shortly.

As an analytical device, the idea of social relations helps to explicate the social organisation of what an account, a text, intends through its ideological properties. For Smith, there is an interpretive schema that the teller, hearer and reader are positioned around and which allows the social researcher to explicate the “pieces of organisation” that constitute the account but which are immediately not visible (Smith 1990a:154). Smith (1990a:155) makes clear the ideological aspects:

[O]ur major focus is the ideological practices entering into the production and interpretation of factual accounts. The analysis of ideological formed, factual accounts makes visible a phase of the extended relations of a division of labor among different sections of ruling apparatuses.

In investigating texts and the grounded practices producing them, the analytical focus is on the movement from the particular local sites of knowing, to an extra-local generalised knowledge that is known in common and objectified.

Smith (1990a:171) helpfully summarises how ideological accounts are constituted in a circular way and the criteria she uses to analyse this:

This is the ideological procedure. The ideological circle as a method of producing an account selects from the primary narrative an array of particulars intending the ideological schema. The selection and assembly



procedure discards competing reasons (*her* reasons) and permits the insertion of ideological connectives. The resulting collection of particulars will intend the ideological schema as its ‘underlying’ pattern. The process of selecting and assembling the particulars creates an array in terms of the criteria. ‘Does the schema apply to this?’ and ‘Is this describable or interpretable by the schema?’

As a result of this process, Smith (1990a: 171) argues, “... the objectified version entered into the relations of ruling is installed as the authoritative account. These are the practices that make over the telling of the actual everyday/everynight world into the forms that subjugate it to the objectified relations of ruling.” The significance of explicating the ideological circle is not merely to describe the interpretive narrative process of the teller, writer and reader of texts. More importantly, she sees those textual ‘moments’ as embedded in social relations, with the moment of writing and of reading producing active participation.

***Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling (1990b)***

Like *The EWAP*, Smith’s (1990b) *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling (TFF)* is composed of closely linked previously published articles. The book is organised around two central ideas. The first concerns inquiring into the social from the standpoint of an experiencing subject, while the second is the social organisation of experience as it is objectified and transformed into knowledge known in common by ruling relations. It brings these two central ideas together through various grounded analyses, with Smith elaborating on the character and functions of texts in organising the social world in contemporary society. Smith (1990b:8) argues that “social consciousness exists now as a complex of externalized social relations organizing and coordinating contemporary society. It exists as co-ordered practices and can be investigated as such.” That is, investigations look at the forms in which social consciousness is organised by and for us. According to Smith

(1990b:4), “the text before the analyst, then, is not used as a specimen or sample, but as a means of access, a direct line to the relations it organizes.”

Smith has maintained throughout her writings that ruling relations should be understood as a complex of social relations that organise and rule through various objectifying and standardising practices. However, no concept or idea of ruling relations is to operate as a theory of societal governance. As Smith (1990b:6) makes clear, “the notion of relations of ruling has no particular theoretical intention. It names an area of examination that is explicated as the standpoint of women arises as a distinct epistemic moment.” The focus in *TFF* gives primacy to textual practices, not in the abstract or surface of the texts, but regarding the “...textually vested versions of the world that are constituents of the relations of ruling” (Smith 1990b:6).

In *TFF*, Smith argues that the trend in analysing texts through examining language and discourse means working with textual surfaces. Smith’s (1990b) critique of Foucault and those using his work insists that textual surfaces cancel out the actualities of people’s lives and create an abstracted and ‘implied’ subject. In working in this way she argues that the ontological problem is shelved because it:

...presupposes the textual and works within it, reading off the actualities of people’s lives, as Foucault does with sexuality, from the textual. The ideology of post-modernism seals off any attempt to find an escape hatch for inquiry beyond the textual surface of discourse. (Smith 1990b: 4)

Throughout *TFF*, she works to show how inquiry into the social can be read *through* the text and not simply a surface textual analysis from *within* the text. “Reading through the text” is an analysis of social relations, for the texts are activated as a social organiser and ruling relations accomplish this organisation. Smith (1990b:5) proposes that,

...inquiry into the social organization of knowledge is positioned prior to and including the moment of transition into the textually grounded world. There is an actual subject prior to the subject constituted in the text. She is active as a reader (or writer). Inquiry begins there and not on the already written side of the text.

Consequently her textual analysis explores the intersection of the extended social relations of ruling through an actual experience of reading.

### *Ethnomethodology and Institutional Ethnography's Strategy*

A central question for Ethnomethodology (EM) concerns indeterminacy, the uncertainty of meaning in relation to understanding how social order is accomplished. Smith discusses EM's ideas about this and her alternative analytical strategy in relation to sociological description and the questions which indeterminacy poses. She describes four key ideas in the early development of Ethnomethodology concerning observation and description. The first concerns how observation and description is possible. Earlier I introduced this discussion with Smith's "riding on the train..." example, which highlights how language-games are embedded in social relations (Smith 1990a; Wittgenstein 1953). As Smith (1990b) points out, one of EM's critiques of social science practice is that the researcher actually cannot separate observation from interpretive action, with the former a constituent of the latter action. The social world is not independent of how we can observe and describe it. Consequently, within an EM perspective, Smith (1990b: 87-88) notes:

There is no such thing as non-participant observation. The problem is not how her presence may or may not influence the events she is concerned to observe. It is more fundamental, lying in the social character of the events themselves and how it is that they arise for us as they are.

The second EM idea Smith highlights is that no amount of description can reveal the underlying and background knowledge that individuals use to make sense of the world although people's use of non-explicit knowledge is used to accomplish actions of the everyday. In this respect, Smith (1990b:88) argues:

The sociologist uses background understandings, expectancies, and knowledge to make sense of 'appearances', or the actual sequences she observes. They enter in as an unexplicated resource.

The reader herself fills out the text by reading in background knowledge to accomplish its meaningful character. As the describer has taken advantage of what she knows but does not tell in the making of the description, so also the reader must read in what is not actually present in the text in order to know what it says and hence to know what it describes.

EM's third important contribution is that description cannot be separated from the locatedness of where the action takes place. People are at work in accomplishing meaningful determinate action:

The descriptive work is done in definite settings governed by their particular relevances, methods of accomplishing the sense and rationality of the work that is done, the practical exigencies of doing the work, and so forth. Hence, the descriptive enterprise is determined by the setting in which the description does or will make sense and the socially organized enterprise at which it aims. (Smith 1990b: 88)

The fourth point Smith highlights concerns the relationship between language use and indexicality. From an EM position, literal descriptions of any kind are problematic. Smith (1990b: 89) addresses this by noting:

If a member of a class [of activities, events, persons] cannot be identified independent of its context, and further if its identification depends on its context in such a way that located otherwise it cannot even be determinately treated as the same, then literal description is an impossibility.

For her, there are some shortcomings in this. First, the social world is socially organised and the constituting features of it that are produced by members can be investigated, with interpretation being part of what they do and not something reserved for analysts. Secondly, Smith is not concerned with description, but rather with how experience is constituted through a complex of social relations, insisting that “If there is to be a science that goes beyond systematic description and analysis, it must lie in the dynamism of the historical development of these relations” (Smith 1990b: 90). Third, IE works with the notion of accomplishment in a slightly different way from EM. Both treat members’ practices and activities as the inquiry point rather than an entity, but for Smith this is done at every point in the analysis:

How things actually get done cannot, by some methodological convention or device, be disattended. A descriptive methodology in sociology must not be obviously at war with how descriptive work is actually done. Rather, it must build upon and build in the actual practices explicitly. (Smith 1990b: 91)

Fourth, Smith (1990b: 91) discards “...ethnomethodology’s safeguard – the device of member’s practices’ ...” by arguing that

... when we address the actual practices involved in the doing of sociological description, we address these as our own practices – as what we know as a matter of our methods of proceeding and know as doing in the doing. We cannot step outside. We enter ourselves into the relations we are concerned to explicate as methods of practices.

This does not mean that the researcher begins from some subjective, auto-ethnographic position. Rather, it is to recognise and start from an insider’s standpoint, working within a coordinated set of complex social relations.

### *'Language-Games' and Sociological Description*

'Language-games', a concept developed by Wittgenstein (1953), conveys the problem of words, meaning and usage in local and extra-local settings. Smith (1990b: 97) wants IE to move away from an analysis that reproduces objectified sociological description and instead discover "... the social organization of the local setting." This, according to Smith (1990b: 98), requires recognition of not taking "... for granted that we know what it is to do descriptions [and become] ... aware of how our methods of accomplishing sociological description confound properties of the descriptive procedure with properties or features of the 'original.'"

There is a disjuncture between the language-game of sociological description and the original relations of the social setting, existing prior to an externalised extra-local setting, involving what Smith calls the 'double relation', pointing out that "In that context, they 'work' differently from how they operate in the original setting they now describe" (Smith 1990b: 100). How we observe and know needs to be explicated, although this is not an easy thing to do procedurally, although for Smith part of it is that "... learning how to 'mean' with words correctly in that setting is learning how it is socially organized" (Smith 1990b: 109).

In explicating the social organisation of knowledge in a situated context, Smith (1990b: 118; 119) argues, the problem of the double relation must be analytically worked through as a part of the inquiry process:

Thus, we begin with the notion that there is already an intimate linkage between terms members use to describe settings to newcomers and the social organization of the setting described. The social organization is always necessarily 'present' in the description, and the description depends upon it though it does not explicate it.

There is a possibility, then, of tracking back through a description... [to the] 'background knowledge of social structures'.

Consequently, then, social relations and speech acts in local settings are linked. For Smith (1990b), if we can discover this prior to the language-games, we can produce a different form of knowledge about the social world.

### *Texts*

Smith is interested in the constituting relations of ruling as organised by texts, arguing that "... textual practices are operative in the work of accomplishing the social relations in which texts occur" (Smith 1990b: 125). Smith (1990b: 120) addresses two particular points about sociological practice and texts: how does research deal with the "... the inertia of the text"? and, what are some constituting properties of an active text that socially organises public discourse? While she recognises formative work on textual analysis by others (e.g., Darrough 1978; Chua 1979; Eglin 1979; McHoul 1981; Morrison 1981; and Green 1983), Smith (1990b: 120-121) argues that this:

... still works from the presupposition of the inertia of the text, the dead text which the sociologist has read for its content, finding in that the dialectic of social conflict. The active text, by contrast..., is to be seen as organizing a course of concerted social action. As an operative part of a social relation is activated, of course, by the reader but its structuring effect is its own.

Smith explicates the active text through an analysis of two written accounts of a single event concerning a confrontation between police and people on the street, in Berkeley, California, as reported in an underground newspaper and in a response from the Mayor. Her analysis makes four key points.

The first is that the historical place and time of analysing these texts is not the same as the historical local and political time that gave rise to the actual event and its related texts. The texts are analysed in an academic setting, allowing them to be encountered and analysed side-by-side, as Smith (1990b) notes, with the researcher able to move back and forth between the two. This is markedly different from how these two texts arose in their historical local setting and in the sequence they did. This is significant because it highlights the importance of analytically accounting for the researcher's contemporary position separately from that of the local, historical and temporality of the original setting and sequences of action.

The second point is that texts embed social relations that are not explicit in the texts but that both link into wider circumstances of the time. Also, there is a crucial and consequential absence, as Smith (1990b: 126) makes clear:

We have no means of telling how these texts were actually taken up and how therefore their activity was accomplished in that taking up by unknown readers. We can only address the operating properties of the texts in tying a local political context with the wider public textual discourses.

The silent third party is implicated in that a text deploys descriptive strategies that intend to 'capture' the reader into its interpretive framework.

The next point concerns the language-games around accounting for observation and terminology deployed in an account. Texts can rely on the position of 'witnessing' and the rhetorics used in its descriptive strategy on an institutional organisation of telling through a justification of a 'mandated course of action'. Such textual organisation sets up a relation between the reader and the text, 'instructing' that there was direct experience, which utilises rhetorical force and authorisation rules grounded in referentiality as a basis for constituting 'facts'.



The fourth point she makes concerns narrative structure. Here Smith draws on Mannheim's and Garfinkel's ideas about the documentary method of interpretation as the central point of analysis. Smith (1990b: 139) relies on Garfinkel's account of this:

'The method consists of treating an actual appearance as 'the document of,' as 'pointing to,' as 'standing on behalf of' a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of "what is known" about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other.' (Garfinkel 1967: 78 in Smith 1990b: 139)

From this, Smith (1990b) proposes that texts utilise descriptive strategies, language-games and a narrative structure that frames the organisational interpretation to construct a 'mandated course of action'. The documentary method leads readers to perceive and arrive at the underlying pattern of the 'mandated course of action.' Smith (1990b) acknowledges that not everyone will read a text in the same way, but she does recognise, that for readers (watchers or hearers) who are not committed to a particular interpretive scheme, the 'reader's conversion' can occur and act as a social organiser in interpreting social phenomena that are mediated by texts, and

...the argument here is that the text-reader relation must be explored as part of a sequence of social action which includes interpretive practices. Hence textual analyses must explain how the text has petrified meaning structuring the reader's interpretation and hence its meaning may be entered into succeeding phases of the relation. (Smith 1990b: 222-223)

### ***Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations (1999)***

*Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations* (1999) (WSCTI), like earlier Smith monographs, incorporates previously published articles and explores what differentiates writing the social from a women's standpoint from that of 'standard sociology' in a more comprehensive and systematic way than in earlier work. For Smith, working out ideas is not

done in isolation but through inquiry and exchanges with others; and concerning the analyses in *WSCTI*, she notes that:

They are not mine alone, but *of* the relations of ruling as we bring them into being in our activities as individuals. So my writing of the social in each instance discovers and explicates a particular piece of the fabric of ruling that I have taken hold of. (Smith 1999: 11, original emphasis)

In discussing *WSCTI*, I shall highlight the developments of Smith's ideas about institutional ethnography, and also explore her discussion of the significance of language and self, discourse and referencing and how ideas around them are instructive for inquiring into personal accounts.

### *The Knowing Subject*

Smith has come to recognise the restrictive vision that “women's standpoint” represents and suggests that an alternative sociology should not be gender restricted and should be called a “sociology for people” (Smith 1999: 5). As Smith (1999: 5) points out, people always start from where they are:

The knowing subject is always located in a particular spatial and temporal site, a particular configuration of the everyday/everynight world. Inquiry is directed towards exploring and explicating what s/he does not know – the social relations and organization pervading her or his world but invisible in it.

In *WSCTI*, the struggle to understand the social remains, in particular in relation to the exclusion of women and other marginalised groups, and how their exclusion is accomplished. Smith (1999) argues that, in spite of changes, academia continues to replicate the social order and social control through its structures of discourse. Although acknowledging advancement in spaces for knowledge production and resources to draw on in cultivating the feminist(s) project, academic feminism has become a field that is specialised. And according to Smith

(1999: 20), it has broken with its connections with activism and organising outside the academy, albeit sustained much more by marginalised academics, such as Afro-American or Latina women, than Euro-North American.

By looking at the historical developments and contradictions of the women's movement and the 'academicization of feminism' that she participated in, Smith pursues a problematic of, on the one hand, how sociology can be written to discover how actual experience arises for people; and on the other hand, how can the social be written for people. Although Smith is committed to this problematic, she acknowledges that as her work became more widely known, she has participated in invited discussions by scholars whose interests were "... in discourses of quite a different order," aligning more with disciplinary boundaries than activism outside the academy (Smith 1999: 25). This recognition of being controlled by institutional relations of ruling is important. It is not an easy thing to pull away from the inertia, but for Smith, it must be done, and it must be done analytically in the process of inquiry.

Here Smith is not suggesting an abandonment of the academy, for repression can be confronted and changed in the academy as well as outside. For her, the disengagement of social research for people must be understood as located:

... in the social relations embedding a politics at a level of organization of the academy, where it is not visible as such. Making it visible is a first step in addressing how we can overcome, bypassing and, as a minimum, avoid consciously replicating and reaffirming a politics which is neither for women nor for people in general. (Smith 1999: 28)

Smith's work aims toward discovering and making visible the relations of ruling that organise people's actual lives, to map the organisation of what is rendered invisible so that people can see how their lives overpower them and aim to change that. In this project,

knowledge is for people, the relation of the individual is materially connected to learning to know about the organisation of their lives and help change this. Smith (1999:75) argues that:

The knowing subject of this sociology is located in a lived world in which both theory and practice go on, in which theory is itself a practice, in time, and in which the divide between the two can itself be brought under examination.

In the next section, I address Smith's notion of theory as a practical activity and not as abstract thought.

### *Theory as Praxis*

Smith uses the idea of theory, not as an abstract concept from which social research starts, but as an activity that people do. Her stance is that it is inquiry that guides research and not theory. Like concepts and beliefs, theory is a method of thinking and therefore an activity. People are actively at work formulating such thinking within the actual conditions and particularities of their lives and these are coordinated with those of others, people bound to complexes of coordination but who may not know each other. This forms the complex of ruling relations that people's everyday lives are caught up in and which Smith (1999) argues is regulated by texts. In exploring this, she starts with the activities and relations of people:

... the standpoint of women locates us in bodily sites, local, actual, particular; it problematizes...the coordination of people's activities as social relations organized outside local historical settings, connecting people in modes that do not depend on particularized relationships between people. The ruling relations are of this kind, coordinating the activities of people in the local sites of their bodily being into relations operating independently of person, place, and time.

The extra-local relations referred to here are brought about through textual regulating practices. Textual-mediated relations of ruling do not, as Smith notes (1999:76), invalidate extra-local relations, but through representation of ideas, beliefs and actions are socially

organised. The social happens in definite time and place, while textual practices conceal that moment of organisation and come to be taken up as timeless and not located:

They become independent of particular individuals; individuals participate in them through forms of agency and subjectivity they provide. Organization is produced as a differentiated function. Coordination and concerting are leached out of localized and particularized relations and transferred to modes in which they are subjected to specialized and technical development. (Smith 1999:77)

In *CPP*, Smith highlights this process through the example of the development of child welfare case histories in the nineteenth century and the role of texts in relation to this.

Does Smith's notion of textually-mediated ruling relations confer an overarching power of the text and assume that texts do it all? Smith (1999: 79) makes clear that although power as a socially organised activity enters into ruling relations textually, it should not "... reduce them to relations of domination or hegemony, or to view them as monolithic or manipulated." Ruling relations are complexes of coordinated fields of activities, and texts of all kinds enter into social action as regulators that are represented as endowed with agency and power. The power of textual mediation is fundamentally linked to the replicability of texts, particularly as contemporary society is increasingly organised around electronic information technologies.

The significance of textual replication is its materiality. For Smith (1999), the materiality of the text connects a particular local setting in which a text is read, written, or told with its definite social organisation into extra-local properties that make it generalisable and replicable:

... the text *is* material, a definite physical entity, and its standardized reproduction in multiple sites of reading *as an identical form of words* is presupposed in the theorizing of the text as distinct from the work. (Smith 1999: 80)

It is the mediation of the text that is central to Smith's emphasis on ruling relations that coordinate the everyday activities of people's lives. Textual mediations serve as organisers of the social, making the social happen, and not organisation itself. Textual mediations are activities that, according to Smith (1999: 93), "... transmit 'organization' invented in one site of ruling to multiple sites..., regulating the local activities of particular people." According to Smith (1999: 87):

The replication of local 'events' as identical (though identity is always more or less a fiction) makes possible, for example, systems of measurement, the accumulation of statistical data, the formulations of rules and instructions applicable from one setting and to others, and other textual practices of science, management, and the market.

Smith's intention is to find a way to discover how the social is organised, to map that organisation so that those caught up in the ruling relations constituting it see and act upon this. The metaphor of mapping becomes significantly operational with institutional ethnography practices. In *WSCTI*, Smith (1999: 94-95) points to how mapping relates to the aim of inquiry, stating that it:

... extend[s] people's own good knowledge of the local practices and terrains of their everyday/everynight living, enlarging the scope of what becomes visible from that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others. Like a map, it would be through and through indexical to the local sites of people's experience, making visible how we are connected into the extended social ruling relations and the economy. And though some of the work of inquiry must be technical, as making a map is, its product could be ordinarily accessible and usable, just as a map is.

Smith (1999: 98) proposes that post-structuralism/postmodernism "... transfers the function of the subject to language or discourse, reinforcing the traditional separation of the bases of consciousness from the local historical activities of people's everyday lives." She criticises poststructuralist thinking as preventing inquiry into the relations that coordinate people's

activities with each other: this line of thinking cannot reveal how social relations come about. Smith's approach has been consistent in its commitment to what has been learned from the women's movement and its emphasis that the foundation of women's standpoint is anchored in the recognition of how actual people experience the material conditions of their lives. The experiencing subject, Smith would argue, cannot be reduced to discourse. The method of starting from experience and exchanging experiences with others reveals a truth about social organising exclusions and how it comes about. The task of social research for Smith is therefore to reveal how the social is put together as it happens. Contrary to post-structuralism/postmodernism, this requires co-ordering of subject-object-subject relations that arise as people's activities bring into being a world that is known in common.

Throughout Smith's work, she argues that inquiry must start from where people are, increasingly using the metaphor of a map. The map is only a representation but can be used as an analytical tool that points to: here is the person/group in their material conditions, now find the complex constellation of organising activity. For Smith, the metaphor of the map is imagined as three dimensional and tracing social relations that are in motion:

The metaphor of a map directs us to a form of knowledge of the social that shows relations between various and differentiated local sites of experience without subsuming or displacing them. Such a sociology develops from inquiry and not from theorizing; it aims at discoveries enabling us to locate ourselves in the complex relations with others arising from and determining our lives; its capacity to tell the truth is never contained in the text but arises in the map-readers's dialogic of finding and recognizing in the world what the text, itself a product of inquiry, tells her she might look for. (Smith 1999: 130)

Mapping social relations has become a significant part of the way other researchers have utilised institutional ethnography. It is now rare to see an IE project that does not entail some form of illustrated 'mapping', some quite elaborate.

## *Investigations*

Smith emphasises that the investigations she presents came about in a reflective writing process, drawing on previous research to make clear her arguments in the book. This research she relies on was formulated in a more conventional format (Smith 1999: 5). In writing the social, a problem came first and not the research data (Smith 1999). The two research analyses she discusses presents new dimensions to representing her ideas and have an important connection to analysis in my research.

The first is on schooling and mothering. From this, Smith interprets the coordination of multiple sites of experience that criss-cross with large scale organisation and text mediated practices as “Ideological Codes.” This idea does resemble her previous explication of an ideological circle. But here, Smith argues that discourses that are mediated by texts which she terms “T-discourses” have embedded in them a kind of ideological code that governs, rules. It accounts for how people are hooked into taking up the discourse and how that taking up is dispersed non-locally:

... there are ‘ideological codes’ that order and organize texts across discursive sites, concerting discourse focused on divergent topics and sites, often having divergent audiences, and variously hooked into policy or political practice. This ordering and organizing of texts is integral to the coordination and concerting of the complex of evolving T-discourses. (Smith 1999: 158)

Smith is adamant that she is not claiming a kind of determinism. For Smith (1999:159), the analogy she makes is meant to stress that ‘ideological codes’ are “... a constant generator of procedures for selecting syntax, categories, and vocabulary in the writing of texts and the production of talk and for interpreting sentences, written or spoken, ordered by it.”



Smith argues that the Standard North American Family (SNAF) is an example of an ideological code that hooks into all sorts of social, economic and political relations and standardises what a SNAF family is in North American. This is a married couple with children, employed male breadwinner, female carer of household members. And Smith (1999:159) sees it, as not particular, but as applying to any family. Her discussion of this connects with her earlier discussion of sociology's preoccupation with analysing categories which are not grounded in the actualities of any particular person's everyday life. Ideological codes, such as SNAF, Smith argues, are ubiquitous and operative: "They operate to coordinate multiple sites of representation" (Smith 1999:160).

Smith proposes that the ideological code ascribed to the SNAF discourse (T-discourse) provides a means of interpretation as a 'documentary method' instructing on how to read school behaviour as having cause and effects from an intact family or a deviant one. What Smith learned from this research was the necessity for the researcher to question their own participation in the research process and she points out how she too operated ideological codes that perpetuated a T-discourse that operated the SNAF typification. The 'standard family' or an approximation to it is a presence in my own research arena in terms of where children should and should not be present, and will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The second investigation Smith discusses concerns the social relations that constitute 'politically correct' discourse (PC-ordered). PC-ordered discourse works to standardise and regulate discourse. It works as a disciplining category which signifies deviance, and it sanctions what can be said, by whom, in what context and when. Political Correctness operates as an instruction in intertextual text-mediated discourse. Smith (1999:175-176) points out that political correctness as an ideological code:

...seem[s] to operate pretty independently as devices, carrying the effects but not the body of the ideology that governed their design. This is their power as discursive devices...

People pick them up and use them without realizing the source and the efficacy of meaning they carry with them in settings of their use; they become an active currency of ruling, operating in the interests of those who set them afloat and may have designed them, but their provenance and the ideological 'intention' is not apparent to them. They do not appear as regulatory measures; they are not forms of censorship by the state. Indeed, characteristically, they are spontaneously adopted and reproduced.

The ubiquitous characteristic of the ideological code is given force through its generalising and taken-for-granted characteristics. Because 'political correctness' works as a ruling relation, people use its organised inscribed authority to discredit challenging, oppositional and alternative knowledges. 'Political correctness' is something very much at work in my own research area, in particular in terms of controversies over who can research whom, and will be discussed in Chapter Three.

### ***Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People (2005)***

Smith's (2005) *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People (IEASP)* synthesises prior developments and also extends her thinking. Institutional ethnography is, according to Smith (2005) "... a resource that can be translated into people's everyday work knowledge. Hence it becomes a means of expanding people's own knowledge rather than substituting the experts knowledge for our own." She contrasts some other sociological attempts to link together macro- and micro-sociology, including Burawoy and his colleagues (Burawoy, Blum, et al. 2000; Burawoy, et al. 1991) on the 'extended case study method' (ECM), with institutional ethnography. This is because ECM is also trying to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-sociology as well as engaging with the local and extra-local. ECM is, however,

organised in a way that promotes the sociological drift from people to abstract concepts and systems when its analysis moves from the micro to the macro:

... inquiry passes from macro, from the 'life world' to 'the system.' While at the 'micro' level, the extended case method is ethnographic, using participant observation, at the macro, it is theory that is operative. Participant observation brings lives and work under scrutiny, and research analysis is 'hermeneutic.' Once, however, investigation moves beyond the life worlds of people to discover 'the properties of the system,' theory is in command and research becomes a 'scientific' ... exploration of forces acting at the global level. (Smith 2005:35-36)

Smith's work rejects a sociological project that is determined by theoretical frameworks that constrain analytical attention. This does not mean that she does not use theory, but for her theory is always understood as an activity. ECM, however, shifts from an ethnographic position to operating as a theory and Smith (2005: 36) notes that ECM analyses are guided by "... concepts such as *global domination* and *resistance*." For institutional ethnography, by contrast, there is no theoretical destination aimed for, it is a project of discovery in which the micro and macro are examined ethnographically. Smith (2005: 37-38) makes clear the central distinction between IE and ECM:

... institutional ethnography opens up ethnographically that level of organization that Burawoy assigns to 'the system.' The connections of actual activities performed locally are coordinated translocally, contributing their organization to local practices. Carrying ethnography beyond the locally observable is made possible both by the approach to work organization through the work knowledges of participants... and through innovative methods of incorporating the coordinating functions of text into ethnographic practice... Translocal forms of coordinating people's work are explored as they are to be found in the actual ways in which coordination is locally accomplished.

Institutional ethnography is neither bound to theory nor is its development exhaustive of a problematic. There is always more to the complexes of social relations than can ever be represented. And in *IEASP*, Smith (2005:38) explicitly notes:

I have appropriated the term problematic from Louis Althusser (1971, 32) to locate the discursive organization of a field of investigation that is larger than a specific question or problem. Within such a field, questions and problems arise to be taken up, but they do not exhaust the direction of inquiry.

In proceeding with an IE inquiry, Smith (2005:41-42) stresses two aspects of a problematic:

1) The problematic may start from a person's particular experience, but the focus of inquiry is on how that experience is coordinated by and through other people's doings. This requires exploration of the complex of social relations that the particular experience is hooked into and which enable it to be articulated as such. 2) The limitation of qualitative research in being bound to a local setting is a non-problem, Smith (2005: 42) suggests, because "... the local is penetrated with the extra- and translocal relations that are generalized across particular settings." Smith (2005: 42) further notes that:

Institutional ethnography addresses explicitly the character of institutions in contemporary society: that they are themselves forms of social organization that generalize and universalize across multiple local settings [and] ... their generalized and generalizing character is going to appear in any ethnography – indeed, it has to be there and should be there explicitly, even in an investigation that begins with the experience of one individual.

The social organisation of any institutional order cannot be taken for granted, it is the researcher's job to map out the institutional complexes that construct and determine people's lives in the material conditions people find themselves in. IE consequently has a 'double character,' which Smith (2005: 51) explains is on the one hand, "... to produce for people what can be called 'maps' of ruling relations and specifically the institutional complexes in which they participate in whatever fashion," and on the other hand, "... to build knowledge and methods of discovering the institutions and, more generally, the ruling relations of contemporary Western society."

Smith's metaphor of the map is not meant as an exhaustive representation of complexes of social relations. It is analytically useful to describe it, Smith (2005:51) suggests, as: "like the map of the underground mall, with its arrow pointing to a particular spot accompanied by the words YOU ARE HERE!" Through analytical mapping, the discoveries that arise from starting with "YOU ARE HERE" allow the subject standing in that position to come to know the social complexes implicated in organising their life and to perceive the possibilities for where change could be made. Smith does not qualify what she means by 'Western society' in the above quotation. She does acknowledge, however, that as institutional ethnography began to be taken up by others, she did not foresee the much more diverse institutional settings it would be used in relation to. However, the universalising applicability given to 'Western society' needs to be interrogated, and I return to this point later in the thesis.

The social happens, it is real and needs to be attended to in the actual activities people do. Smith (2005: 55) sets out in summary form mainstream sociology's deployment of the conceptual practices of power: 1) Words that reference action are converted into nominal concepts that disappear subjects, but which ascribes agency to the concept., such as "... organization, institution, meaning, order, conflict and power..." 2) Terms are treated as existing in the world independent of people's activities, such as "... role, rule, norm..." 3) Terms that are not well defined and are taken for granted as real, and here she notes such terms as social structure, and cultural capital. And 4) concepts detached from the activities that gave rise to them within historical time:

A concept such as bureaucracy, which came to sociology through the late-nineteenth/early twentieth century work of Max Weber can be used... as if there were no changes in how large-scale organizations are governed from Weber's time to our own. (Smith 2005:55-56)

Smith critiques these and related conceptual practices. She also uses concepts and acknowledges their usefulness so long as they are not taken to be relations in themselves. However, her use and that of other institutional ethnographers differs from the conceptual practices of standard sociology. For Smith (2005: 55) "... conceptual practices are intended to *explicate* the social in people's actual doings, and they have to be modified or discarded as further discoveries display problems or inadequacies." They are also not voided of people's activities with a false substitution of a referent agency. This does not mean the individual and their behaviour is the focus of inquiry. It is rather the coordination of people's activities that creates the social, not individuated subjects. Smith (2005:59) helpfully summarises what she calls the 'four-part package' in doing an institutional ethnography:

For institutional ethnography, the social as the focus of study is to be located in how people's activities or practices are coordinated. Individuals are there; they are in their bodies; they are active; and what they are doing is coordinated with others. That is the four-part package that is foundational to the institutional ethnographic project... For institutional ethnography, the social, as the focus of sociological inquiry, is specified as people's activities as they are coordinated with those of others. That is what is meant by "the social" in this context.

There are differences and similarities among people within situated contexts. What institutional ethnography investigates is the coordination of them.

#### *Language, Experience and Texts*

Smith incorporates a dialogical model of language as a form of coordination within institutional ethnography's ontology, which allows for the:

... social to be conceived as an ongoing historical process in which people's doings are caught up and responsive to what others are doing; what they are doing is responsive to and given by what has been going on; on every next act, as it is concerted with those of others, picks up and projects forward into the future. (Smith 2005:65)

For Smith, language is incorporated in understanding how the social is coordinated, how people's consciousness and subjectivities are concerted. In *IEASP*, Smith adds to her thinking of language as a social coordinator, taking up the "verbal generalized word" into her understanding of a world known in common. This idea of what is 'known in common' is significant for the discussion of my research as it relates to the multiplicity of experiences within the Aboriginal Australian child removal histories. A particular connection to be drawn on from Smith (2005: 85-86) is that,

...the perceptual standardization organized by a word means also that people differently positioned in relation to a named object can see it as the same. Hence diverging perspectives that are a necessary outcome of being in bodies and starting from each individual's own center of coordinates... can be concerted in words that organize perceptual generalization.

In *IEASP*, Smith (2005) sets out how to analyse textually organised institutional discourse. I have already discussed her use of texts as being active in the movement from the local to the extra-local ruling relations. In *IEASP*, she uses an analytical concept called 'text-reader conversation' (TRC), proposing that institutional discourses are constituted by properties of the TRC and are socially organising our everyday activities. She makes the connection between institutional practices and language to understand how institutional ruling relations coordinate everyday lives:

... rather than view institutional discourses as prescribing actions, we might see them as providing the terms under which what people do becomes institutionally accountable. They are distinctive in that they displace and subdue the presence of agents and subjects other than as institutional categories: they lack perspective; they subsume the particularities of everyday lives. This, then, is how we can begin to frame the distinctive properties of institutional text-reader conversations. Somehow or another, the text-reader conversations of institutional discourse involve procedures for treating actualities as their instances or expressions. (Smith 2005: 113)

Texts occur and work to coordinate institutional work across multiple settings. Texts are also produced, they are organised and designed with intent that works as a property of institutional discourse. Smith (2005: 120) sets out how a TRC approach to analysing texts focuses the researcher on three main things: reading of a particular text as something that is done in a particular local setting by a particular person; the reader plays two parts: first, she or he activates the text and, in activating it, becomes the text's agent; second, she or he responds to it in whatever way is relevant to her or his work; the text as activated by the reader plays a part in organising definite further sequences of action. This provides IE with a practical framework grounded in the material practices of working with texts. It not only maintains the presence of the subjects being researched, but also the researcher as a subject in the analysis.

In *IEASP*, Smith connects experience as located in place and time, rulings relations, and how institutional ethnographers can approach discovering those relations. As she notes,

...a central problem for the institutional ethnographer is to escape from the objectifications of the ruling relations and the monologies of institutional discourse and find her or his way back to the actualities that are always there, always going on, and always ultimately more than can be spoken. (Smith 2005: 123)

But when Smith proposes to start from someone's experience, what is this in relation to 'data' in the research context?

It is necessary to keep in mind, as Smith has suggested throughout her work, that researchers are in the same world as those we research. Connected to this is her argument about language as a social coordinator for researchers as well as subjects (Smith 1999, 2005). The characteristics of language as a social coordinator come together through an interpretation of experience as dialogue. Consequently, Smith proposes that the institutional ethnographer is



working with what she calls ‘data dialogues.’ That is to say, experience is understood as dialogic:

Dialogue is the language factory that produces out of the actual the experiential knowledge that can be further processed into ethnography. Experiential accounts cannot give direct unsullied access to actuality; actuality is always more and other than is spoken, written, or pictured. What becomes data for the ethnographer is always a collaborative product. (Smith 2005:125)

The attention to data dialogues is analysed in terms of what Smith (2005) calls ‘work knowledge’, relying on the generous concept of work introduced in *The EWAP* which orients the researcher to two lines of inquiry. The first is a person’s experience of and in their own work, what they do, how they do it, including what they think and feel. The second is the implicit or explicit coordination of their work with the work with others. For my research, it is the latter that is the focus. Smith recognises that it is not always easy to access work knowledges. Some impediments come in the form of ‘institutional capture’, discussed earlier concerning *The EWAP*, which generates a dialogue imbricated by institutional discourse. The institutional ethnographer is always working against this inertia of their practices. However, the use of work knowledge nonetheless allows the ethnographer to discover how work knowledges hook into various social relations that are involved in the organisation of people’s activities.

In *IEASP*, Smith returns to the metaphor of the map, in relation to mapping the work knowledges in a given research context. The intention is not to simply identify “X” as a work knowledge, but rather to map the sequences of action where work knowledges generate their coordination:

... the ethnographer’s analysis assembles the work knowledges produced by her or his collaborative work with informants to create a map or model of that

aspect of institutional organization relevant to the research problematic.  
(Smith 2005: 160)

An institutional ethnography aims to use the experience and work knowledges of its subjects, to learn from their expertise and to discover the extra-local social relations they are embedded in. A significant factor in discovering the movement from the particular and local experience, to the extra-local social relations that organise people's activities, is the mediation of texts.

Throughout, Smith has emphasised that texts mediate and work as social organisers in contemporary society. In *IEASP*, Smith looks at how texts and 'textual systems' work as social coordinators across time and distance. In her schema, this is a result of their characteristic property of replication:

Replicable and replicating texts are essential to the standardizing of work activities of all kinds across time and translocally. It is the constancy of the text that provides for standardization. The multiple replication of exactly the same text that technologies of print made possible enabled historically an organization of social relations independent of local time, place, and person. Texts suture modes of social action organized extralocally to the local actualities of our necessarily embodied lives. Text-reader conversations are embedded in and organize local settings of work. (Smith 2005: 166)

In an institutional ethnography, texts are part of the action, but "texts, however, do not become the focus in and of themselves... institutional ethnography recognizes texts not as a discrete topic but as they enter into and coordinate people's doings" (Smith 2005: 170).

*IEASP* provides a formulated approach to how institutional ethnography is done, albeit leaving open the topics of inquiry and the methods to be used in explicating ruling relations in particular contexts. This is the first monograph where Smith repeatedly acknowledges fellow institutional ethnographers. There is a shift in language that implies a field of discourse and research identities has developed, with this book using the phrase 'institutional

ethnographers.’ This is an interesting shift and it was also observable at the 2011 Institutional Ethnography Workshop in Las Vegas, where there was also use of the phrase ‘IErs’, discussed later. The development of an institutional ethnography field and ‘IErs’ affirms Smith’s argument that we are living and active in the same world that we research and the challenges of institutional capture. A question arises, which is whether the reflexive materialist method of inquiry has become an alternative sociology or a methodology in the wider field of sociology? Smith (2005: 50) herself clearly does not see it like this:

I have referred to it as a method of inquiry... because its findings are not already prejudged by a conceptual framework that regulates how data will be interpreted; rather, exploration and discovery are central to its project.

Smith insists, then, that it is an alternative sociology rather than a methodology.

*IEASP* is also concerned with how this alternative sociology can continue to develop. There is, for instance, considerable framing concerning how institutional ethnographers strategise around, for example, texts, language, ideology and so on. Also, a glossary of key terms associated with its practices is also incorporated. Nevertheless, Smith has consciously opposed treating institutional ethnography as an orthodoxy in the making, and she rejects the idea that the social relations constituting institutional complexes of ruling relations in a given context constitutes a ‘case study’. Rather, for Smith (2005: 219), each institutional ethnography

... is an investigation of the ruling relations explored from a given angle, under a given aspect, and as it is brought into being in people’s everyday work lives. Generalization from a particular study is not a matter of populations or even just the forms of standardization and generalization that institutions themselves produce and reproduce; it is, more important, an effect of the phenomenon of ruling relations themselves – that they are interconnected in multiple ways as well as deeply informed by the dynamic of capital accumulation.

Smith recognises the existence of a collective of researchers taking up institutional ethnography from different angles and exploring different aspects of ruling relations. As she has stressed, the researcher is in the same world as that which she investigates, and the body of IE research findings should be made more accessible outside the academy.

### ***Taking Up Institutional Ethnography***

Institutional Ethnography has been taken up by many researchers, a good few of whom were Dorothy Smith's doctoral students, and they in turn continue to utilise and make more visible through publication and teaching the practices and possibilities of IE. Discussion here concerns two things. The first is a collection of papers edited and contributed to by Smith, *Institutional Ethnography as Practice (IEP)* (Smith 2006), that draws on various ways IE has been taken up the second is my review of an Institutional Ethnography Workshop (Workshop) held at the 2011 Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) Annual Conference in Las Vegas which I attended. I highlight some overlapping themes and challenges concerning this taking up of IE below.

*IEP* should not be treated as a systematic guide to set borders for an emerging field of work, and Smith (2006: 1) comments that "though there are certainly some definite principles of procedure, there are also many ways of realizing them." It is a collection of research-based chapters that shows the various ways IE has been taken up in investigating and analysing the complex coordination of everyday lives in different settings. Smith (2006: 5) also returns to the 'Hero Map' previously discussed, using this as a framework for the chapters in this publication: "Each [chapter] takes up a different aspect of or approach to the journey of exploration that starts where our small hero stands." *IEP* is organised around three broad themes: methods, data and stages of research. Some of the chapters represent what can be

thought of as ‘classic’ IE, in the sense that the majority of investigations are in fields concerning professional industry/services in health professions, education, criminal justice systems and land regulation, where research starts the investigations of the particularities through talk and written texts, albeit carried out by different methods, to explore the social relations of organisation in particular situations. What follows is my summary and comment around five points that arise throughout the collection concerning: standpoint, form of data, mapping, texts, temporality and IE research funding prospects.

Standpoint, as articulated by Smith (1987), is the location from which analysis is made. This is represented in mapping as the ‘small hero’ just mentioned. In the *IEP*, research demonstrates how IE, grounded in standpoint, reveals social organising processes that work to shape and subjugate individual experiences through various ruling relations. For example, Diamond’s (2006) paper reflects on a conversation with Dorothy Smith about his study of nursing home care and points out the issues concerning standpoint and participant observation in the context of his research. This involved him conducting participant observation research as a certified nursing assistant on nursing home care, particularly the practices of nursing assistants. For Diamond (2006), adopting women’s standpoint meant that he would occupy in an embodied way the subject position of the nurse assistant. Through his embodied and reflective research, Diamond (2006:50) notes that nursing care was formally organised by nursing practices (extra-locally by management and regulations) and textual charting of tasks and management, however, there were a whole range of other experiences that go into nursing work that are more complex and unarticulated work practices: “The experience is full of physical and emotional turmoil, and it is suppressed... [and] investigation was about seeing, explicating, doing, and writing about work where we didn’t think it existed.”

Diamond's research reveals the silenced work, particularly of emotions and how the formal work organising practices shapes the informal, invisible, but felt work of emotions. I highlight emotion here because it raises questions for my research concerning how *the Stolen Generation(s)* narratives are organised. Emotions play a central feature in the organisation of experiences accounting for child separation histories, yet are not recognised as an organising property. Conceptualising emotion as a work practice as Diamond has opens up for my research, interrogation of forms of social organisation that has not been part of the literature on the child separations in Australia, a literature that renders itself to highly politicised ruling relations. To interrogate emotions as work knowledge in the child removal context is academically and politically risky.

Another example is Wilson and Pence's (2006) contribution, which points out that women's standpoint methodology is not exclusionary to other methodologies. Their research co-joins women's standpoint with indigenous methodologies (IM) concerning the relationship between domestic abuse of indigenous women and how the justice system managed such cases. Wilson and Pence recognise that research is subject to ruling relations. IM's aim and objectives are to recognise indigenous ways of knowing and therefore particular forms of organising social relations. For Wilson and Pence (2006), IE and IM are complimentary strategies: the people's standpoint (Smith) in Wilson and Pence's research is the indigenous standpoint. Wilson and Pence look at the social relations that organise particular indigenous lives and the social relations that organise the justice system through its work practices, how the two coordinate and identify the ruling relations at work. One of the strengths of standpoint is that it allows the locatedness of individuals to be a central place in social analysis. IE makes explicit how locatedness coordinates social relations. Wilson and Pence's analysis reveals, by starting from the standpoint of an indigenous woman subject to domestic

violence, there is a complex of ruling relations grounded in institutional management that does not take into account the everyday social reality experienced by the indigenous communities.

Wilson and Pence (2006:207) comment that,

...professionals working in the U.S. legal system are located inside a complex apparatus of social management in which, as professionals, they are coordinated to think and act within the relevancies and frameworks of that apparatus.

It is important to note that IM is not a homogenised research strategy that is identical across indigenous community researchers. In particular, the debate over using indigenous methodologies, including who can research whom, is relevant for my own research. Recognising the diversity of subject locations and ways of knowing needs to be attended to, made visible and articulated to the complexity in how multiple experiences are socially organised in the context of indigenous child separations in Australia. Standpoint is a fundamental principle in IE.

The development of IE has stressed that analysis of social relations looks at organising practices that are always in motion. One of the central roles data plays in IE is to hold or freeze social action for analysis. Data used for analysing complexes of social relations therefore takes on many forms. In *IEP*, a number of chapters look at issues around these forms: accessing and holding data in place for analysis, including experience, talk and texts. Just as data can take on multiple forms, a single research project can use multiple sources. IE is grounded in standpoint, which assumes the starting point of an experiencing subject. Experience is taken as a serious form of data, not as a referential property but concerning how particularities of experience are being shaped and organised from somewhere else. This

form of data has produced what might be considered 'common' IEs, where interviews and first person accounts are key forms of data.<sup>24</sup> The common IE tends to be interview-based rather than what I interpret from 'classical' Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999) as a text-based approach. That is not to say that common IEs do not utilise texts in their analysis, only that the interview-based approach dominates and precedes textual analysis and my research differs from this trend. Wilson and Pence's (2006) research interviewed justice system workers and conducted focus groups with indigenous women questioning what they do and how they experience their world in the context of the management of a 'case' and their everyday world. DeVault and McCoy's (2006) research used focus groups of institutional ethnographers to learn from their experiences about how interviewing techniques are used within the IE framework, rather than relying upon a literature review. Understanding experience as organised by institutional relations opens up an avenue for exploring how the social world is put together. Taking the position that experience is organised requires an interrogation of interviews (including the interviewer) and also first person narrative accounts. The 'common' IE using this form of data is organised, and its organisation includes other forms of data that can be looked at, including texts.

Texts, broadly understood, within IE play a central role in organising the coordination of experiences, which produce a recognisable world in common. Texts as data are not materially static. IE takes the position that texts are part of the social action under investigation. They play a significant, even dominating role in the sequence of action under investigation. For Smith (2006: 67) incorporating texts in social analysis allows the

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<sup>24</sup> A common IE refers to the predominant IE research activities that tend to focus on interview-based institutional ethnographies for primary data. For example, at the 2011 Society for the Study of Social Problems annual three-day conference, the Institutional Ethnography division organised 9 panels with 37 papers presented. Of the 37 papers, 32 of these were based on data drawn from interview-based, personal account approaches.



researcher to make observable the micro/macro, local/extra-local organisation, within which texts, as part of the action, are "... articulated to and articulating people's doings." For example, Turner's (2006) research concerning resident participation in relation to a municipal land development project traces how various texts such as applications, regulations, permits, meeting minutes, planning reports and so on are at work in organising how residents are regulated and able to participate in a local land development process. Texts are dominant factors in this institutional process, which highlights how texts occur and are part of a sequence of action.

The data in Turner's research took the form of text-work-text, which interrogated texts and talk as to how the "planning system" actually works from the standpoint of a resident. She concludes that analysis of this form of data reveals social relations that are coordinated through texts in an institutional process that creates larger scale social organisation which becomes known as the development planning system. By opening up how the process actually works, it allows for subsequent action to determine how and where a resident can intervene for change. In my research, the talk-text-talk data is active in constructing the public history of the child removals and the crystalised general history it produces implicates future action concerning child welfare practices.

Texts as data in Eastwood's chapter reflects on an early phase of analysis of United Nations (UN) documents on the environment and development issues (later connected with direct interviews). She articulates a broad understanding of access and notes that accessibility is more than just having access to a particular site or material object. Eastwood (2006: 182), following Smith, sees accessibility as the research practice that opens up the complexes of social organisation. Accessibility into the ontology of institutional complexes reveals the significant role texts play at the juncture of generalising particulars. Institutions, utilising

texts, generalise, replicate and thereby make recognisable a social order that becomes known in common. Eastwood examines the textual mediation of UN documents, noting that people are at work producing documents and not a generalised organisational body such as the General Assembly at work, nor do “meetings produce documents.” According to Eastwood, this is the standard way of discussing the textually mediated nature of the UN system. Eastwood (2006:183) makes the point that “the activities of a wide range of individuals are obscured in these phrases and in the final documents produced.”

Eastwood’s chapter shows how terms and categories are applied in policy making processes which, mediated by texts through institutional discourse, generalise and abstract particularities of members of countries and it is the abstraction that policies are produced from in institutional textual activity. The particular is subordinated to the generaliseable in the institutional sphere it is articulated to. What resonates with my research, although concerning a different context, is her comment that “... those texts are the sites of key struggles that are currently taking place. These struggles are organized around practitioners’ attempts to influence the meaning of terms that are integral to the making of environmental policy” (Eastwood 2006: 183). One could argue a similar struggle in the sense of influencing public history and by extension future public policy concerning the welfare of children in the wider in contemporary society. Textual production is an important issue in my research. For instance, the National Inquiry, not the sole Commissioner, produced the BTH Report. The BTH Report was produced by a number of differently located individuals and, like the BTHOHP, is socially organised. What are the abstracting and generalising features that organise a text to be known in common? What does the text serve to do? By whom, where and when? Is it being taken up in the context of its organisation?

Although data can take on different forms and can be analysed in different ways, in IE one of the common ways this happens is through mapping. Mapping is a representation of a limited portrait of ongoing social action. It is used to represent the complex social organisation taking place in institutional processes so as to show how texts occur and dialogically work in organising people's activities. One of the interesting features about mapping as an analytical tool is that it can be used to trace sequences of action by the experiencing subject and the places where texts are part of that action. For example, Turner's (2006) complex mapping of the public process of land development planning and approval revealed how 'invisible' textual operations organised the everyday actions of residents' participation and the invisible local work that gives rise to the larger social organisation of a planning system.

Like Turner, Wilson and Pence's (2006) research also mapped sequences of action in analysing indigenous domestic abuse cases in the justice system, by utilising multiple maps. One map traced the step-by-step process of the criminal case and also the civil protection case. Another map traced the local, state and national criminal justice regulations. By linking multiple maps, Wilson and Pence's work began to see the institutional actions which form 'processing interchanges.' Combining the different forms of data and mapping, 'processing interchanges' then became the analytical tool to identify the location of when something was done to a case record by an institutional worker in relation to the wider process. Wilson and Pence (2006:204) comment: "Steps before and after this interchange helped to determine the worker's actions on a case and the reasons behind the actions taken." Mapping the processing interchanges, and through this showing the rationality behind social actions, allowed the researchers to reveal where invisible assumptions were operating and where interventions could be made. Both Turner's and Wilson and Pence's chapters show how mapping has been

taken up, in linear, layered and cyclical forms, to reveal text-mediated social organising practices.

It is important to note that various forms of data and the multiple methods, like mapping, are all situated in time. An attention to temporality is essential in IE. Again, IE attempts to ‘hold’ social relations that are always in motion. It is therefore important to recognise that what is held, is done so in a particular place and time. Diamond (2006) highlights how time was an essential element in his participant observation analysis, recognising that his data was not verbal reconstructions on the part of those observed, but the articulation of primary narratives of observable action in time. Smith (2006) points out it is not always easy to hold social relations for analysis, and particularly when dealing with texts, the researcher must avoid the inertia of the static text. Texts are part of the action and occur in time, including reading. Reading occurs in time and in a specific place and involves intention. Intention implies temporality, the text is intended to do something, it is embedded with future action. Smith (2006: 67) comments that “The notion of the text as occurring is intended specifically to make it observable as in an ongoing activity. It suggests as a simple rule that texts should not be analyzed in abstraction from how they are entered into and coordinate sequences of action.” In this same sense, in terms of my research, the BTHOHP and related textual material is treated as part of the ongoing activity in the wider conversation and actions concerning Aboriginal and Settler Australian society.

Wilson and Pence (2006) make a distinction between institutional time and time as lived in the everyday. Institutional time is bound to a whole set of relations: legal, labour, ‘time zone’ and so on which is laid over the experiencing indigenous subject of, in the case of their research, domestic abuse. For Wilson and Pence (2006: 212), institutional time works as a social organiser in sequences of action:

Lived and institutional times intersect in some institutionally defined events; but once the institutional process begins, institutional 'efficiency' takes priority over 'victims' needs.

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When practitioners talk about a case, it is almost exclusively about the administrative process; what is happening between actual people has no other relevance.

The notion of institutional time and lived time is relevant in terms of the kind of knowledge and public history that derived from the National Inquiry and the BTHOHP. Some of the criticisms of the National Inquiry and BTH Report concerned time regarding, for instance, the limited time each interviewee was given, the short timetable given to states and organisations to produce position papers, and so on. Additionally, the BTHOHP was operating under a budget that further implicated time in relation to resources and accessibility to interviewees. An institutional inquiry process and the creation of the documentary record based on first person accounts necessarily makes use of 'memory' in a very material way. Memory practices are of course a definitionally temporal practice. Time is also relevant in ontological and epistemological terms of social organising practices of personal narratives between some indigenous ways of knowing and those of settler Australians.

I have highlighted how IE researchers are taking up practices in standpoint, the kinds of data that is being used, how mapping is being used as an analytical tool and the significance of time in interrogating institutional complexes of social activity. But getting a piece of IE research going in terms of funding can be challenging. The institutional complexes of obtaining research funding are governed by ruling relations. The antithetical character of institutional ethnography does not sit well with mainstream social science and funding institutions which generally want the researcher from the outset to state a problem, situate that problem in a discourse that is often from the standpoint of the institution instead of the

subject prior to researching, and therefore to already pre-structure the limits of what will be observed and written about.

In *IEP*, Smith, G., Mykhalovskiy and Weatherbee (2006) present a grant proposal assessing the relationship that people living with HIV/AIDS have with social services practitioners in Canada. This successful proposal is a demonstration of one way of articulating key IE principles for a funded research project. The key points the proposal raised are:

1) The research is from the standpoint of people living with HIV/AIDS rather than from the standpoint of the health care system and social services. This centralises the subject, the ‘small hero’, as the expert of their own lives. 2) It utilises the notion of work to understand the social organisation and “reorganization” of people living with HIV/AIDSs and also their supporters; and it presents some entry point questions on this that draw from preliminary interviews. 3) It articulates the problematic from experiences of people living with HIV/AIDSs and the disjunctures with how social services operates in relation to them and is not concerned with “feelings” or “attitudes.” 4) In addition to interviews, the proposal concerns how texts are conceptualised and how they can be used as data. 5) The term “social relations” was also identified as a crucial organising aspect. This part of proposal writing can be challenging since social relations are in motion while analysis is trying to hold them in place. Social relations are therefore a tool for how the researcher proceeds: “It operates as a methodological injunction that requires the researcher to examine empirically how people’s activities are reflexively/recursively knitted together in particular forms of social organization” (Smith, G. et al 2006: 177). And 6), an IE is articulated for people and the findings regarding this proposal take the form of policy recommendation at various levels and publications for academic and community organisations.

Despite the antithetical properties of IE and funding proposals, Smith, G. et al (2006) shows that proposal writing for an IE project can be both well articulated in policy terms and also consistent with IE practices. This proposal presented a common version of IE: the standpoint of those living with HIV/AIDs as located and experts; a problematic arising from preliminary interviews; texts occur as active organisers; social relations as operating activity; conclusions clearly define for particular people and policy outlets. It would be beneficial to see representations of strategies in successful proposal writing for projects that are more “messy.” I will return to the idea of common IE and its potential orthodoxy after discussing an Institutional Ethnography Workshop.

The practice of institutional ethnography has also emerged with various academic societies, such as a division within the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and as a thematic group within the International Sociological Association (ISA). Through the division of Institutional Ethnography in SSSP, a whole day IE Workshop was held as part of the SSSP 2011 Annual Conference. It was attended by around 45 people, some new to IE but most familiar with it and considered to be “old hands” (Workshop 2011). Prior to this conference event, apart from reading the literature review presented in this chapter, I had not engaged in discussions with other scholars concerning institutional ethnography apart from in supervision. I address this point because the direct engagement with others in the Workshop revealed a way that IE has been taken up in terms of how people talk about what they are doing with others as colleagues. Many people attending spoke of themselves as ‘IErs’, which implies a particular kind of research identity, differentiating themselves from other fields of inquiry. The workshop was organised around three broad themes of institutional ethnography: formulating a problematic and mapping, the sociology that informs institutional ethnography, and questioning how to extend and push boundaries of institutional ethnographic thinking.

Four particular points of interest arose during the Workshop relative to the concerns of this thesis.

The Workshop was not an introductory one. It started by plunging immediately into ideas about mapping the social, describing it as a strategy to support the development of research while recognising that maps are “an objectification that are culturally located and in time. A map is a representation... the map has to be pulled into the actualities of everyday lives of people” (Griffith 2011). Some participants displayed final and draft mapping projects in a way similar to a format of a poster session. Collectively, the presentations concerned the various ways mapping is used as a tool to discover a problematic and develop stages of research. Two of these presentations show this well. Thus participant Laurie Clune presented ‘layers’ of a developing map concerning nursing work and work injury. Her initial brainstorming map of nursing injury was layered over with a clear paper map with information obtained during the research. This had included informants completing empty ‘shell’ maps to sketch/write what they understood was happening to them and when it was happening to them. The maps she presented also incorporated the texts that occur in the work injury process. By incorporating these layers of mapping and the use of colours on the maps to distinguish people, documents and talk, she showed something of the complex relationships that rule the nurse work injury process. The layered mapping process helped her identify disjunctures to take up in her further research as well as showing her how social relations were governed in this context.

Jerry Ferris then provided maps illustrating her research on the US justice system. She presented two maps. The first showed her data collection progression concerning the texts that dominate in the justice system, and the texts that disappear in the system. The second was a relational map showing what happens outside in the community in relation to



particularities of an incarcerated/emancipated (released from prison) person. The mapping technique used represented her process of research while also showing how individual experience and related material (personal essays and letters) is subordinated, including personal texts made invisible, to judicial procedural texts (dominant or Boss Texts).<sup>25</sup> Ferris's second map demonstrated one of the key goals in IE, which is to find the ethnographic moment when people interact with texts that occur and the social relations that they are hooked into.

Mapping is not essential for an IE. However, mapping has been a useful analytical tool even though it is recognised as a material representation of how the social in a given situation is put together. There is little discussion of the linear or 'flat' character of such a presentation in dealing with layers of complex social phenomena. As discussed earlier, Smith sees the metaphor of the map as three dimensional, but it is difficult to materially make IE mapping visible as such. Also, there might be the sense of an expectation that an IE project ought to use mapping, and this might eclipse other possibilities for representing an IE process. IE mapping is used as an analytical tool and the social organisation of knowledge it represents has very definite limits. So an interesting question to ask is, what might a non-classic IE mapping of social relations look like?

Asking this connects to questions regarding common IE and orthodoxy. It was clear at the Workshop that common IE research has tended toward interviews and researching the public sector, such as regarding public social and health services, education, the justice system, and so on, and there was something of a sense that there is a need to push boundaries of empirical

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<sup>25</sup> Many participants used the term "Boss Text" to represent a dominant text or set of texts that suppress other texts or particular experience. At the Workshop, Dorothy Smith noted this term arose out of a conference she attended in Australia and acknowledged it is a very "Australian sort of word" which has been captured in many institutional ethnographers analytical descriptions.

sites for IE research. For many of the Workshop participants, the question of orthodoxy only meant the kinds of empirical zones that had been engaged. However, on reflection, I see another form of orthodoxy to confront, and that is the replication of the limited repertoire of foundational IE assumptions and there has been little development of other social theories/methodologies and also research contexts that might expand IE in new directions. In Chapter Three I will discuss methodologies that I link with the IE investigation I carried out.

At present, how IE has been taken up gives the impression that IE methodological principles are set and that there are equally set methods to discover and map the institutional aspects that coordinate social relations. In addition to concerns about growing orthodoxy, a related question is whether IE is being taken up and treated as a methodological approach and not an alternative sociology, similar to how ethnomethodology was taken up in relation to broader sociological practices. There is a connected question here - what are the ruling relations that render IE as an optional approach rather than as an alternative sociology? The politics of ruling relations in the academy and the discipline of sociology is relevant to exploring all three, but particularly the third.

The politics of IE has been made clear: research is for people, the 'small hero.' The politics might in some way play a role in how IE performs as a possible orthodoxy, not by intention but by material effect. The Workshop centered on who the research is for in terms of how to best represent IE in terms of grant proposal writing. In this respect, participants were encouraged to articulate the practical and usually policy outcomes of research for people. At least for a common IE, this mode of inquiry has a practical base: to bring knowledge back to people so they can see how it works and see where change can be made. Discussions in the Workshop were oriented around the common form of IE research, in which people have been

interviewed and the data produced from those interviews are analysed in relation to how texts work in the situation under interrogation.

What is not clear, and the Workshop could not articulate a discussion around, is how the politics of a research strategy for people shapes up when the data are retrievable documents to be analysed in relation to large scale public discourse. This is of course the context of my own research. The common IE position of starting with the experiencing subject, the ‘small hero’ as an expert, to provide to the researcher the particularities and material conditions of their lives in a given situation does not exist in my research. I am working primarily with documents, a set of documents now some twenty years old, where people’s participation and personal accounts were articulated, not in relation to my inquiry, but to a discourse about experiences of removed children. I cannot interview the people who have provided personal accounts in the BTHOHP, I cannot start from a single interviewee’s material conditions like many IEs do. I am working with retrievable documents as the core data, with few additional direct interviews. The politics of an IE, including who the research is for, became a contentious issue in a conversation between myself and another Workshop participant about my research. The conversation with an Australian workshop participant about my research on the Aboriginal Australian child removal histories was revealing in terms of relations of ruling concerning who can speak and what can be said about these histories.

The Australian researcher presented her IE mapping process of ruling relations that construct and evaluate ‘standards’ in technical and higher education in Australia. She spoke of herself as an ‘IEr.’ I had the opportunity to have a short conversation with her about my research and my IE approach to interrogating the social organisation of knowledge around the public histories of the child removals, focusing on the BTHOHP and related material. My subsequent fieldnotes did not capture the full extent of the conversation but they did note her

reactions and her comments (Peet Fieldnotes 17 August 2011). Her initial reaction was that she was ‘disturbed’ that I was investigating the documents of the child removal history narratives when I did not have any immediate connection to them or Australia (although apart from being Australian, her own connections seem equally removed). She commented she did not think there is a master narrative about the removals, yet immediately preceded to provide one by stating that the removals were about removing people from cultural ways of life, that this was done for physical and cultural dispossession and used to produce domestic servants out of this.

For the Australian researcher, and like the master narrative, the removals were about stamping out the cultural connections which differentiated people based on race. Her statement points to race-based ideological reasons, identifying it as a social Darwinism which is part of the organisation of the master framework she also said does not exist. She did not bring up the more nuanced and complex aspects of the removals and just mentioned a narrow relationship to servant labour. She did not acknowledge the links that my research reveals concerning the removals as part of a broader oppression of women (indigenous and settler) and class, poor women and their children. As such, the removals are not solely an ‘indigenous issue.’ She commented that many people in Australia, particularly Indigenous people, would think it inappropriate for me to do research on an ‘indigenous issue’, and she stated (erroneously) that I needed to go through an ethics committee and also ask Indigenous council leaders’ permission, although in fact the interviews are documents fully in the public domain. Her clear discomfort and disapproval were combined with encouraging me to read removal autobiographies and to watch *Rabbit Proof Fence*, a film based on an autobiography by Doris Pilkington/Nugi Garimara about her and her mother’s removal to a settlement, in order to ‘see how the real indigenous people talk about it’. Her position suggests that such

experiential accounts by indigenous people on removals are ‘authentic’ and referential to reality of what happened back then. My observations and account of the conversation reveals how sensitive my research topic is. In addition, given that she is a ‘seasoned IER,’ it was interesting to see how difficult it was for her to make the connections of ruling relations that she was employing in our conversation, and also that she found it difficult to conceive of a purely text based IE project.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the chronological development of Institutional Ethnography as it has been developed by Dorothy Smith and taken up by others. In my research, I am taking up an institutional ethnography, IE, as a methodology and ontology. By this I mean I am orienting my research to the ruling relations that coordinate multiple personal accounts that form the knowledge that constitutes the public history of Aboriginal Australian child separations. There are five points of an IE strategy that are particularly important for my research. These concern the knowing subject, ideology, accounts, texts and mapping. Although they are set out separately here, they are of course in practice interrelated, as later chapters will show.

### *The Knowing Subject*

Smith’s idea of women’s/people’s standpoint brings to attention the critical relationship that exists between knowing subjects and what can be known about the social world. Investigating the relational link that is materially mediated between the two is essential for understanding the social organisation of knowledge in the movement from a local to extra-local sites. People experience their lives in a located setting under specific material conditions, in time, and

always in relation to other people's doings, including some who may be unknown to them. The experiencing subject is understood as an expert in their lives, which also links into how the BTHOHP has positioned its interviewees. Starting from the located position allows the researcher to interrogate the organising activities that work to shape the subject position's experience. People are at work in producing a recognisable world that is known in common; and they do so by using methods of interpreting, thinking, reasoning, language and also narrative devices that operate as organisers to make their particular experiences recognisable by others. This also includes the researcher, who becomes a subject in the research through her methods of observation, interpreting, reading, writing and activating texts. These are the same activities that the subjects under examination also use in their everyday activities; and in my research they are interrogated in the context of the public histories of Aboriginal Australian child separations accounts.

In my research, the people whose interviews I examine experienced differences and similarities in their experiences of the child separations, while the inquiry focuses on how the complex of social relations mediates and organises those diverse experiences to produce what is known in common about them. This requires analytical procedures which recognise that experience is dialogic and organised. In my research, the knowing subject of the researcher is the starting place for this analysis. I am primarily working in the extra-local site of textually mediated discourses, regarding the BTHOHP and related material. How and where is this research carried out? What is it being carried out for? How are the activities of my research practices hooked into and coordinated with activities that others have engaged in from elsewhere? To start from this located place requires using the analytical tool of a problematic, for this focuses the researcher's gaze on the disjunctures existing between the variously located people, and their accounts of removal and how they were coordinated into a socially

recognisable world that is known in common. The result is that people can make statements like ‘she or he is one of the Stolen Generation(s)’ and ‘this is what happened/this is what the removals were about’, and my own sociological description about this accounting is of course also part of the process. Starting from experience and moving outward to examine how an object world is produced, I use the analytical tool of “social relations” to identify and describe the activities that people engage in and are articulated by. Social relations points to the coordinating activity that is the focus of this research. It is understood as an “effect of social organisation” (Smith 1990a: 69).

### *Ideology*

A disjuncture, a line of fault, exists between particular experience as a form of actuality that cannot be referentially fully accessed, and the version that becomes transformed into objectified general experience. The social occurs in the transformation involved, and one task for this research is analysing the ruling relations that organise the coordination of the multiple experiences that eventuate as a public history known in common about the child removals. This requires taking up ideology as a material activity in terms of how the BTHOHP and related material were produced, who can research what, and how ideas, statements, categories and concepts work to construct a recognisable interpretive framework which hooks into various activities of people, in policy, politics, education and so on. Ideology is a social organiser and mediates various institutional activities. My research focuses on the textual mediated discourses and how ideological practices operate in the construction of personal accounts about the child removals and resultant public knowledge about them. To do this, analytical tools for explicating ideological practices will be used, such as Smith’s procedures for analysing the ideological circle of personal accounts, and the ideological codes embedded

in what she has termed T-Discourses, as a means of discovering the ruling relations that organise knowledge in my research context.

### *Accounts*

The popular use of personal accounts is to produce an interpretive scheme pointing to an account as factual (real in every sense) and referential. Discovering the relationship between experience, telling, personal accounts and time in producing ‘the facts,’ and how these becomes authoritative about what happened and why during the child separations is central to my research. I am interested in how personal accounts are socially organised across multiple sites and how this organisation produces particular knowledge about the child separations and more generally about public history making in this context. An IE strategy enables me to analyse the ruling relations of how personal accounts are socially organised in local and extra-local settings and taken to represent a definitive public history. This gives attention to how an account is materially produced, the reading and interpreting relations that are invisible but part of its organisation, the role of the documentary method of interpretation in unpacking the reading of personal accounts, the work knowledges that hook into social relations at extra-local sites, and also the ‘double relation’ that sociological description plays in this.

### *Texts*

Texts are crucial in IE in analytically interrogating the social organisation of knowledge. My research is focused on the textually mediated discourses that work to accomplish a particular form of knowledge. It is primarily texts, of different kinds, that are coordinated into sequences of action in the accounting of the past in the public history of the child separations.



How and when a text appears and operates as a property of social organisation in and through personal accounts, including the researcher's, needs to be made visible. This requires a textual analysis conceptualising texts as material, ideological, mediating and active. IE strategies to discover the organising social relations are helpful and I will use the analytical procedures of "reading through the text" by incorporating the "text-reader conversation" approach, which positions the reading and interpreting of the text by a knowing subject in a particular time and place. The reader or hearer of the text becomes the active agent, activating and responding to the text in a particular way and this must be accounted for in analysis.

At the same time, the text is active and is intended to do something in relation to future action, including reading. Connected to the importance of reading and interpretation and social action, the T-Discourse approach is analytically useful in explicating how texts mediate the social organisation of knowledge produced through personal accounts in my research. The highly political and contentious knowledge practices around these histories are embedded with ideological practices and are instructive in showing how something can be told, read, and by whom. The use of T-Discourse analysis allows the researcher to focus their gaze on 'ideological' codes' that work to organise and rule how and what can be known, and by whom, and this is extremely important in understanding knowledge production in my research.

### *Mapping*

Mapping is a way of representing the social relations that organise the experience of knowing subjects in given situations. As previously, discussed, common IEs have often started from the particularities of a person in a local setting and in time, mapping the work knowledges of informants and moving outward from there to how they are coordinated with extra-local

activities. The IE mapping I have reviewed from the literature and at the SSPS Workshop did not start from the researcher's location. The researcher was eclipsed from these representations.

In contrast, my research concerns the extra-local space of textual discourses, using personal accounts that have already been collected by other people and for other purposes. However, staying consistent with the IE strategy of starting where we are, my mapping begins with the located place as a researcher, how I went about my research, the discovery of the social relations that work to organise an accounting for the child removals as a social problem, and the activities which organise the researcher's sociological descriptions of them. IE maps are representational and embedded with ideological intent. They are to be read in a particular way in order to instruct the viewer/reader on how to read it. Maps are texts and will be analysed as textual practices consistent with IE strategies concerning them. Mapping in my research not only reveals the coordination of multiple experiences from the data collected, but also shows the researcher's relationship to the sociological inquiry and how that organises the knowledge produced.

In chapter three, I will explore these five IE strategies in more detail and how they are taken up in the analysis that follows. Chapter Three will also introduce and link these strategies to other analytical tools, such as those that interrogate memory in relation to personal accounts.

## Chapter Three

### Taking Up an Institutional Ethnography

#### Introduction

Chapter Two explicated the development of Institutional Ethnography (IE) and I identified various ways it has been taken up; it ended with a brief review of key IE ideas of resonance for my own research. In this chapter, I analytically get to grips with how I take up an IE. This includes identifying a problematic, the relationship between my Master's study and taking up an IE; five points my analysis of ruling relations focus on: the knowing subject, ideology, personal accounts, texts and mapping; and the analytical procedures of the Text Reader Conversation, Ideological Circle and Code and mapping that I draw on.

It will already be apparent that my IE does not conform to an orthodox or common IE as described in Chapter Two, in a number of respects: 1) The standpoint taken up is of the researcher engaging extra-local coordination and discourse as a reader. I did not interview local people concerning their removals or participation in removals and therefore do not adopt the common 'work knowledges' focus of most IE projects. As a result, the 'small hero' framework positions the reader/researcher in constituting the complexes that organise the extra-local discourse. 2) I am working with retrievable texts situated within an extra-local discourse rather than entering research through interviewing. 3) I am broadening the reach of IE research by thinking about the social organisation of knowledge in relation to narrative and memory in the context of accounting of the past. This research, therefore, begins to move away from the common IE model.

### *The Problematic*

The production and circulation of *The Stolen Generation(s)* personal accounts has occurred around a canonical contemporary public history in Australia. The entry point of my research arises as a problematic (Smith 1987) concerning this knowledge as grounded in particular times and places, and what needs to be explored and explained is how many people who are differently related, and who have experiences which contain many differences as well as similarities, end up being represented as saying the same thing. How knowledge is organised and produced and become ruling is empirically interrogated in chapters following. Partialness and limitations are not surprising in such a complex social phenomenon as the Aboriginal Australian child separation histories. In addition, the cultural ideas and assumptions aiding the production of a core meaning, of what it all ‘adds up to’, are amongst other things embedded in what kinds of stories can be told, how they are told, to whom, and under what materially situated circumstances (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). At the start of my postgraduate work, taking up this problematic and an IE was not straight-forward.

### *The Master’s Study, Knowing Subjects and the ‘Text Reader Conversation’*

My Master’s research served as a pilot study for investigating BTHOHP accounts but did not use an institutional ethnography methodology. Instead it took off from other analyses on BTHOHP interviews, to provide an in-depth analysis of Glenys Collard’s (Collard 2001) interview about her removal and separation. I used Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998; 2003; 2008) ‘Voice-centred Relational’ method<sup>26</sup> to examine relational links between biography and social structure through the layered readings it organises. The advantage of the Mauthner

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<sup>26</sup> Mauthner and Doucet (1998; 2003) adapted their method from Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) ‘Listening Guide’.

and Doucet approach is: 1) it allows an ethical analysis of interviews which avoided fracturing these through practices such as coding, instead preserving the integrity of meaning-making processes, 2) it produces layered readings which help to understand the progression of lengthy and dense interviews, 3) it enables the analysis of in-depth connections with this one interview in relation to the other nine interviews I examined, and 4) it takes up a reflexive approach to narrated subjects, including the role of the researcher as analyst.

There were also some disadvantages to this approach and, as I reflect on it now, I made mistakes too. I found the methodology was constraining in that the layered readings imposed categorical boundaries in terms of reading just for ‘relationships’, or ‘socio-cultural structures’; and so on. I also found myself turning the subject’s personal accounts into categorical abstractions, applying abstracted theories and comparing the abstractions across interviews. The subjects disappeared as the category was empowered with agency. This first study also rendered absent the social organisation of the telling and the context of the telling. The result was an appropriation of personal accounts.

I raise these mistakes for analytical purpose. I was operating within a categorical analysis which Smith (1990b) has argued is a form of ruling relations that actually works against understanding the social in given situations and disappears experiencing people. Connected to this, the role of research and writing about others is significant, and as Strathern (1987:25) has noted: “Other people’s authorship cannot be displaced. The ethnographer of his/her part is put into the position of laying out the relationship of his/her representations alongside ‘theirs’.” My main problem and perplexity after writing up the pilot analysis and what I had ‘done’ with Glenys Collard’s interview was: “Who am I to question her and other peoples’ experiences?” This question surfaced in different ways during doctoral supervision meetings until my perplexity became more concrete and it seemed that at the core of what I was

dealing with was: “How can I as a researcher ethically question someone’s past experience?” I had to deal with the ethical issue of researching what I started out assuming were ‘victim’ accounts. I positioned the individuals who had been removed/separated as children as victims and had apprehension and fear of writing in a way that would not ‘validate’ their experiences, or rather their tellings of these. Within this same frame of thinking, when I approached the interviews of a former police officer, welfare officer, missionary, I was not apprehensive of invalidating *their* experiences. My own bias, before approaching their interviews, was that they were ‘perpetrators’ that required a different treatment. During supervision (Research Diary 15 January 2009), I had to engage with whether I would have a moral conundrum in questioning someone’s account if they were a ‘victim’ of attempted murder or a murderer? This led me to further question why I assumed there is a ‘hands-off’ to questioning and analysing the accounts of perceived ‘victims’, but a ‘hands-on’ to perceived ‘perpetrators’? The ethical question for me became: “How can I proceed as a responsible researcher and respond ethically to those whom I don’t necessarily agree with as well as those I do?” I realised that making the double participation, the activity of knowledge production by others and also by my own research, intellectually and morally transparent is a key to responsible research (Addelson 1994; Stanley 1997).

This ethical puzzle contributed to organising my research around how a researcher can ethically and responsibly investigate the social world. This new line of thinking led me to Dorothy E. Smith’s (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006) work. This gave me a useful framework to explicate this ethical question in the context of my research by insisting that ruling relations are at work in organising binaries such as victims and perpetrators. Reflecting on this, how I came to think of a particular interviewee and their personal account in that way is itself a question of the ‘how’ of the social organisation of knowledge.

The necessity of an ethical research practice became clear, including that the experiences of the BTHOHP participants should be taken respectfully, and the particularity of their accounts should not disappear in the midst of methodological techniques (Smith 1999; Addelson 1994). They are real people who experienced real outcomes from their life experiences as well as from telling their stories. Included in this is my own research, for that has material consequences as others engage with it and perhaps take it up. Such a sensitivity toward research participants and analysis of their accounts needs to morally balance investigating how an account is put together and structured, the claims being made from this in the present, and the agency and material conditions that gave rise to the experiences told about.

My Master's research and the ethical issues arising from it brought into sharp focus that the knowing subject is central to producing knowledge. Analysis cannot separate the knower from what is known. It is in the particularities of the experiencing subject that hook into other people's activities, and which in turn produce what is known. As Stanley (1997) has pointed out, the act of knowing should be understood and practiced methodologically. This means that the act of knowing ethically should make visible the researcher's location and also their gaze and analytical activities must be understood as in a social relation with the kind of knowledge produced.

To ask, who are the knowing subjects and how their experiences are socially expressed in relation to others is an empirical question. In Chapter Two I discussed Smith's (1987) differentiation between knowing which is understood as the particularities of the experiencing person, and knowing which takes the objectified form of knowledge. Focusing on the knowing subject in the inquiry process is in part to find out what is not known from a more removed position, and to explicate the disjunctures between actuality and the social organisation of an expressed world known in common. How knowledge about

removals/separations has been accounted for requires an analysis of the role of the knowing subject. This places importance on the activities of the social researcher in terms of their methods of thinking, reading and writing about the social relations that coordinate the expression of multiple experiences in this context of the documentary accounts of child separations produced by the BTHOHP.

My IE takes up Smith's (2005) Text Reader Conversation (TRC) approach in order to explicate the knowing subject in relation to the material discourse within which this research is located and also a part. This approach shows how my reading of the BTHOHP personal accounts and related material activates those texts; it also and relatedly brings my participation as a reader and knowing subject, through my local thinking, observation and interpretive activities under definite material conditions, into a sequence of coordinated action with others to produce knowledge about how this accounting of the past is organised. This echoes Atkinson and Coffey's (2004:72) comment that: "reading is an activity, not the passive receipt of information. The reader brings to the text his or her stock of cultural knowledge, a knowledge (or ignorance) of similar texts, and his or her own biography." Taking up a TRC approach is useful in showing how social relations, as activities, connect one site to another. The text/reader relationship centralises questioning how a text is organised for the reader around the particulars represented and interpreted as knowledge that is known in common. Connected to this is the significance of sociological observation and description in analysis and writing an academic text such as a doctoral thesis, article or a book.



*Personal Accounts, Memory and the 'Ideological Circle'*

Sociologically interrogating personal accounts obviously has a history beyond institutional ethnography. The term 'accounts' has its own epistemological and methodological underpinnings. For instance, there are significant differences between terming people's statements as accounts, stories, life histories and narratives, including the implied ethics of analysing them. At one end of a spectrum, accounts can be seen as highly performative (Scott and Lyman 1968). At the other end, accounts can be seen as referential and celebrating agency and the 'voice' articulated in them. Atkinson (1997; 2009) has addressed some of the resulting methodological and conceptual problems and has been subjected to intense criticism for doing so (see the Atkinson, Frank and Bochner debates; and comments on this by Stanley 2007).<sup>27</sup> As I discussed in Chapter Two, Smith's work (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005, 2006) takes a different approach, by viewing accounts as coordinated social practices in producing a world known in common. This is a middle ground that takes into consideration the performativity of an account, but it also recognises agency (embodied experience) with the caveat that agency does not mean that organisation and structure is not there.

In the BTHOHP, the personal interviews overall and as 'a collection' tell a story, with the collection itself acting as a narrative device within this, drawing together as an entirety what it was like to be an agent and participant, whether as a removed child, a foster parent, welfare worker and so on, in those particular circumstances, places and times. How personal accounts are composed, and by what means they are articulated and interpreted as 'factual accounts', requires the investigation of personal accounts that are popularly understood as referential.

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<sup>27</sup> See Atkinson 1997 and 2009, Frank 2000, and Bochner 1997, 2001. See also Stanley's 2007 clarification of Atkinson's position.

However, both the composing accounts and the overall narrative frame can only be expressed through memory. This is often taken for granted as having directly referential properties but which in line with much recent theorising, I conceptualise as a present-day situated reconstruction, located in and shaped by the 'now' of telling (Stanley 2006; Riessman 2008; Plummer 2001; Thomson 1994). There is little IE literature that engages with the complexity of analysing memory practices or of the artfulness with which stories and narratives are shaped and told, which I argue compliments institutional ethnography strategies. This is however central to my analysis and therefore requires some expanded attention here.

Memory, as a social and present-time reconstruction of past lived experience (and recognising the very real outcomes of experience), can be understood as 'limited portraits' which influence attitudes, assumptions and expectations concerning how people go about telling their stories (Riessman 1993; Tonkin 1992). Utilising retrospective personal accounts to research patterns of social life does not provide a 'window opportunity' to an actuality as this was lived, but rather, as Riessman (1993:15) has argued, "We are interpreting and creating texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of primary experience, to which we [including the teller] have no direct access." This is in line with Smith's (1990a) point that textual reality works to organise personal accounts as though referential and in effect as a substitute for actuality, with the substitution becoming represented as actuality itself. What an institutional ethnography does is look at the ruling relations that have organised the representation and how it comes to rule. In the context of memory, there is social organisation to what is represented as 'collective memory' around Aboriginal Australian child separations and its organisation shows how ideological practices instruct and guide the way in which memory can work in accomplishing particular knowledge.

The Introduction to this thesis discussed how the discourse around Aboriginal Australian child separations has at its core the assumption of a common experience, which I argue has required the simplification of multiple experiences to coordinate these into a standardised narrative through the activities of ruling relations. This in turn has had effects, complicated effects, on how ideas about memory of the past are understood and deployed. Does the discourse and actions of those involved in making histories about the Aboriginal Australian child separation, like the National Library of Australia's *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project*, play out in 'instructing' or 'pressuring' or 'enabling' an emphasis on common experience? What happens to those experiences that do not fit the 'shared experience'? Ideas about collective memory<sup>28</sup> (Hablwachs 1992; Misztal 2003; Tonkin 1992) convey the importance of the social frameworks in which particular memories can form and be regenerated. As Elizabeth Tonkin (1992:112) points out, "The contents or evoked messages of memory are...ineluctably social insofar as they are acquired in the social world and can be coded in symbol systems which are culturally familiar." And in a similar vein, Peter Berger (1963:56) argues: "We ourselves go on interpreting and reinterpreting our own life, ...memory itself is a reiterated act of interpretation. As we remember the past, we reconstruct it in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is not."

Memory is certainly a social activity, but the collective notion of memory needs to recognise there are often circumstances in which memory is actively re/made, and not just concerning the Aboriginal Australian child separations example either. It is analytically more useful when looking at collective memory in the context of Aboriginal Australian child separations to take a position similar to Sontag (2003). This is to see it as rather a 'stipulation', a 'collective instruction,' and in this sense it relates to Smith's idea on ruling relations that

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<sup>28</sup> For an extensive largely uncritical review of collective memory approaches, see Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy (2011) *The Collective Memory Reader*.

authorises some forms of ideological practices and de-legitimises others in its construction of a standardising narrative. As a result, ‘the history’ becomes a set of supposedly unassailable facts covering something more complicated and contentious (Stanley 2006). This idea has been developed by Stanley (2006) in relation to white women's role in Afrikaner nationalism in early and middle twentieth century South Africa, in theorising the analytical concept of post/memory. This is memory as a memory ‘after the fact’ that links individuals, reminiscences, non-transparent power structures and present-day social actions.<sup>29</sup> And it is precisely this which are the ruling relations that this research explores.

An IE approach is useful in interrogating personal accounts and enables the researcher to take into account the relationship of experience, memory, the telling of a life and the textual-mediations that organise these. My research evaluates those accounts of agency and action as precisely accounts and therefore as motivated explanations rather than straight-forwardly as descriptions. The aim of analysis is to interrogate how multiple personal accounts are coordinated, and co-ordered, to accomplish the particular knowledge it produces. To do this, I use the analytical method of the ‘ideological circle.’ This entails looking at two things: first, the structure of the narrative in terms of how particularities are ordered, what is included, discarded or ignored and what the narrative is related to, in order to arrive at a particular ideological scheme; and second, how the ordering and post/memory practices forms a particular narrative that implicates social relations and actions that position and takes off from these.

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<sup>29</sup> Stanley’s post/memory as an analytical tool should not be confused with the term of ‘postmemory.’ The slash in Stanley’s term signifies a mediated relation between the two. Others use the term differently. For example, in Hirsch’s (2012: 6) work concerning trauma studies, postmemory is understood as a structural transmitter of trauma from one generation to the next, whereby postmemory (without the slash) is “... a *consequence* of traumatic recall but ... at a generational remove,” a broadly referential approach to memory and the past.

### *Active Texts and Temporality*

Interrogating the extra-local discourse of the Aboriginal Australian child separations phenomenon through the BTHOHP and related material engages ideas concerning the materiality of texts, their formal production and consumption. Taking up an IE strategy of “reading through the texts” assumes that texts are active within a sequence of action, that the reader or hearer activates them through their own response and interpretations, and that there are implied silent third parties because the text is intended toward social action. That is, texts are constructed to *do* something, and so interrogating the ruling relations that assemble the organisation of a text points to social relations that one cannot see. With a similar concern, Atkinson and Coffey’s (2004:58) ‘documentary realities’ approach recognises that “documents are ‘social facts’, in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways.”

The BTHOHP texts are used in my analysis as access points to relations that organise these histories. The text itself is not the focus of the research. The focus is always on the coordination of social relations, with a text serving as an access point to discover what those coordinating social relations are. Treating texts as an access point, rather than texts as a topic, is an IE strategy that differentiates it from other textual analyses.

The experience of reading becomes a route to explore social relations, with “reading through the text” enabling the particularities of a reading activity and the extra-local social relations the reading discovers to be explored. To ground this, it is helpful to return to the analytical approach of TRC, discussed earlier. A TRC analysis takes into account the issue and actuality of time. Reading the texts of the BTHOHP and related material in the local place and time

and in the sequence that I do is, for example, very different from how and when the original texts were coordinated and put together.

Temporality is a necessary concept in examining the social organisation of texts and knowledge production process. Smith's analytical concept of "textual time" is useful here. This points the researcher to moments where articulated experiences become subsumed or frozen by a text. These articulations are captured by the text and according to Smith (1990a) are detached from its local production in time by being treated as objectified and as if timeless. Similar to Smith's idea of textual time, Atkinson and Coffey (2004:69) point out that, "documentary sources *suppress* time, by lifting events out of the flow of lived experience, and recording them in the decontextualized language and formats of official records." Recognising temporality in the telling of accounts as this relates to the social organisation of a text is important in understanding how knowledge is produced in a particular context. Therefore, it is important to ask not only how time is 'frozen' by the textual organisation as an extra-local space, but also, how the different accounts use time and what temporal issues are implied by terms such as 'stolen' and 'generation(s)'. The relationship between actuality, textual time and interviewees is both complex and ideological, in that interviewees who are constrained to crystallise their present-time interpretations - post/memory - into a textual time which implies a particular historical reality. This implicates oral history and archival practices in the social organisation of knowledge and public history.

### *Oral History and Constructing Archival 'Evidence'*

Critique of the *National Inquiry* focused in part on the limited involvement of a range of social actors in providing balanced 'evidence' of 'what happened back then.' Personal accounts as oral evidence in the BTHOHP and the BTH Report were positioned around the

contemporary public historical momentum, as ‘indisputable’, assumed referential, ‘factual’ accounts of experiences by people who had been removed/separated, but not necessarily by former professionals who were part of the separation apparatus. It is interesting to note that this conclusion about the shape of its contents preceded any analysis of them. As such, investigating the social organisation of these accounts is important, for the ‘fact’ concerning this has been the effect of organisation. The ‘facts’ on either side of the contested debate of the public history are taken at face-value and self-evident. Stanley and Wise (1993: 216-217) note a common trend:

...typically, research is treated as a means of uncovering and describing reality for all practical purposes, and the ‘data’ that it collects and analyses are assumed to exist in an effectively one-to-one relationship with a social reality they supposedly provide description of.

Why is it that oral history or testimonies are presently privileged as more ‘authentic’ than written texts? Why should oral history accounts be viewed as more authentic than other forms of text? In terms of the National Inquiry and the BTHOHP, the oral testimonies are interviews which have been interpreted popularly as the ‘real’ truth of ‘what happened back then’ and seen as a moral telling positioned as ‘setting the record straight’. The NLA’s approach to its oral history collection is in turn connected to oral history and its methodological approach, which became more organised and also more influential from the 1970s on.

The BTHOHP’s approach closely connects with seeing personal accounts as ‘testimonies’ and as ‘giving voice’ to subjugated people. The approach has been valorised and popularised by interviewing and oral history practice which have produced the materials taken up as providing knowledge about Aboriginal Australian child separations within the context of the BTHOHP. The use of oral personal accounts as ‘the facts’ has been related to people’s

experiences that have been ‘hidden from history’ (Perks and Thomson 2006). However, the implicit social organisation of personal accounts does not often become part of analysis by those who favour this kind of approach. The relationship of interview and oral history accounts and the production of knowledge through these connects to ideas and practices regarding the archive.

Breaking from the common IE model of directly interviewing particular people, I make use of an extra-local site of multiple archival texts as a data-set. That is, the interviews conducted and ‘collected’ by the BTHOHP are now a publicly accessible archive collection. My IE research takes into account the social relations that have shaped this ‘evidentiary’ archive collection. The TRC and the ideological circle approach toward analysing the single interviews the collection contains is also applied to the archive, in particular in terms of how the project was put together by the NLA and the cataloguing practices involved. Important questions concerning this include: How was the project originated, how was it put together and by whom, what are the ideological frameworks that guided its operations, what categorical imperatives did the archiving practices involved use to organise the data as ‘a collection’, and how are the original audio interviews positioned in relation to the transcripts later produced? The social organisation of the archive requires the same kind of materialist analysis that is used to interrogate the ruling relations of personal accounts and documentary texts. I will address the BTH archive and its organising practices further in relation to data collection in the chapter that follows.

### *Ideology*

My research takes up the argument that personal accounts are socially organised under definite material conditions, they make use of ‘language-games’ (Wittgenstein 1953), and



studying the transformation of primary narratives into ideological versions shows how a particular social reality is constructed and made recognisable as knowledge that is known in common. Addressing the materiality of ideology directs analysis to the fracturing activities that standardise some particularities and render others invisible. The ruling relations that work to cover over what is invisible, 'forgotten' or eclipsed are ideologically practiced. The materiality of ideology here means that people's methods of reasoning and interpreting the past and the present rely on narrative devices in order to socially organise a particular reading or interpretation. It must be made clear that recognising ideological practices in organising personal accounts does not in any way deny the agency of the people involved. The National Inquiry and BTHOHP interviewees are understood as experts of their own lives and their interviews were solicited at a particular point in time when people felt the need to bear witness to their and other people's lives to make these experiences understandable to those who were not there (Peet 2008).

How did the personal accounts which now constitute the histories of Aboriginal Australian child separations play out in the organisational processes that worked to 'suggest', 'constrain' or 'instruct' an emphasis on the presumed commonality of experience? The term 'Stolen Generation' can be interrogated as an 'ideological code' which has delimited and perhaps in a cumulative way closed off understanding of the often highly complex processes involved in child separations over time, because of its stark moral attributions and homogenising and totalising aspects. That is, it has in effect if not in intention operated a closure over the multitude of composing experiences. Ideological codes act in an authorising way, and in relation to my research have operated to constitute the mainstream narrative as a limited repertoire of accounts around the binaries of protagonist v. antagonist, victim v. perpetrator, child v. carer, Anglo-Australian (white) v. Aboriginal (black) categories (Peet 2008). These

categories are analytically understood as expressions of social relations, they are social organisers with ideological properties infused with intent and effect. The ubiquitous nature of the idea of the ‘Stolen Generation’ as an ordered ideological code has meant that multiple subjectivities have to be located within an ordered homogenous representation and around such binaries. But what about alternative or ‘deviant’ tellings of separation and care? The question arises, to what extent does the BTHOHP encompass these?

The mainstream narrative of Aboriginal Australian child separations as an ideological code sanctions and orders legitimate aspects of the discourse, and those which are illegitimate or deviant falls outside its purview. In Chapter Two, I discussed how my conversation with an Australian academic about my research and the possibility of revealing alternate tellings of the public history of the child removals was met with an ideological response of this kind; first, it repeated as ‘certain fact’ the homogenising public narrative; and second, it de-authorised as *a priori* illegitimate my interpretive re-telling, including by denying the existence of any ‘authority’ or warrant to do so. This links directly to ruling relations that regulate ideological discourse in this research context. A discourse which regulates who can research whom and what can be known by whom severely restricts researchers in organising, collecting and interpreting data, and making knowledge-claims from these activities and has monopolistic or oligarchical features. Similar to Smith’s (1990a) main arguments in *CPP* discussed earlier, Jaggar (1998) points out that:

...empirical discussions are always infused with power, which influences who is able to participate and who is excluded, who speaks and who listens, whose remarks are heard and whose dismissed, which topics are addressed and which are not, what is questioned and what is taken for granted, even whether a discussion takes place at all.

With regard to research dealing with Indigenous Australian issues, there are some scholars who argue that a researcher who is not Indigenous cannot gain knowledge from an investigation as an Indigenous researcher would. This idea has led to some contentious discourses on who can research whom (See Bell-Huggins debates 1990s<sup>30</sup>; Cole, et al 2005; Smith, L.T. 1999; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Probyn 2009). The argument is that one has to be a member of an indigenous community to best be able to know what questions to ask, to be able to ‘see’ and ‘hear’ knowledge that a non-member could not be attuned to (Smith, L.T. 1999). However, according to Strathern, membership in a particular group does not mean that insiders *a priori* know what a researcher wants to know: “Indigenous reflection is incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so that there is always a discontinuity between indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself” (Strathern 1987:18). The BTHOHP organised its interviewing practice with some of these debates in mind, resulting in arrangements for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewers. However, its implicit response was wider than such explicit features.

How the BTHOHP materially produced the collection and how ideas, statements, concepts and categories operate in the BTHOHP personal accounts are important matters to discuss. In doing this, I follow Smith’s (1990a) example by using the ideological circle procedure. The ruling relations that coordinate ways of reading and telling across multiple experiences through text-mediated discourse are taken up as part of this.

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<sup>30</sup> See Bell and Nelson 1989; Bell 1991; Huggins et al 1991; Klein 1991.

## *Mapping*

I take up mapping the relations of post/memory working to examine in detail two text-mediated personal accounts in the BTHOHP collection. Analytical mapping of the reading experience makes visible the textual moments that highlight pieces of social organising activity in these personal accounts. The map places the reader/researcher at the entry point of the map, as in “You are here.” From this position, the reader ‘looks up’ to see the social relations that are organising the experience of reading the text. This includes examining the different social relations implicated in organising particular experiences for an intended interpretive reading.

My IE approach also takes up the experience of reading to interrogate how personal accounts are socially organised in the text-mediated BTHOHP collection. I provide an-depth textual analysis of the post/memory activities in two BTHOHP interviews, with the focus on the knowing subject, personal accounts, ideology, texts and mapping. In the next chapter I will discuss the text/reader relation in connection with data collection and reading the social organising activities of the BTHOHP archival collection.

## Chapter Four

### Reading the Archive: Relations of Ruling and Organisational Practices

#### Introduction

This thesis argues that knowledge production is socially organised and is coordinated by ruling relations. As Chapter Three discussed, my institutional ethnography is concerned with the text-mediated space of personal accounts in which knowledge is socially organised so as to order and standardise experiences about the child separations into what is known in common as ‘the history’ of those events. This chapter will discuss my data collection process in relation to the experience of observing, reading, ordering and collecting materials of relevance as a social organising activity for a particular intended purpose connected with knowledge making. This immediately situates my research as part of the ongoing process of knowledge construction about these events. I will also discuss other social relations that my data collection has hooked into, including interviewing and oral history and archiving/library sciences, concerning how the construction of data was originally carried out and made available for collection through the BTHOHP production process, and then later through my own research activities.

The primary material my research is concerned with is the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* (Adams, et al 1998-2002) (BTHOHP) and its interviews and transcripts. This is physically archived at the National Library of Australia, Canberra (NLA) and many of them are also publicly accessible via the NLA’s website for ordering and online listening. I also rely on material from Mellor and Haebich’s (2002) *Many Voices*, which documents and reflects on the oral history project involved. In addition, I conducted fieldwork at the National Library of Australia, Canberra, engaging in conversational interviews with its oral

history project managers and staff, carried out archival research and viewed local monuments depicting the Aboriginal Australian child separation histories in 2010. As the Introduction and Chapter Three discussed, my methodology changed during the research process, and as a result the data collection in relation to the scope of interviewees selected from the BTHOHP shifted. Reading through the data collected and the decision to move in the direction of an institutional ethnography has already been discussed in prior chapters. Therefore, the data collection processes I focus on in this Chapter relates to the institutional ethnography and how I have operationalised it.

Secondary data involves working on data that was collected for an earlier different study and with that study in mind. When talking about my research using the BTHOHP as a data-set, I have often received academic comments that I am carrying out a secondary data analysis. That is not actually the case. Although the BTHOHP interviews were carried out by other people, this does not mean that my use of its materials involves a secondary data analysis. I am taking up a data-set composed by the BTHOHP interviews and interpreting them as retrievable texts as a whole in order to investigate how they are socially organised. This is a very different matter from using them as secondary data – I am not re-analysing the interviews, but rather looking at the practices involved in how they and the collection as a whole has been formed and shaped.

As I already briefly noted in Chapter One, the BTHOHP consists of 340 interviews of people separated or removed from their families (or talking about relatives/friends who were), and others involved in some capacity with the child separations and/or issues around these activities. Although the BTHOHP was broadly open to wide participation, there was a fundamental criteria on organising it concerning the interviewees who were separated (or talking about relatives/ friends who were) and which has had significant effect:

A general rule of thumb for identifying Indigenous people to be interviewed was that their particular experience involved separations carried out *without the approval of Indigenous parents or guardians*. (Mellor and Haebich 2002: 6, emphasis added)

This instructs all readers of the BTHOHP that all the personal accounts of those separated (or relatives/friends separated) are to be understood as occurring against the wishes of the parents. This is a problematic criteria concerning the context, events and time and provided a conclusion about the separations before the personal accounts were provided let alone analysed. It does not leave room for alternate telling of occurrences of separations outside this scope and begs many questions about what ‘approval’ or its absence might entail. This criteria connects into the public narrative that such children were ‘stolen,’ whether by being taken directly through a welfare order or by order of a children’s court against the wishes of parents and it does not account for circumstances in which consent and the voluntary giving up of children might have occurred.

As a result of the different phases of my research, and various access restrictions that BTHOHP interviewees placed on their interviews, I analytically collected forty-four interviews with the aim of selecting a diversity of interviews of people from a broad scope of experiences and involvements: 16 interviews of people removed as children<sup>31</sup> and 27 interviews of those who served in some professional or carer capacity (such as government policy/administrator, welfare officer, police, patrol, missionary, institutional carers, adoptive family, teacher, political activists, journalist, nurse, psychologist,), and 1 concerning a former British child migrant. In order to discover how multiple people’s experiences were coordinated and whether there were similarities and differences from the public history narrative about the child separations, through a purposive sampling, I wanted a wide diversity

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<sup>31</sup> I did not take for granted the BTHOHP’s assumption that a former separated child interviewee was separated against parental consent.

in the origins and scope of the selected interviews. The professions I selected resulted from using the NLA's catalogue category "Occupation." I will discuss this as an organiser later.

Although I tried to balance interviews of equal numbers of men and women, that was complicated because the NLA catalogue did not indicate sex, although this could partly be recognised through gendered names and reading through the catalogue summary for gender pronouns. Additionally, in relation to those interviewees who were not formerly separated children, the professions involved were typically highly gendered at the time. For instance, professions involved with implementing policies and laws tended to be male interviewees such as police, policy makers, and welfare officers. However, I was able to select females too because the differentiated labour of carers also ran along gender lines: the institutional carers tended to be women, although men were involved usually in the leadership of a boys' home. As a result, I achieved less of an equal gender distribution of interviewees who were once separated, than I did regarding those with professionals and carers due to the gendered professions of the time.

For my IE, I focused my Chapter Five analysis on two Australian states: the Northern Territory and New South Wales. The reason for choosing these geographical locations was initially due to wanting to research possible similarities and differences in experiences across states to show differences between urban and rural areas regarding the experiences of the removals. What I found was that there were just as many variations, similarities and differences of experiences within a single state as there were across states. Also, to try to recognise some sharp changes occurring over time, I selected personal accounts focused in the post-WWII period. With the geographical and time period constraints I set, I analytically selected 2 from the 44 interview sample which reveal different kinds of complex social organising practices in accounting for the past. These 2 are the separated or removed



interviewee Rita Wenberg (New South Wales) and separating official Reginald Marsh (Northern Territory government policy implementation). Chapter Five is an in-depth textual analysis of these two interviews.

The interviews I selected had what I saw to be analytically significant features. First, so as to be able to explore how people's experiences were organised by a complex of social relations, I selected interviewees who would be talking about a broadly similar time period. There has been criticism about assuming the policies and moralities of one time will prevail in another, and this will be returned to in Chapter Five. The importance of choosing geographical locations that included urban and rural regions was so as to take into account how social relations might differ in geographical environments. This in fact did show the significance that time period and location had on how people were accounting for the past. Although taken up again in Chapter Five, it is worth noting here that my analysis of the data revealed how the material conditions in particular populations of urban and rural areas were involved in variations about the separations, but also relate to reoccurring discussion of violence, mental and physical health, and gender and labour relations across interviews. Secondly, I selected both interviews from people separated from their families and from people involved in processing the separations. This was to enable me to explore that aspect of the mainstream narrative that focuses on the binary of 'the removed v. the remover'. The public history sees this as a pivotal aspect in accounting for the child separations and it is therefore a critical point for investigating the social relations involved.

In Chapter Six, I offer a further revision of IE analysis through reading multiple person accounts across the BTHOHP collection. Although my main sample of 44 was based on purposive sampling, the criteria for selecting Chapter Six interviews from the 44 had only two criteria: 1) maintain the separated and separator interviewee status previously defined;

and 2) post-WWII period. Based on this criteria, I discerned that I had a further seven interviews of people represented as ‘the separated’ and ‘the separating’ from various Australian states: Ken Colbung (Western Australia), Delia Sweeney (Queensland), Ken Stagg (Northern Territory) and Mary Terszak (Western Australia), who were all formerly separated as children; and those of Janne Graham (New South Wales) and Mamie Merlin Moy (Northern Territory), both Welfare Officers during the post-WWII period, and Stuart Phillpot (Northern Territory), a former Patrol Officer. This differs from Chapter Five which restricted analysis to two states and two interviews. Chapter Six expands analysis regarding 4 states and a further 7 interviews.

The selected interviews were located within the BTHOHP and accessible to me. However, there are also silences in the data, concerning what I was able to select and assemble and what I was not. It is notable that, of all the three-hundred forty interviews in the collection, there are no interviews at all with the biological mothers or fathers of people who were separated as children. There are relatives talking about their relations who had their child separated from them, but not the biological parents themselves. There could be various reasons for this related to death of the mother/father, cultural reasons, stigma of the removals, unknown parentage and a host of reasons that cannot be assumed. But these silences are there within a project that was designed to produce a rounded history. And the likelihood is that social organising activities in the production of this collection and its organisational structure for public consumption were involved, not just happenstance.

#### *Constructing Data: Implications of Project Practices as Social Organising Activity*

In addition to a literature review and analysis of the selected interviews, I conducted fieldwork at the NLA in Canberra and was able to speak with some of the library project

managers and staff currently overseeing the collection. Discussions with these participants were carried out as semi-structured conversational interviews and written up as fieldnotes.

The BTHOHP needs to be understood as part of sequences of action evolving from the National Inquiry directly and also more generally the wider context that it arose in, as discussed in Chapter One. The project aimed to resolve criticism of the National Inquiry by producing a rounded oral history of the child separations over time. That criticism pointed to the BTH Report as one-sided and proposed that other people involved should also be part of the history. The multiple personal accounts in the BTHOHP show how complex the times and circumstances were in their eventuation. With an allocated AUS \$1.6 million,<sup>32</sup> the NLA developed and implemented the project that solicited advisory committee members, interviewers and interviewees across the country. The relationship of interviewing and oral history practices and the interviewer are important here because they play a role in the reading experience. Scrutinising the oral history/interviewing approach shows the social organisation of knowledge from this process. The BTHOHP was part of social relations that coordinated an academic and popular oral history field in Australia. Such approaches are multiple, but one of the things most versions have in common is that interviewees are understood as experts of their own lives, which resonates with an institutional ethnography (Perks and Thomson 2006). My institutional ethnography does not resonate, rather makes problematic, a related tendency of oral history approaches, which is to interpret the 'voice of the expert' as directly referential.

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<sup>32</sup> The project came to a close when the budget was fully exhausted after 3 ½ years which covered paid technical equipment, contracts for the transcriptions, logistics, interview training, and paid interviewers and advisory committee members (Peet Fieldnotes 8 July 2010).

As part of the pilot work for the BTHOHP, researchers who were mainly professional historians traced the scope and names of people, particularly the impacted homes, missions, reserves, professionals and carers, to determine who to try and contact for interviews (Peet Fieldnotes 7 July 2010). The paid interviewers participated for various reasons; some were already trained oral historians while others were not, and interviewers were trained in interviewing techniques and ethics in the interview process, particularly as they related to indigenous interviewees (Peet Fieldnotes 13 July 2010; Mellor and Haebich 2002). Mellor and Haebich (2002) point out that the project was organised around the broad oral history approach that lets the interviewer serve as a facilitator, and for the interviewees to own their story and emotions. The interviewers were also instructed not to use the problematic term ‘stolen generation,’ but nonetheless some did (Peet Fieldnotes 13 July 2010).

My research has found significant variations in interviewing practices and the interview questions used, which echoes comments from Doreen Mellor, former Director of the BTHOHP, some interviewers were better than others in applying interview skills (Peet Fieldnotes 11 July 2010). This has impacted the way that personal accounts in the BTHOHP interviews are socially organised. Not everyone has the skills to express a complex life as lived and some interviewers might not have the skill to facilitate that. And as the transcripts clearly show, despite the broad facilitator approach to the oral history interviews, each interviewer uses their own approach: life history, conversational narratives, thematic and others, including being more or less directive and facilitating (Mellor and Haebich 2002; Peet Fieldnotes 13 July 2010). Because of the eclecticism of approaches, there are broad variations in the kinds of knowledge that the personal accounts are concerned with. In part because of this organisational variation, it is difficult to compare differences and similarities across interviews that are organised by completely different approaches. However, that is not to say

analysing social organisation and social relations cannot be compared across the interviews. The variations in interview approach contributed to my decision to focus analysis on two interviews, in part to demonstrate how this variation of how personal accounts are socially organised occurs and what its organisation reveals about the separations.

Mellor has pointed out that the BTHOHP in fact used two interview schedules, one for those who had been separated, and another for participant professionals (Peet Fieldnotes 8 July 2010).<sup>33</sup> And although the interview schedules were agreed by the advisory committee, once an interviewer/interviewee pair was agreed, it was the task of the interviewer to do research on areas of this before a pre-negotiation meeting with the interviewee (Peet Fieldnotes 8, 13 July 2010). This meeting was a phase of sorting and ordering personal accounts prior to them being given for the formal record. The various interests of interviewers, their level and type of skills and interview negotiations all played a significant role in the organising of the personal accounts prior to the interviews taking place and are not made explicit in the interviews themselves, although some aspects of that social organising activity is made visible through the IE analysis I carried out.

### *The Catalogue Summary as Socially Organised Text*

The way in which the BTHOHP was pulled together and its interview materials made accessible is socially organised and the result impacts on how a researcher initiates an engagement with it and works on this data. The catalogue of the BTHOHP materials is crucial here. The catalogue is a socially organised text which codifies and structures particular information from the personal accounts and produces these as an order that

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<sup>33</sup> I was unable to obtain the skeleton interview schedules during fieldwork.

standardises accounts. This standardisation is part of regular cataloguing practices within archiving/library science (Chowdhury and Chowdhury 2007). As the interviews are extremely varied, including the ‘scopes’ or brief summaries of them that are available, what is interesting is the standardised way that the account appears in the catalogue. Although transcriptions of the interviews were contracted out, the interviewers were responsible for providing the catalogue summary based on a timeline and as directed by the NLA staff (Peet Fieldnotes 8 July 2010). The timeline is however not the only thing organising the catalogue summary. From the point of view of the reader as the intended silent third party, what the catalogue details has consequences regarding whether one looks at the material as data or not, and it also and relatedly sets up an interpretive framework for the reader.

The catalogue and its summary are not neutral. The catalogue summary is a textually mediated space and can be analysed for the ideological schema intended for the reader. Highlighting one of the interviews analysed in Chapter Five, here I shall look in detail at the catalogue summary by reading the text to discover properties of social organisation around an interpretive scheme. I read and analyse this summary with the background resource of having also read the interview. This order of reading is along the same lines as the interviewer reading the transcript before preparing the catalogue summary:

Wenberg is a Bundjalung woman of mixed descent. She and her nine siblings were removed when she was 3 years old and taken to Burnside, Sydney. She was transferred to Cootamundra Girls' Home when she was aged 4. She describes the harsh living conditions in the Home. Wenberg spent several years doing domestic work placements, before marrying and having four children. The marriage ended but after counselling over some years, she is now in an emotionally supportive relationship. She describes her efforts to find her family, and speaks about the effects of separation. (National Library of Australia Catalogue: Rita Wenberg: 2001)

The catalogue summary has organised various particulars in order for them to be standardised into a reading to interpret Wenberg’s narrative as if it came into being

independently of anyone else by using the descriptive strategy “she describes”. The description provides a temporally ordered timeline of removal, placement, work, marriage and children. The master narrative of Aboriginal Australian child separations embeds the idea that child separations were of Aboriginal and Anglo ‘white’ Australian mixes. This summary takes the same order, giving primacy to identifying the Aboriginal mix of Wenberg. She is “a Bundjalung woman of mixed descent,” which eclipses the relevance of what the remaining mixed descent is composed by.

The summary provides the reader with an instruction on how to read Wenberg’s living conditions in the home: “She describes the harsh living conditions in the Home.” Firstly, this provides a negative interpretive framework eclipsing any others that might have been benign or neutral and which are shown in the interview itself regarding some relationships. Secondly, “living conditions” is used abstractly and could be interpreted as the physical living conditions of the home, or home life in general including relationships, care, schooling and so on. The ambiguous nature of the term allows for the reader to fill in the gap with their understanding of the language used, drawing the reader into the negative characterisation that has been provided. The summary also instructs the reader to interpret Wenberg’s experiences in relation to a loss: “She describes her efforts to find her family...” Despite the ambivalence her interview provides concerning separated family members, the summary instructs the reader that Wenberg had/has a prolonged desire to know family members with the phrase “her efforts” giving force to this interpretive reading.

The beginning and end of the summary captures issues of temporality beyond the ordered timeline. Removal in this summary is stated as a single physical event: “...removed when she was 3 years old...”, when she was taken from one place and put into another located in time, although sometimes removals were a back and forth process. The term “separation” indicates

an extended period of time and “... speaks about the effects of separation.” This indicates that “separation” does not stop, it is an ongoing relation even in middle or old age.

Analysis of this library catalogue summary consequently shows how the social organisation of particulars are transformed into an ideological interpretive scheme based on the interconnected activities of selecting, ordering and deploying seemingly descriptive but actually interpretive strategies. The point in raising this in relation to data collection is that I necessarily relied on the catalogue summary to guide my data collection, looking at the scope, coverage, locations and so on but initially being unaware of it as already socially organised to instruct me on how to read and understand both its contents and the interviews these are indexical of. I took up the catalogue summary’s order and at the outset at least treated the information as taken for granted. With hindsight, the summaries could have been written quite differently and still be both temporal and ‘descriptive’, and this would significantly impact the data collected and the knowledge the researcher constructs from it.

This discussion of the catalogue shows how reading practices can be socially organised in often mundane routine and taken for granted ways. Organisation structures reading and understanding. Data collection processes, as activities, are part of the same social phenomena I am interrogating concerning the data obtained. The next chapter will carry this analysis forward and develop further how personal accounts are socially organised through the researcher’s reading experience and how this implicates social relations that become ruling through post/memory practice.



**Chapter Five**  
**The Separated and the Separating: Standpoint, the ‘Line of Fault’ and**  
**An IE Investigation in Action**

**Introduction**

The analysis carried out in this chapter proceeds from the standpoint of the reader/researcher. This organises my textual analysis around and through the experience of reading. Reading texts brings the reader in their particular location into the active sets of social relations that have organised the text and its reading. The analysis explicates the ruling relations that work to socially organise a textual reality into what is represented and read as factual accounts of ‘what happened back then’ concerning Aboriginal Australian child separations. The analysis in this chapter focuses on a particular aspect of the standardised ‘Stolen Generation’ narrative; this is the binary representation of ‘victim’ v. ‘perpetrator’, which I recast as a relationship between those who were ‘separated’ and those who were ‘separators’. Analytically I focus my gaze on BTHOHP interviews of people represented by the public narrative as those who were removed/separated from their families and those involved in the development and enforcement of the removal policies. I take up this binary as a line of fault because it is a central constituting feature of the mainstream narrative of indigenous separations, which have been represented first and foremost as removals from their culture and secondarily about care and effects of institutionalisation, and also because its binary character is often muddied or undermined in interview contents (Peet Fieldnotes 13 July 2010). I am not analysing these as two sets of interviews to reify the binary, but rather to examine whether and to what extent BTHOHP interviews are in fact organised around this or provide alternate tellings. I recognise there are a number of other actors implicated in what and how is known about these histories. However, the scope of this analysis focuses on the

disjuncture between the separated and the ‘separating apparatus’, the nexus of people involved in this whose accounts are accessible via the BTHOHP interview collection.

As Chapter Four introduced, the material production of the BTHOHP through its development and interviewing oral history practices, and its constitution and consumption as a collection, is organised around not only what happened back then but also why it happened and to a lesser extent why it is a public issue now.<sup>34</sup> How accounts are organised around the ‘what/why’ question about the child removals points to social relations that are still active in its organisation. My analysis takes the position that the interviewing process and the reading or hearing of the interviews is a co-production embedded within social relations, some of which one cannot see. Some qualitative research focuses only on the interviewees and their comments for analysis. I argue that the social organisation of knowledge is organised, not only by the active participants such as the interviewee and the interviewer, but also the reader or hearer, and other silent third parties as the interview also intends further unknown readers. The production of the interviews as texts is part of a sequence of action that activates material practices within the texts beyond their telling of the experience itself. This could be how unknown others take up the texts, but it could also be how the interview text is ‘still worked on’ after the interview has been taken through the transcription process, editing, adding research footnotes and so on.

My analysis examines closely the development of ideological accounts that intend a particular interpretive schema. Through reading the text, the active use of particulars as part of primary narratives are worked into its ideological narrative (Smith 1990a). To demonstrate various ways in which this is accomplished, I shall go on to analyse the personal interview

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<sup>34</sup> The BTHOHP developed a second phase in 2009 called “After the Apology.” Former BTHOHP interviewees who participated in this reflected on the Apology and how their lives had been impacted by this process.

account of a woman who was removed from her family and placed in a children's home at the age of about three in New South Wales. The co-production of her account between the interviewee and the interviewer reveals pieces of social organisation that originate in the particulars and which are worked and ordered around life events intending an ideological interpretation of her removal/separation history. Texts mediate the interview, but the subtlety of them can almost be missed by a superficial gaze. I shall also then analyse a second interview so as to show how the standpoint of the text is deployed as an active organising property, and this is the interview account provided by a former government administrator.

In both, my examination of the interviews looks into how particulars constituted in the primary narratives are selected, assembled and ordered, and what resources the speakers and readers are using that links into the resulting ideological interpretive scheme. The experience of reading includes filling in gaps in pre-existing knowledge and providing connectives that are not 'there' but implied in the course of reading an account. The first interview works up its accounting through a primary narrative construction and the transformation process involves turning this into an ideological narrative, while the second interview works up its accounting through the standpoint of the text as well as the discourse drawn on. In both interviews, the transformation of primary narratives as data into ideological narratives as fact is accomplished through a tension concerning the past. The use of memories as experience are a constituting property in both primary and ideological narratives. In my analysis, post/memory is a tool which links the individual account or interview to a complex of activity in sorting out and actively remaking or revisioning experience of the past. Memory here is a relation, it is a textual practice between actuality and the material conditions that give rise to memory practices. In both interviews, there is clearly a tension in ordering and authorising practices in producing an interpretive schema, although this is differently organised in each.

The analysis of both interviews utilises an analytical mapping of the interviews to help reveal an underlying pattern of pieces of organisation. By mapping various forms of texts, discourse and the narrative form taken in organising authorial standpoints, the researcher is able to show parts of an interpretive scheme organising the original telling of these accounts and my questioning of them.

### **The Separated: Rita May Wenberg**

#### *Primary Narratives: The Removal*

For many of the BTHOHP interviewees, this project was not the first time they had provided accounts of their life in relation to their removal/separation histories. The interview with Rita May Wenberg, for instance, commented at the end that a Dutch television company had interviewed her and video-taped her reunion with the Aboriginal side of her family (Wenberg 2001). Despite having gone through a prior telling, Wenberg's interview provides an account that still tries to work out the sequencing and ordering of events in primary narrative form as it relates to 'what happened back then' concerning her removal and separation along with nine siblings. Wenberg sorts out for the reader her racial descent, describing her mother as a mixed Aboriginal Cabbage Tree Islander and North American black, and her father's family as Polish, with her father born in Grafton, New South Wales, Australia. Subsequently, the interviewer wants to know why Wenberg was removed. Three sets of exchanges in a sequence establish a narrative about the what/why of removal that is socially organised through memory, temporality and ideological practices and is analytically approached as a primary narrative structure.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes, all up at Grafton. I believe Vincent the older brother was looking after us at the time.

**Diana Ritch:** Yes? And how old would he have been then?

**Rita May Wenberg:** He must have been about ten or eleven or something like that. He was looking after us at the time, and he said the welfare came and got us.

**Diana Ritch:** Did he say anything else?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, I think Mum was out somewhere. I don't know where Dad was, Dad probably was in the Army at the time, and I think the welfare just came and got us. I can't remember, but that's what he told us.

**Diana Ritch:** And how old were you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Oh I must have been about three or two. Four years I was in the Home.

**Diana Ritch:** Right. So you were quite young. You would have no memories.

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** And has anyone told you what actually happened at the time. Your mother was out, Vincent was looking after you, your father was in the Army?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes. Then the welfare came and got us.

**Diana Ritch:** Why do you think they came and took you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Oh I don't know. I wouldn't have a clue. You know, they just came and took us and went to the Children's Court in Sydney. (Wenberg 2001: 4-5)

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**Diana Ritch:** So why do you think you were taken?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I think it might just be because of what we were.

**Diana Ritch:** What were you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Being an Aborigine I suppose. Being... having dark skin. That's my opinion.

**Diana Ritch:** Were there other Aboriginal people in the community where you were living?

**Rita May Wenberg:** There probably was but I can't remember, being so young. Because up that area there is quite a lot of Aborigine people, you know up that area.

**Diana Ritch:** And so all, like, ten children were just taken.

**Rita May Wenberg:** That's right, yes. And then I think one of the sisters died in Bomaderry. (Wenberg 2001: 5-6)

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**Diana Ritch:** So what happened to you when they took you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well I went to the Children's Court in Sydney

**Diana Ritch:** And you were only about two years old?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes... then I think I was put in a little Home, a Children's Home, I think something like Burnside.

**Diana Ritch:** Whereabouts?

**Rita May Wenberg:** There's a Home in Sydney, do you remember Burnside? Sort of a Home for younger children. Then later on when I was... I was four I was put into the Cootamundra Girls' Home.

**Diana Ritch:** And were you with any members of your family at the time?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, I don't think so. At the Court?

**Diana Ritch:** No, no, no, no, when you went to Cootamundra.

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. I don't know who put me there but I was there when I was four years old anyway.

**Diana Ritch:** So when you went to Cootamundra you were about four you said?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes.

**Diana Ritch:** And did any of your sisters go with you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I can't remember. But as I grew up I grew up with Amy and Adelaide.

**Diana Ritch:** Amy and Adelaide, you realised they were in the Home at the same time.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes.

**Diana Ritch:** They were older than you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes. And I didn't have much to do with them in the Home. As a matter of fact I didn't think I had sisters in the Home.

**Diana Ritch:** What did you think about your family altogether? Did you feel you had any family?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. Nothing. I didn't feel I had sisters in the Home because the other two wouldn't have nothing to do with me.

**Diana Ritch:** Why do you think that happened?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I don't know. But I had nothing to do with them, I didn't really feel like I had the two sisters there until Vallie came along from Bomaderry, then I realised. The matron came along and told us we have two other sisters coming up from Bomaderry, and that's when Val and I and Trish were all got on real well together, I felt a lot we were sisters. But the other two, we wouldn't know we were in the Home.

**Diana Ritch:** So you had two other sisters at Cootamundra and nobody said to you, "These are your sisters, you have family".

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** Did you ever wonder about your mother?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** Were you ever taught anything about your parents?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. Nothing whatsoever. I just grew up like, as if I was a European, I was white. I wasn't taught nothing. It was just natural to me because I was so young being brought up in a Home. (Wenberg 2001: 7-9)

These exchanges reveal primary narrative sorting activity. The account is not an unmediated actuality, it relies on reminiscence and relations of exchange. Between the two speakers, they

sort out events in relation to other events and people, and Wenberg draws on memory as memory told by another, but her presence of an experiencing subject is constituted as providing as an authority of her own. This authority is constituted in particular through a present time reconstruction of the past that invokes an intended 'what happened.' One of her brothers told her what had happened, her experience of removal is not unmediated. This is observed by expressions of the kind, "he said the welfare came and got us," and "I can't remember, but that's what he told us." Wenberg's uncertainty of exact events is worked into a sequence of 'then what next' as she connects reflections to what seems like a logical association using phrases such as: "I don't know where Dad was, Dad probably was in the Army at the time..." and "There probably was but I can't remember, being so young." Ritch assembles the particulars given by Wenberg's account, which is mediated by another's telling, and she also neatly orders the removal occasion as: "Your mother was out, Vincent was looking after you, your father was in the Army?"

Ritch selects and synthesises the removal moment as such, asking for confirmation, which is provided. This ordering is then treated as 'what happened'. The temporality involved in constructing the primary narrative is important and points to the activity as a post/memory practice. Wenberg has acknowledged she does not have actual memories of the removal as she was too young, but she works out how this telling is to be heard by the reader by mentioning that, although she was too young and does not remember exact sequences of action, she can affirm the removal and a timeline of being placed at Cootamundra Girls Home: "I don't know who put me there but I was there when I was four years old anyway." With her removal already being established at around three, and being at Cootamundra at age four, the reader has been instructed to interpret the narrative as moving along a chronological timeline:

Removed (around 3 years old) → Children's Court → Brunside Home → Cootamundra (4 years old) 'alone'

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Figure 5.1 Removal and Placement: Setting the Timeline for Telling

This sequence of action is sorted out through the post/memory practice. Wenberg has made it clear she does not remember that time, yet the interviewer insists on a reason for why the removal occurred. This forces Wenberg to generate a reason from present knowing and knowledge practices that can be used to inform on the past. The interviewer asks her why the removal occurred, and in the first instance Wenberg replies, “Oh I don’t know. I wouldn’t have a clue”, as she has already stated she was too young to recall. When she is pressed again about this, a plausible reason is assembled: “Being an Aborigine I suppose. Being... having dark skin. That’s my opinion.” This illustrates that establishing the reasons for the removal shifts from not knowing to probably knowing because she is Aboriginal. This shift arises somewhere other than from her experience as a young girl in the home, as she later points out that “I just grew up like, as if I was a European, I was white. I wasn’t taught nothing.” The construction of past experiences is organised by the person at the moment of telling and to make acceptable sense in that moment and context. Knowing is always in the moment and context of now.

The primary narrative of removal also demonstrates the social relations that impact the development of the primary narrative into an ideological narrative and is connected with her placement in the Home as ‘alone.’ ‘Alone’ in the Home positions her in relation to others. She is not aware of nor identifies with siblings or parents on the outside within the early timeline: “As a matter of fact I didn’t think I had sisters in the Home,” and “I didn’t feel I had



sisters in the Home because the other two wouldn't have nothing to do with me." For Wenberg, not knowing or wondering about family relations as a child 'alone' is expressed in this way: "It was just natural to me because I was so young being brought up in a Home."

These primary narratives are structured and interpreted through close-grained social organising activity. The primary narrative has established the sorting out of time, temporal order, relations, reasons and memory-making that provides groundwork for the reader to interpret further sequences in the text. The structuring of primary narratives as data is subject to ideological interpretive frameworks as the particulars of experience are further sorted, ordered, categorised and assembled. The next section looks at the transformation into the ideological mode of interpretation, a process that is ordered around home life, relationships and the effects of separation over time.

#### *Ideological Narratives: Separation*

The question of home life and home routine after the removals arises in many of the BTHOHP interviews. The relationship to home life is usually connected later in the interview to how well the person got on subsequently in life and is a common underlying pattern in the more than forty interviews I have examined. The common question is always intended to relate to and confirm the master narrative that home life was a negative experience. It is therefore interesting to look at how ideological narratives operate in this respect. In this interview with Rita May Wenberg, sequences of negative experiences concerning discipline and sexual violence are followed by schooling experiences that are partly expressed as positive. But it is the negative experiences that are carried through in the organising aspects of the interview.

**Diana Ritch:** And what are your first memories of the Home?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well the first thing that comes into the Home is the box room, that's where I was locked up a lot, in the box room over night.

**Diana Ritch:** How old were you when you were locked up?

**Rita May Wenberg:** About seven or eight or nine.

**Diana Ritch:** And why were you locked up?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Giving cheek or running away from the Home.

**Diana Ritch:** So as a little child they would take you. And what was the box room like?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well the box room was a room that was dark, you stayed there all night for punishment. (Wenberg 2001: 9-10)

First home memories in these interviews often take on a negative character in telling about them. The rhetorical use of 'first memories' also implies a direct relationship to the experience. The narrative shifts away from what others, such as her brother, had told her, to experience being expressed as direct and referential. The 'bad' first memory sets up a direction for the interviewer to go in, who then continues pursuing expressions of negative experiences and only subsequently, if at all, asks about 'good' experiences. An ideological interpretive scheme of 'good'/'bad' requires the reader to be able to relate such descriptive strategies to the implied associations. The reader relates the relationship of Wenberg in a box room and being "locked up" to institutional disciplinary practices. The interviewer carries on using the language of being "locked up," which has a 'prison cell' association. Wenberg tries to sort out possible ages, but the interviewer crystallises her age into a standardised and emotive "little child," which means the negativity of being locked up is compounded by the young age. The expression of this does not leave room for questioning why others treated her in this way or normative forms of discipline in collective institutional settings of the time, resulting in a straightforwardly and entirely 'bad' character to what was told about.

Speakers rely on hearers to understand the language-games involved and to hear or read the interpretive scheme that the narration intends. As the reader of the next two sets of

exchanges, I had to rely on other knowledge to fill in gaps in the transcript in making sense of what is implied but not explicitly said.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes. At school I ran away because the teacher was cruel to me and I ran away the police locked me up over night in his cell and tried to touch me and then I came back, he took me back the next morning to the Home and the matron said, "Have you been interfered with?" and I said, "No", because I had blood all over me. And later on [inaudible] she put me back in the box room and I ran away.

**Diana Ritch:** Why did you have blood on you? What had happened?

**Rita May Wenberg:** [inaudible] so young, all I can remember was the policeman coming to the cell at night.

**Diana Ritch:** And how old were you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I must have been about ten.

**Diana Ritch:** And whereabouts were you when this happened?

**Rita May Wenberg:** In the Cootamundra Girls' Home. (Wenberg 2001: 10-11)

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**Diana Ritch:** Why did they send you to La Perouse do you think?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I don't know. They sent me there, and I was sitting in the bush there watching and I got raped there by a big Aborigine bloke.

**Diana Ritch:** And you remember that?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah.

**Diana Ritch:** Can you talk about it?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, it's alright.

**Diana Ritch:** And how were you after that?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Bad.

**Diana Ritch:** Yes. Did anyone look after you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I can't remember. All I can remember is blood and everything.

**Diana Ritch:** So how long were you in La Perouse?

**Rita May Wenberg:** A couple of weeks I think, I can't remember. They sent me back to Cootamundra then. (Wenberg 2001: 12-13)

Filling in gaps in a narrative is an indication that organisation is present and supports such 'leaps'. In order to concretely make sense of what is said here, I employ my own resources of interpretation. In this way, I am able to tell others what is being talked about. In the first exchange about running away, being caught by the police and the circumstances described in

it, it is interpreted that Wenberg was raped. That may seem obvious to the reader. But to say something is obvious implies knowledge known in common and social organisation is involved. Using the term rape is not part of the dialogue and nor is any detail given that directly implies this. An ordering of a sequence of events is established:

Wenberg picked up from police → placed in police cell → policeman went into her cell at night → returned to the Home with blood all over → denies being “interfered with” = Wenberg was raped

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Figure 5.2 Reading Rape into the Account

To read this as an account of rape requires inputting connectives that the policeman sexually assaulted her against her will when she was held prisoner. The term rape itself is an institutional term connected to social relations that implicate a legal system and in particular in this case, sexual relations between ‘adults’ and ‘minors.’ Reading rape here is accomplished by interpreting the blood on her and the use of the word “interfered” and the association of this with sexual assault. I did not read this dialogue as Wenberg being beaten, which could also account for the blood on her. The qualifying term “interfered” implies sexual assault and therefore is read that she was raped. The reader’s resources reads into the account the necessary gap-filling implications that accomplish a reading of sexual violence. The second exchange is explicit as to sexual violence “...I got raped there by a big Aborigine bloke.” These particular sexual violence experiences are further developed along an interpretive scheme in how to read relationships further on in the interview and is discussed later.

### *Social Organisation of the 'Sad/Loss' Tale*

The master narrative about people who were removed and separated encompasses emotions concerning lost Aboriginal communal cultural ties, parents and various forms of suffering. I call this the “sad/loss” tale. The sad/loss tale is a way of talking about the complexities of a life as lived in relation to others that is expressed under particular circumstances. As I have noted in other chapters, examining how something is told in no way denies the agency or actuality of a person’s life. Such an examination points out that social phenomena occur through various forms of mediating organising practices. By examining the social organisation of ‘telling the tale’ allows the researcher to examine how these kinds of experiences are put together and what social relations are implicated. The sad/loss tale is an expression and should not be understood as the actuality of what is being expressed. As real and felt as experiences are, expressions of actuality and the relations of loss are not necessarily unproblematic, particularly when another person wishes to pin these down in an unproblematic and therefore unnuanced way.

Interviewees in the BTHOHP interviews express loss over not knowing where they come from and feeling cut off from a particular cultural way of life. At the same time, the loss is often expressed solely on the Aboriginal cultural side of the mother’s descent. I am not aware of a BTHOHP interview that identifies an Anglo/European woman who had a child with a mixed descent Aboriginal man. Nor is a sad/loss tale told in relation to an Anglo/European or mixed Aboriginal father either.<sup>35</sup> The sad/loss tale is predominantly in relation to the mother. Indeed, more generally fathers are generally eclipsed from the child separation histories. The

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<sup>35</sup> For all the interviews that I read for this research, this is the case except for one, Glenys Collard’s (2001) interview. Her interview was significantly organised around her mixed Aboriginal father’s attempts to get his children back from a children’s home in Western Australia.

silence surrounding Anglo/European or mixed Aboriginal fathers is an obscured relation, including in Wenberg's account. Wenberg did eventually meet her father and father's sister, and it was her aunt who she came into contact with first, yet Wenberg does not discuss the relationship with her father, only that they met (Wenberg 2001). Nor did the interviewer pursue Wenberg or express curiosity or interest in knowing about the paternal Polish side as she actively does concerning Wenberg's Aboriginal side. The sad/loss tale is a dominant organisation of the post/memory process in a range of BTHOHP personal accounts of former removed people.

The removal narrative and placement into the home sets up an instruction that Wenberg was in the Home 'alone' despite her other siblings being there. She may not have been aware of them being there the whole time, but certainly she eventually came to know they were there. The only 'good' particulars from the Home that are taken up in the interview are the friendships she had, which also include some of her sisters.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes I did. I had good friends at school, girls and boys, you know friends, good friends.

**Diana Ritch:** Were these the Cootamundra girls?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes. Now we still are good pen pals all these years.

**Diana Ritch:** Oh good... and what were their names?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Marjorie, [inaudible] and Thelma Hancock.

**Diana Ritch:** And what did you do together? Did you ever play games?

**Rita May Wenberg:** We played games and we swapped sandwiches.

**Diana Ritch:** Did they send food with you from Cootamundra?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah we had sandwiches like... we might have dripping to take to school, jam or golden syrup or something like that. And we used to swap our sandwiches and the white girls used to give us something.

**Diana Ritch:** Did you get on with the white girls?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Some of them. Still a bit conscious about... you know.

**Diana Ritch:** How did they treat you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well they treated us good there only for one teacher, he was cruel, because my girlfriend Marjorie, she was in the same class as me, the one I am writing to now, she is a white girl. She said to me “Do you still run away all the time Reet? You were never at school.” (Wenberg 2001: 14-15)

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**Diana Ritch:** Did you know how to feel like a family?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Not really. It was just like Val and Trish they came and, you know, I got to know each of them a bit better. We just felt, you know, like good friends. You know, she was my sister but she was my friend. (Wenberg 2001: 18)

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**Diana Ritch:** So did you ever know anything about your parents? Did they tell you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No...

**Diana Ritch:** You weren't told when your mother died?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** Did you ever ask what happened to your parents?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, because we never was taught. So if you're not taught you don't ask.

**Diana Ritch:** I mean, the kids at the school, they might have had parents, so did you think...?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. That's just natural. Like I said, it's normal.

**Diana Ritch:** Like some people have a car and you don't have a car, that sort of thing. You know, it's nothing to worry about.

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, that didn't even get through.

**Diana Ritch:** How do you think this has affected you in later life?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Very bad. Very bad. I'm on strong anti-depressants. And another thing is I just don't want to know anybody dark. I don't want to associate with them.

**Diana Ritch:** And this was as a result...?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I think the result at La Perouse, I think.

**Diana Ritch:** The rape?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. (Wenberg 2001: 18-19)

The 'alone' narrative sets up for the reader how to interpret Rita May Wenberg's telling of her experiences with people while she was in the Home. The reader has to interpret about her sisters and her friendships. The primary narrative has set up that she has no family in the Home. Through this, it puts into question the assumed definition of what constitutes family

vs. friends and also takes up the assumption that biological family might 'naturally' be privileged over friends and alternative carers.

The interview also problematises what constitutes family when discussing Wenberg's domestic job after leaving Parramatta Institute for Girls. The family life in her domestic job with the Farrells ideologically juxtaposes the institutional Home as a collective of children and carers but not a family, as opposed to the nuclear family model of the Farrells, as constituting a family, with her included.

**Rita May Wenberg:** I cleaned the house and everything. They had racehorses, I milked the cow in the morning.

**Diana Ritch:** And you felt quite happy there, did you?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yes.

**Diana Ritch:** Would this have been the first place where you'd felt comfortable?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. Till I got married.

**Diana Ritch:** Yes. How old were you when you went there, to their place?

**Rita May Wenberg:** About eighteen.

**Diana Ritch:** Right. Now is there anything else you can remember about the Farrells? What were they like?

**Rita May Wenberg:** They were very nice people, the Farrells. They lived at Bringelly near Camden, and they owned thoroughbred racehorses, and they were very nice, she is really nice and everything. She had a daughter the same age as me. Her daughter in St Vincent de Paul was a nursing sister.

**Diana Ritch:** Oh. At St Vincent's Hospital.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. And she used to treat me as her daughter too, which was nice. That was the first time I've ever got treated properly.

**Diana Ritch:** Was this the first time you had seen a family in action?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. And their son, he was nice, he got killed up in Singleton in the Army with a grenade and they were all nice, very nice people. Then I left them and got married. (Wenberg 2001: 23-24)

The relationship of Wenberg to an Aboriginal identity becomes a preoccupation more so for the interviewer than Wenberg, which occurs around an ideological interpretive scheme of loss and identity.



**Diana Ritch:** And did you ever question anything about Aboriginal people?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** Do you ever remember thinking about Aboriginal people?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. All I know I hated them.

**Diana Ritch:** Because of what had happened?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I think so, and the way I was brought up, being brought up as a white, and being as young as I was and brainwashed all those years that, you know, it was just one of those things.

**Diana Ritch:** What did they teach you, do you think, at Cootamundra, about Aboriginal people?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Nothing.

**Diana Ritch:** I mean you say you were brainwashed. Who do you think they tried to make you think you were?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well, I think that they tried to make you into the European way of life, not your Aborigine background or where you come from. You're a white and that's that and you've got to train as a white. Forget about your skin. I've done that.

**Diana Ritch:** And you weren't told anything about your parents?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No. (Wenberg 2001: 23-26)

The category European is not taken up by the interviewer, and there is no attempt to make a connection to Wenberg's Polish descent father, despite her acknowledging that she met him. When recounting a visit with her paternal aunt she is asked about whether she questioned her aunt about the family, but Wenberg replied "No, because I didn't bother asking" (Wenberg 2001: 16).

In the BTHOHP interviews, the Anglo/European male is a generalised other. He arises in the interviews as an abstraction. The silence about the fathers indicates social relations between gender and parenting of the time. The mainstream narrative always expresses that children were removed from their mothers and never in relation to being removed from their fathers too. Wenberg does not associate the Europeaness of the Home culture with a heritage from her father. The telling of her life from the point of view of a Polish association or 'loss' could yield a very different story. The lack of father participation and non-appearance in children's

lives is a significant gap in the literature. It also relates to the material conditions of poor women who become subject to state interventions concerning care of their children.

**Diana Ritch:** And so when did you learn about your mother?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well let me think. I think through a piece of paper, that letter I was telling you about. That she had died of TB when I was eight years old, because I never thought about my parents or nothing and I still don't really. And the day we went up to see, you know, Mum's brother's children, Uncle Glenn's, up at Yamba I didn't feel not quite right.

**Diana Ritch:** So the result of your being separated has been...?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Disaster. Complete disaster 'cause I don't want their world.

**Diana Ritch:** Whose world?

**Rita May Wenberg:** The Aborigine side, I still don't want nothing to do with them...

**Rita May Wenberg:** ...and I'm still in the white sort of law way, white way, and I'm just in the middle and I don't belong to none of the worlds. That's how I feel. You know, Val, she's accepted it sort of, I haven't you know, and I don't think I ever will. I try but something sort of always stops me. (Wenberg 2001: 28-31)

The loss of rights which underpins the master narrative of removals concerns Aboriginal cultural loss and is actively organising an interpretive framework in this interview as in other BTHOHP interviews too. An underlying pattern of particularities related to Aboriginality takes on great significance in organising this account, as opposed to her father's descent. The assumption is that the telling of loss is intended and arises independently by the person who had been earlier removed. However, in this interview, it reveals the active way the interviewer pursues establishing the Aboriginal sad/loss tale. Throughout the interview, the interviewer pursues a line of questioning to elicit loss in relation to Aboriginal (but not Polish) identity. If the ideological interpretive scheme is able to complete a sad/loss tale about Aboriginal descent and cultural life, then the narrative can be read as one in which removals were about being Aboriginal. The interpretive frame cannot accommodate the loss of fathers or Polish identities because it does not fit the master framework of removal being about Aboriginal identities. The sad/loss tale is completed by Wenberg commenting that the

effect of separation has been a “Disaster. Complete disaster.” Her narrative here moves away from not wanting to know or hating Aboriginal people, as she puts it, and begins a shift which implies her thoughts about her experiences are still being sorted out. But what also gets incorporated into the sad/loss tale concerns records, identity and physical and mental health. These social relations temporally move her narrative forward in time to talk about ‘what happened back then’.

*A Sad/Loss Tale in Relation to Records, Identity & Psychiatry*

Like many of the interview accounts in the BTHOHP of those who were separated, Wenberg’s too expresses confusion about identity in relation to descent. There is also sometimes a desire for what is expressed as a lost identity, an identity they were not allowed to have. This is linked to the notion that there is or should be a material record that contains ‘it’.

**Rita May Wenberg:** I think it was just the way I was brought up, like in the Home at a very young age and be taught nothing about your background and who you are and what you are and where you came from and things like that. [inaudible] just wiped. You know, just wiped off. Even when I went down the Archive, there’s no papers of me whatsoever.

**Diana Ritch:** You went to the Archives?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. No papers of me whatsoever. I said to Val, “Well, there you are. I’m still a lost child.

**Diana Ritch:** When did you go to the Archives?

**Rita May Wenberg:** A couple of years ago.

**Diana Ritch:** Were there papers of any other members of your family?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I don’t know. We didn’t go through them.

**Diana Ritch:** Did Val have papers?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Valerie’s got hers. [inaudible] one little strip that showed that I was in La Perouse, proof that I was in La Perouse and Sydney Hospital. There’s nothing else whatsoever on me.

**Diana Ritch:** Nothing to say you were taken?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No.

**Diana Ritch:** That you were at Cootamundra?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, there was nothing. There was nothing whatsoever.

**Diana Ritch:** Why did you go to the Archives?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well I wanted to find out what happened to me in the Home and things like that, you know. There was nothing. (Wenberg 2001: 31-32)

These remarks point to hope that identity can be discovered materially through official records. This views identity as something stable and material and that it is removed or misplaced or discarded for various reasons. The record is central to the sad/loss tale and plays a role in Wenberg's account as she tells of her search for a textual identity. The hope that material proof of identity might be found in the archive is disappointed: "There was nothing there." The implication here is that identity and knowing are materially tied and involve institutional practices concerning administrative involvement in the removals, the management of collective care and record-keeping in relation to the institutions concerned.

Wenberg took up mental health therapy a few years before her interview because of experiencing flashbacks, depression and night terrors about rape (Wenberg 2001). Through relating the psychiatrists' interpretation of such things, she enlists the psychiatric discourse into her telling of what happened back then.

**Diana Ritch:** So you were here today at your sister Val's place. So you do have some sense of family with Val.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah with Val. Val is the only one. No others. I associate with [inaudible]. You know. Like my brother rang us last night, Vincent, asked if I want to talk to him, and I said, "No, I don't want to talk to him." I said, "He doesn't exist with me."

**Diana Ritch:** Is it his fault at all?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, like my psychiatrist said to me, he said "Rita," he said "you still have hatred for what happened to you as a child because it was a man that done it. It was done twice, you'd been interfered twice". He said, "You might have been interfered more but you can't remember." You know, because at La Perouse I had

nightmares where I was raped and there was blood everywhere on the wall, and I think I ended back in Sydney Hospital, I'm not quite sure as a young age. And when I did have babies I had trouble and the doctor said, "We'll have to remove everything, your inside's damaged, it's in a bad mess. So the ovaries will have to be removed, so just as well you had your four children". So they had to remove the whole ovaries and the lot. He said, "I don't know how you had children". [inaudible] badly damaged. So I had to get everything removed quick. And he said, "Some of this has happened to you when you were young", and said, "I don't know how you managed to have children." (Wenberg 2001: 44)

The psychiatric evaluation in its telling by Wenberg becomes an operating force in interpreting what happened back then. This is an area of ideological manoeuvring which interprets experience in relation to physical and mental health and also draws on a medical doctor's interpretation of the state of damage that her body had incurred in youth. Wenberg also points out she had four years of counselling at the time of the interview. This corresponds to the time around the National Inquiry and raises the possibility of separation accounts and debates being in the national spotlight and impacting the kinds of psychiatric interpretive frameworks she received.

The time that sexual violence and separations occurred in can be internalised and in a way frozen and therefore always present. For Wenberg, the time of the past has not ended and the impact of these events still reverberates in her present time, manifesting in the kinds of relationships that she has with people. Frozen time is a reoccurring matter in other BTHOHP personal accounts too.<sup>36</sup> But there are other personal accounts in the BTHOHP where, at a certain point, such frozen events in time ended when the material conditions of getting on with their life were taken up.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See BTHOHP interviews Mary Terszak (1999) and Trevor Deshong (2001).

<sup>37</sup> See BTHOHP interviews Glenys Collard (2000) and Kenneth Staggs (2000).

*The Sad/Loss Tale as Commodity*

As I noted earlier, Wenberg's BTHOHP interview was not the first time she had been interviewed about her experience of removal and separation. Firstly, her experiences have been organised through psychiatry/counselling discourse, a form of interviewing which she invokes in this account. Secondly, they have also been assembled for a Dutch television project that she and her sister participated in. The Dutch television company interviewed and recorded a first reunion involving her and her mother's Aboriginal family, but not her paternal side. Wenberg relates to her story as commodity for use and exchange, which is an interesting way to look at the ideological framing involved and which relates the sad/loss tale interpretive scheme to public consumption.

**Rita May Wenberg:** To see so many dark people. You know, it's a bit scary. I didn't know what reaction I'd have. You know, when we got there Muriel came out and I broke down and we all broke down and cried, and they came in with all these photos and everything to show us but, you know, it was nice but something was missing, it just wasn't... I don't know, it might be just me. I don't know, it's just that I've got in my mind about Aborigine people. It's very hard for me to sort of try and associate.

**Diana Ritch:** Do you want to try to?

**Rita May Wenberg:** One mind says yes and one mind says no. You know, I'm quite happy if I'm on me own I won't get let down. Do you know what I mean? Because I don't want to get hurt again. I know that if I keep clear away from all that and just be myself I will be alright.

**Diana Ritch:** So you went up to Yamba and there was a Dutch television or radio people?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Television.

**Diana Ritch:** And what were they filming?

**Rita May Wenberg:** They were filming where we went across the little island where Mum and Dad was living. Muriel showed us Mum and Dad's shack.

**Diana Ritch:** Your mother and father lived in a shack up there together.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. They showed us that.

**Diana Ritch:** Was it still there?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah, I've got the photos there as a matter of fact. And I re-sketched it how it is supposed to be, I'll show you later.

**Diana Ritch:** I'd love to see it.

**Rita May Wenberg:** And I walked away. Val and Muriel was in there talking, you know, and I just sort of walked away on me own.

**Diana Ritch:** What was going through your mind at the time?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I don't know. I just walked away and looked at the trees. I think I was more thinking about Mum than anybody. Mum was the first person I was thinking mostly about. [No] anybody else. Thinking that she lived here in a lovely little spot, you know, by the river and trees and you know. It was so peaceful, so pretty. Just the thought that she lived there with Dad and that.

**Diana Ritch:** Was it a good feeling?

**Rita May Wenberg:** It was a sad feeling, you know nothing good but just sad. And I just walked away on me own.

**Diana Ritch:** What do you think was making you sad?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Just the thought of what a mix up, you know, the Australian government done and how they've mixed up the lives of families and destroyed family life and, you know, things like that. It's sad.

**Diana Ritch:** Did you feel any spiritual connection to the area?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah, I think I did. I felt as if somebody was present there. You know, I felt that somebody was watching me, you know I keep walking and feel like somebody was there watching me. It was very peaceful and, you know. Yeah.

**Diana Ritch:** Did this help you recognise anything in yourself?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No, not really.

**Diana Ritch:** Could you identify with anything that was there?

**Rita May Wenberg:** All I identified was how peaceful and you know, the rivers and the old shack, that fascinated me and the big trees and that, you know. So peaceful, and really nice.

**Diana Ritch:** And what was the reaction, say, of the Dutch crew and then later on, of the Dutch viewers?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Very good. They were very nice, very understanding. They looked after us very well. They were wonderful people.

**Diana Ritch:** And why did you think they did it?

**Rita May Wenberg:** I think they wanted to get it back of Holland, you know, about the stolen generation was going on, to the video stations there, I s'pose.

**Diana Ritch:** Right. And you've seen the video since then?

**Rita May Wenberg:** No I haven't. Yes I have. And I was disgusted with it.

**Diana Ritch:** Oh no. Why?

**Rita May Wenberg:** Well I was in it. Val was in it. And they show the part of the Redfern mob<sup>38</sup> with the needles and dragging somebody drunk out and putting him underneath the tree and, you know.

**Diana Ritch:** It's very negative.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Imagine like, you might think I am a bit of a snob, but that's me. You know I'm not used to that sort of [inaudible], you know. I suppose they had to show the people the real thing, but why put us, you know. You know, I don't see the point in it.

**Diana Ritch:** The connection.

**Rita May Wenberg:** Yeah. My point is, it was supposed to put Val and I go back home for the first time, alright? Then Valerie showed me the video and I said, "That's disgusting," and I didn't like it. Valerie didn't like it. But my opinion is that they did show the right video over in Holland 'cause the photo of Mum and Dad in his army uniform and how we were taken away while he was in the army and things like that, and of course the servicemen in Holland they are disgusted with the Australian government for taking the children away while their father was in the army and things like that. [inaudible]. (Wenberg 2001: 38-42)

The narrative builds from and onto the act of telling. Mass media in the 1990s played a significant role in the extra-local organisation of the child separations as a social problem and continued to commodify this aspect of history. Through Wenberg's personal interview account, I have drawn out how primary narratives are transformed into ideological narratives and the practices that constitute Wenberg as one of the removed and separated as organised around the sad/loss tale.

### **The Apparatus of Separating: Reginald Marsh**

#### *Textual Reality in Accounting for a Removal Policy*

Chapter Four detailed the development of the BTHOHP and how its interviewers and interviewees privately negotiated what each interview would cover. I do not know the scope

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<sup>38</sup> "Mob" is a term used in Australia as an informal way of talking about an extended family, often an Aboriginal group without familial specifics. In this instance, the "Redfern mob" refers to the Aboriginal people residing in the Redfern area in Sydney.



that Reginald Marsh and his interviewer Manne agreed to and whether the interview upheld those agreements. Although not privy to such negotiations, I can still use the analytical approach of reading the text and its ideological circle to find sets of relations that work to socially organise this personal account. Doing so reveals the activities of instructing, disciplining and regulating the telling involved, and also the significance of a textual reality that works to order the experience of telling and reading. The interconnections of particular experiences and texts may not be immediately apparent to the casual reader, but through close examination and mapping, I can piece together an episodic ordering through texts.

This analysis progresses through four ‘episodes’ of social organising around ‘textual moments’ of how and why a policy of removals occurred, which I call ‘textual episodes’. My analysis of textual episodes maintains the sequence of action as the interview progresses and shows how the interview textually operates as an interrogation of the past in which the reader is cast as a judge/juror. This episodic ordering also dominates and suppresses expressions of experience in relation to the interpretive scheme of what/why. These are not ‘real’ but part of a method of interpreting my reading experiences. They show how experience gets ‘looped’ through the textual, how the authority of the text is used in shaping or suppressing particulars of telling, organise ‘corrective’ interviewing strategies, select a vocabulary that generates connectives to an interpretive scheme, and organises knowing in relation to time.

Through my research I have come to know that Robert Manne, the interviewer, is a professor of politics at La Trobe University, has written numerous pieces for newspapers and journals and has been involved in the public debates about Aboriginal Australian child separation histories, particularly through his critiques of the editor and authors of the *Quadrant*

magazine concerning these issues. I have also read Manne's (2001) *Quarterly Essay* article,<sup>39</sup> in which he argued there had been a campaign by the political and media right to deny the existence of a removal policy based on race, among his other publications. Before reading the interview with Reginald Marsh, Manne's position as discerned through these other texts has already set up a position for me as a reader.

The interview starts with Manne asking Marsh what he thought about the BTH Report, which Marsh comments was 'light' concerning the Northern Territory in relation to what was included for other states (Marsh 2000). From this, Marsh details how he came to work in the Commonwealth government administration in the Northern Territory from having been in the Air Force in WWII and then working as a civil servant in post-war reconstruction for re-employment of former defence personnel while in Canberra, the capital of Australia. As a result of conflict over guaranteeing European migrants employment (he commented that the labour market could not support the number of incoming migrants), from 1957-1962 he worked as a government administrator in Darwin for the Department of Northern Territory, first administered by South Australia, but then by the Commonwealth under Prime Minister Hasluck (Marsh 2000:11). I raise here Marsh's concerns about the lack of employment opportunities that existed because such matters are also important in comment concerning child separations at the time they occurred, but this is rarely discussed in present-day literature about these histories.

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<sup>39</sup> Manne, R. (2001) 'In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right'.

### *Textual Episode 1: The Problem*

Marsh's initial primary responsibility in his job was to implement Prime Minister Hasluck's new welfare policy through the regulations set out in what is known as 'The Welfare Ordinance' of 1953 (Marsh 2000). His responsibilities in relation to the Ordinance text became my entry point for explicating how the particularities of his telling of his experience is worked into an interpretive schema explaining the 'what/why' reasons for the policy of Aboriginal removal. Early in the interview, Manne points out the BTHOHP is about the policy of removal and he approaches the what/why question in terms of 'the records' are there to prove it. Marsh in response sets up the relationship between removal and people of mix descent, which he calls "part-coloured", in the Northern Territory, particularly in its capital Darwin. From Marsh's point of view, 'everyone' was aware that the mixed descent population viewed themselves as a distinct group and that the mix was not solely of Aboriginal and Anglo/European. For example, he says that those consciously identifying as a "part-coloured" group were various mixes of Aboriginal, Chinese and other Asian groups and various European ethnicities and that Darwin was practicing multiculturalism before the term came about or was practiced elsewhere in Australia.

Marsh points out, and other BTHOHP interviews also raise, that the Welfare Ordinance was designed to help people based on need and not skin colour. Finding and aiding those in need varied in the form it took, depending on the infrastructure of a particular place such as in a town, camps around town or on pastoral stations. He describes this in and around towns as involving those who might have had aspirations but experienced a lack of community support and need help from the church or state, whereas station workers and their extended families, mostly people of mixed descent but also full descent Aboriginals, were supported by the station employer. There was, then, much variation of experiences within this single

Australian state. This is however not followed-up by Manne questioning how need was assessed in these different locations. Rather, Manne immediately goes into simplifying what a removal was like and where the children were sent to. The interviewer asks Marsh little about this where and how, and instead he instructs where and how they occurred based on his reading. In particular, he draws on the BTH Report which identifies the names and types of institutions the children were sent to.

**Robert Manne:** And just to put it very simply, the policy when you arrived in Darwin was for the administration, the patrol officers, to take the half-caste children from the stations or from the camps. Is that right? And to bring them to Saint Mary's in Alice Springs or to Retta Dixon, or the island missions.  
(Marsh 2000: 17)

Marsh unpacks Manne's simplification and also disciplines him on his use of the term 'half-caste' in characterising people of mixed descent:

**Reginald Marsh:** Usually the situation was that the closest and first contact would be between some church mission. There were settled church missions like Hermannsberg, and Santa Teresa near Alice. There were no missions up the main track to the Top End, but the Seventh Day Adventist Church, particularly, had a roving kind of mission. They had a wider contact with traditionally living camps between the Centre and the Top End than anybody else. Now what would happen was that they became aware that there was a child in a camp who was, in their view, needing care.

**Robert Manne:** And that would be what they'd normally call half-caste?

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes.

**Robert Manne:** Would it ever be a full-blood?

**Reginald Marsh:** We used the term part-coloured.

**Robert Manne:** The term half-caste had passed away then?

**Reginald Marsh:** Part-coloured was used more. And they would let the patrol officers know, either in Alice or in Darwin, and then someone would go out and have a look at the situation.

**Robert Manne:** Can I ask another very simple question: would they ever, in this information, would they give information only about part-coloured children, or also about other children that were, as it were, full-blood. I don't know what term you used then.

**Reginald Marsh:** I don't recall any full-blood children being viewed as a problem, or neglected. I don't think any full-blood children were neglected in Darwin.

**Robert Manne:** So this was exclusively to do with the part-coloured children?

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes, I think that had to do with their problem, their position under the traditional Law. (Marsh 2000: 17-18)

The organisation of the interview is set up by this somewhat abstract articulation of a problem regarding people of mixed descent, and a related policy of welfare to remove those determined to be in need. This then provides the interpretive scheme for the child removals, and it works on the one hand around the idea of the best interests of the child related to the material conditions they were in ('needing care'), and on the other the administrative policy of removals based on group criteria regarding the 'part-coloured' and 'their problem', identified as a structural one.

*Textual Episode 2: Ordering and Suppressing Experience through Assessing Patrol Reports*

With the problem of the removals set up as one where there were mixed descent children in need of care, Manne wants to know how the process of removing was put into action once a patrol officer was told that someone was in need of care. From this, Marsh explains that a patrol officer would go out and investigate the situation and write a case report that would be given to the Darwin office. The patrol officer's report then becomes crucial and contentious in this interview. The report connects with attitudes and motives, both justifying and disqualifying an assessment of the need for a removal, through the telling of experience. And in addition, the report embeds within it other oral texts that might work to disrupt Marsh's reasoning about the removals. This develops in the course of the conversation – which is in fact a question and answer sequence – and this on Marsh's side organises experience in relation to a textual record but is disputed on Manne's.

The first contended issue that Manne raises is what would have happened if a report recommending removal was not accepted by the mother: what if the mother did not want the

child to go? In the exchange below, the best interest of the child as recommended in the report comes into conflict with the possibility that the parent(s) did not want the child removed. The issue of accepting even if not fully consenting removals is worked on by Marsh in deploying textual authority and narrative strategies concerning ‘the problem’ of the structural situation of part-coloured children in Aboriginal communities, and by Manne in repeatedly questioning these by raising possible different responses from parents and mothers especially:

**Reginald Marsh:** I think invariably the circumstance was when they first talked to the mother that she was unhappy. And they’d say, “alright, well let us talk again, we need your agreement”. She had to understand that it was in the child’s interest.

**Robert Manne:** But what if she thought it wasn’t? What would happen?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, in the fullness of time I think she would always agree, because the mothers were aware of their problem in the camp. You see, no young Aboriginal woman did not have an Aboriginal husband, because there was the custom of promising. It wasn’t seen as her fault if she had a part-coloured child, provided that she conformed to the law; in other words she was someone’s wife. The tribe, (I don’t know whether to say the word tribe or clan or camp, camp might be a better word) would not show disapproval of a mixed race liaison on moral grounds. But the Aboriginal husband might, and normally didn’t accept the child as his child, but the woman, she was still his wife.

**Robert Manne:** Now if the Aboriginal husband had accepted, I mean I’ve read cases, I can’t tell you whether they’re true or not, but people have said that the Aboriginal fathers quite often did accept the child as their child.

**Reginald Marsh:** It was then a member of the camp as it were. But the old men, as in the early days would have said, “this child has no place here”.

**Robert Manne:** No, but if there are cases of Aboriginal fathers accepting the child as being the child of...?

**Reginald Marsh:** I can’t recall an instance, but I’m sure in my understanding that if the Aboriginal father and the Aboriginal mother both wanted the child not to go, then the child wouldn’t have gone.

**Robert Manne:** So you think it was always the case that the child would have been rejected by the father at least?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well if not rejected, at least it would have taken with his passive acquiescence. He knew the situation under the Law. In other words, not only was he not the father, but as one of the initiates he knew the community problem.

**Robert Manne:** I’ll go through the things I know, and you can correct me and tell me that they’re not so. I mean quite often the people that gave evidence before the enquiry would have memories that their mothers or aunties or whatever coloured

them, made them darker, so they would not look as if they were part-coloured or half-caste. Because the sense then was that the aunty or the mother or the group were fearful of losing the child. Would you say that's not true in any cases?

**Reginald Marsh:** All I know is that I don't know any instances. I don't say it's not true. It's wholly a problem, the child was not black on both sides, of how long that child stayed in the mother's care. If the child was killed at birth there was no problem. However if it wasn't killed and the mother suckled it, in the association of suckling a bonding took place. My recollection is that children once suckled were to stay with the mother until they were four or five, even if the conditions were bad, because of that bond. The policy certainly was that the welfare officer, the patrol officer, should talk to the mother to let her see what advantages there would be for the child if taken into care, compared to a continuing life in the camp.

**Robert Manne:** And you think in no cases would the mother have said, "I don't agree with you". That their resistance would have been worn down in the end or they would have seen the light or something.

**Reginald Marsh:** I think that always before the order was taken out, the patrol officer would have been able to see the mother thinks "perhaps yes, it would be better".  
(Marsh 2000: 19-21)

Marsh's experience, used in his assessment of the adequacy of the patrol officer's report, has been put into question; and in doing so Manne draws on his reading of other texts that indicate Aboriginal fathers did accept mixed descent children. He uses what he says these generalised others have commented about people elsewhere as a form of authority in countering Marsh's experience that mothers eventually agreed to the removals in the end: "Now if the Aboriginal husband had accepted, I mean I've read cases, I can't tell you whether they're true or not, but people have said." The organisation of telling how the removals in Marsh's area worked is made to loop through abstract unknown texts ('I've read cases... people have said').

This exchange sequence also reveals an instructive descriptive strategy in establishing an order of 'true or false.' Manne instructs this, when he states the procedure that: "I'll go through the things I know, and you can correct me and tell me that they're not..." to which Marsh starts his reply with "All I know is that I don't know any instances. I don't say it's not true." The true or false strategy places a 'burden of proof' on Marsh to disprove what Manne

knows, which includes Manne bringing in the moral weight of the National Inquiry testimony on his side. This burden of proof strategy is also then used by the interviewer to organise particulars in other parts of the interview, which I discuss later.

The interviewer Manne continues to shape what is said about the removal policy. For instance, he questions whether the patrol officer's report was based on a universal policy of removing mixed descent children, or whether the officer was given discretionary judgment. Marsh responds that the patrol officer made an assessment based on individual situations and therefore had discretion in the recommendations to remove or not. Assessing the best interest of the child is further developed around the adequacy of such reports. A recommendation in a particular report sets up an ordering strategy for Marsh's experience to be told:

**Robert Manne:** And do you think the patrol officers, I mean how long would they spend, say, on a station or in a camp to make the assessment of what was in the best interest of the child? I will tell you an example, just because you've mentioned him, Ted Evans. There was a famous document which Ted Evans wrote, I don't know if you know of it.

**Reginald Marsh:** The Wave Hill document.

**Robert Manne:** Wave Hill in 1949, in which he gives a record of how distressed the family was, I think not only the mother. And I think he seemed to place emphasis on never again flying children out.

**Reginald Marsh:** That's right.

**Robert Manne:** How well would he have known, as a hypothetical case, the exact circumstances in that Wave Hill group at that time? How long would he have spent at Wave Hill before his recommendation for the removal came? I know it was before your time, but...

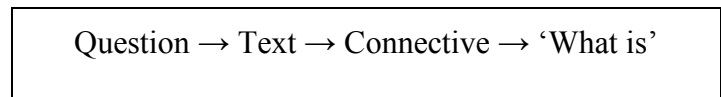
**Reginald Marsh:** He was a conscientious officer so I think he would have spent long enough to feel that he knew the situation. Now that famous report was due to the fact that the children who were removed were removed into the bowels of this flying monster, and that added a dramatic dimension to the whole thing. No wonder the women who were simple and ignorant of aeroplane engines screamed and made a fuss. Ted recommended how it should not be handled, but I don't think that he did not recommend that the children be taken into care.

**Robert Manne:** I know I agree with that, I've read it carefully. His recommendation was that never again should they be moved in that way.

**Reginald Marsh:** The method, it was the methodology. (Marsh 2000: 22-23)



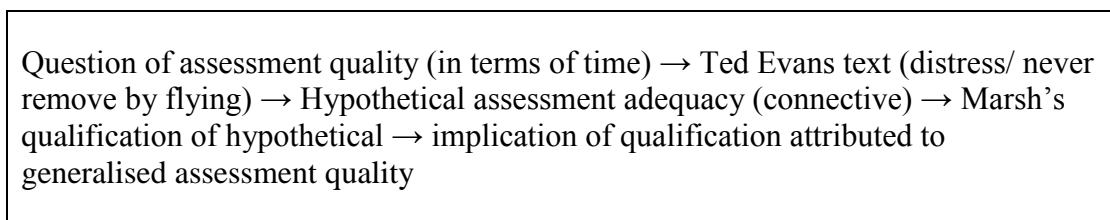
This exchange enables Marsh, in a way albeit governed by the interviewer, to provide an assessment of the adequacy of patrol reports via commenting on the ‘famous document’ and what it did and did not recommend. This interview had not previously discussed Ted Evans and therefore Manne’s reference to Marsh having mentioned him, by implication possibly refers to the pre-interview negotiations. This points to a level of unseen organising that is not explicit in the BTTHOHP interview itself. The organising sequence is sketched in figure 5.3 as a broad question, provision of a textual reference, connectives stated, and a response to conclude about what is in question. This strategy is used multiple times by Manne to order how Marsh is to tell his experience with an example of this set out in Figure 5.4.



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Figure 5.3 Ordering Framework for Experience to be Told

How this ordering strategy unfolds, its specific details, enable a ‘final assessment’ of the quality of this particular patrol report, and by implication others too, is shown in figure 5.4



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Figure 5.4 Sequence of Reading Quality Assessment in Patrol Reports

Marsh must go through some of the specifics of the Evans report to support his assessment of the adequacy of Evans's recommendation, and this is done through a connective hypothetical. The length of time the patrol officer was in the area to make his assessment report links into the adequacy of the report and its recommendations. The implication is that the time taken to make an evaluation equals the validity of judgment, which must be read in relation to a temporal order. This exchange starts with the report being "famous" and known for the distressing effect it said the removal had on the people being removed. The interviewer Manne is thereby seeking to situate removal as entirely counter to the well-being of those involved. However, through his detailed knowledge of the particulars Marsh is able to raise the absence of a connection – the distress was not the removal but 'the methodology' and in particular using large and noisy aircraft that people were completely unfamiliar with as transport.

Manne then goes on to use a similar strategy of ordering as in figure 5.3, first through a question, around the example of a report in Macleod's (1997) *Patrol in the Dreamtime* text, and he then asks for a response to get at the 'attitudes' of patrol officers through their reports:

**Robert Manne:** Yeah. Do you think the patrol officers, I don't know how closely you knew their work or even knew their characters, but would they all have been conscientious in the kinds of recommendations they would have made, do you think, or would there have been variation between one and another in their attitude? Can I give you another example? I read very carefully Colin McLeod's book on this issue, and he had at the back of his book an appendix in which he includes one of his recommendations. Basically what he says is that some of these children should go, and he mainly seems to want the girls to be taken away and the boys probably should be left, as they can grow up as station hands. Would that be a typically kind of report, do you think?

**Reginald Marsh:** I think so, because what was so difficult for the public was that when there was a suggestion that the girls would be abused. There was some prospect of pastoral work for the boys, but there was nothing much for the girls to look forward to other than rejection. The boys were useful to the station owner. A large part of the very effective cattle work was done by part-coloureds. A lot of the part-coloured children were given the name of the station owner, where it was not a company place. I think McLeod would have been aware of the attitude.

**Robert Manne:** And so do you think it's then true that more girls would have been taken away than boys?

**Reginald Marsh:** Oh yes, I'm sure the statistics would have shown that.

**Robert Manne:** And this was because of the fear of them not having a life, or being sexually abused later on?

**Reginald Marsh:** That's right.

**Robert Manne:** That's what I took from Colin McLeod's thing.

**Reginald Marsh:** You see, the child who didn't have a foot in both sides in the camps presented a problem in the future to the full-blood, Aboriginal father. The Law created an intractable situation, and that's why I think that, if reconciliation is to fit into this coming century, the traditional law has to be modified. I think it may sound like heresy to say that a traditional law could be modified, it's not modifiable, never been done; but I think those who still more or less live traditionally ought, as part of the reconciliation, to come to a decision of how to accept children of mixed Aboriginal race.

If I were asked would I suggest that they should modify it by simply saying that where any part-coloured is child born outside Aboriginal marriage, the product of that union wishing to live on in that community should be deemed to belong to the head of the other moiety. In other words, it should be given a leg in the other moiety. That's what I think. If it was deemed to be the child of the head of the other moiety, it would be given status in the camp, it would fit in with multicultural policy.

**Robert Manne:** And you see that as a way where this might be avoided?

**Reginald Marsh:** If I were asked to go to this great debate on reconciliation, that would be my suggestion, that the first step to reconciliation was to make the law capable of this reconciliation at the ground roots in the camps. (Marsh 2000: 23-24)

The interviewer here turns the question of the quality of assessment towards the attitudes of patrol officers and picks out from the text referred to "girl to boy" removals. Manne thereby sets up a sequence that requires a response that the gender of the removed will or will not be a major concern for a "typical" report. The use of "typically" acts as a connective to an implied generalisation about all reports. In this instance, Marsh responds in a way that qualifies the generalisation.

Marsh's response is again detailed and particular and establishes its authority through his detailed knowledge and experience. This experience is tied to what he sees as the problem, especially for girls, of mixed descent people in relation to Aboriginal law. The problem here

is to be interpreted as an Aboriginal problem that positions mixed descent people in an exclusionary way. He also proposes that the condition of exclusion and the existence of available labour was different for boys compared with girls and impacted the children's relationship to the state. The issue of available labour for girls and women with few or no employment skills, and the treatment of and violence against women, are both underrepresented in the literature about the separations.

Before Marsh is able to provide his experiences, this experience becomes subject to the standpoint of various third party texts concerning patrol reports. The patrol report becomes a central organising device used by Manne to impute motives for the policy of removal. Somehow, the patrol officer and their report is positioned as the only factor in determining whether someone was to be removed or not. There is silence in Manne's interpretive scheme and questioning concerning other parts of the official apparatus and also the activities of other people 'on the ground'.

For instance, the patrol officers only dealt with people in and around rural settlements and farming stations. They were not the local police nor part of the Department of Welfare. The silence concerning non-patrol officers, such as welfare officers who handled assessments and cases of removal in the towns, was not brought up once by Manne in questioning nor, less surprisingly, by Marsh in responding. This silence indicates that the account produced in this interview is organised around a policy, not about the removals generally, but just those who fall under the jurisdiction of the patrol officers duties, and this is set up by Manne right at the outset.

There is a real problem in focusing on the patrol officers to get at the motives of a policy that impacted people well beyond rural settlements and farming stations. Yet, reading this

interview, the distinctions are not made and possibly uninformed readers could easily read this as covering all removals in all geographical areas of the various Australian states. For example, the patrol officer was not going around Darwin making assessment reports, that would have been in the jurisdiction of the welfare officer. My background knowledge 'reads into' the text the problem of organisation of the account and it fills the gap of this silence. However, for many readers there would be no perception that such a gap exists, so that the interview might be taken as providing 'the facts' regarding all removals.

### *Textual Episode 3: Struggle, Order & Time*

One aspect of the problematic concerning the removals and separations is to do with time, and certainly the BTHOHP was critiqued for inadequately accounting for pre-and post WWII policies. This interview between Manne and Marsh reflects that in relation to the what/why of past removals. Marsh's government service in the Northern Territory means his knowledge is of post-WWII policies, as he comments at a number of junctures, but the continuing legacy of earlier times muddies distinctions between times and policies. The text of the Ordinance is mentioned, then the exchange moves back in time before the Ordinance to policies carried out under the former Protectorate of Aborigines, led by Cecil Cook prior to WWII. The interview then becomes something of a struggle between an interpretive scheme of exclusion and neglect (for Marsh, as a result of the problem of Aboriginal traditional law) and one of race or rather racism (for Manne, as a threat to Anglo/European lifestyle). The actions and legacy of Cecil Cook becomes the site of difference. As the following extracts indicate, Manne uses time to suggest that race and racism were the dynamic at work overall. Marsh's response however includes that post-war circumstances had changed and Cook's thinking had too.

**Robert Manne:** One of the things I'm interested in is the relationship of the policy of taking the children and putting them in the mission Homes, to the general policy of assimilation, which was the policy very much by the time you were involved. Can you describe the relationship of the two bits of endeavour?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, the policy of assimilation covered the lot. I think it's one of the very misunderstood policies. The policy of assimilation as I had it from Hasluck was that there should be a means whereby people according to their need should be helped, not according to their colour. That's why the word Aboriginal doesn't occur anywhere in the [Aboriginal] Ordinance. Hasluck was very strong on that. One of its axioms was that people who weren't healthy, who hadn't some education and some knowledge of a different world were in no position to choose whether they wanted to live their life out in a traditional style or in a modern style. Now that was the logical foundation of the assimilation policy, and that's how it did work. It was to fit people to make a choice, and people can't be said to have a choice if they don't understand something of the alternatives. Hasluck was a very logical man.

**Robert Manne:** And how do you think that general policy related to the particular policy with the coloured children being taken and being put in the Homes?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, the coloured children were only taken into a Home if their circumstances were judged that they personally, each one personally, needed the care of an institution. However lacking the care might be, or be deemed to be, it should offer a better prospect than the situation which the patrol officer found them in at their traditional camp.

**Robert Manne:** But do you think the policy was part of the assimilation policy? That is, as a way of giving the chance for these children to move into a mainstream society?

**Reginald Marsh:** Absolutely. There's my little story about setting up the shorthand and typing pool illustrative of it. That seemed to be a sensible and natural thing to do. I never heard discussed, even in the widest debate, the idea that's attributed to some of the early officials like Cecil Cook, that the purpose of the part-coloured homes was to preserve the whiteness of those who were taken. I just never heard that suggested. That would have been unthinkable in administration circles in my day.

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**Robert Manne:** Do you doubt it in the '30s, or just that you didn't hear about it?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, I'm in no position to judge of the Northern Territory or the other parts of Australia before I had this close contact, so I wouldn't make a judgement there. That's not to say that I think that the bulk of the administration or the public had the view that it was these children's whiteness that was to be preserved. There was, for instance, a lot of encouragement, positive encouragement for these girls to find part-coloured mates, because they were in much the same situation outside traditional law which only looked after the problem of full bloods' marriage.

**Robert Manne:** How do you mean?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well that law said that the child had to have a leg in each moiety. As mixed race matters, these girls couldn't give a child status in either of the, in two moieties, because they hadn't it themselves. The law, I think, worked that way only where both parents were full Aboriginal.

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**Robert Manne:** Did he talk about his period as Chief Protector?

**Reginald Marsh:** We used to talk about everything, as you do when side by side. Trip after trip after trip we covered a lot of ground, so I got a pretty good knowledge of Cecil Cook and what his attitude was. His attitude then would be very much the attitude that is postulated by multiculturalism. I think he was a realist; I don't think it would have been on racial grounds but on very practical grounds, that it wasn't much good for a part-coloured girl who'd got some distance, [suppose she'd done that typing course which wasn't in his time, but that sort of thing] for her to marry a chap living in a bush camp; in fact she probably wouldn't want to do it. I think that's where he'd have been very happy about the golden people idea. Cecil Cook, in doing what he did, was more looking at practical problems than theoretical policy.

**Robert Manne:** I have read a lot of things he wrote, policy documents, and it's not quite like that, this is in the '30s, it's not what he thought in the '50s, I have no idea. In the '30s, for example, he was very worried about the growth of what he called multi-colour humanity, which was the mixing of the Pacific Islands and the Chinese and the Aborigines and the Europeans. He thought that there was a threat to European settlement in the Northern Territory from what I have read, I could show you the things he wrote.

**Reginald Marsh:** At the time of my close contact with him, the post-war immigration had happened and Australia was already embarked on multiculturalism.

**Robert Manne:** So you think he might have changed?

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes.

**Robert Manne:** I do think he did have a different view. Again, I don't know how much of the history was sort of discussed within the Department when you were there. But as I understand it, and I am just very curious to see what you say to this, that the main thrust of the policy was the idea of absorbing the part-coloured, or what were called at the time half-caste...

**Reginald Marsh:** Into the normal community.

**Robert Manne:** ...into the normal community. And for example, he definitely did encourage the marriage of the part-coloured or half-caste girls with European males. And there was this theory at the time that after three or four generations there wouldn't be any sign of the Aboriginality left. Was there any discussion of those kinds of things when you were?

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes, but it was a practical thing. It was much easier before multiculturalism, for people who were apparently white, certainly as white as many Mediterranean people were. There was a bit of an advantage in getting employment and getting around in the community. I think it was a purely pragmatic.

**Robert Manne:** That there be prejudice against coloured people.

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes. Not in the administration but, there was prejudice in a lot of the Australian community, the majority of whom had never even seen a black fellow. Ignorance is really the root of xenophobia. This is just an example of xenophobia.

**Robert Manne:** So then you think Cecil Cook’s idea is a practical idea that if eventually they look European or look Mediterranean there is more chance of these people fitting in easily to mainstream society?

**Reginald Marsh:** Yes, that’s true. But I think there was, on the practical side, the humane consideration that it was no life for them to go back to the camp. They could have a better life, except of course for some of the part-coloured girls. In my time prostitution was a problem, because there were not good avenues for employment. In the Darwin suburbs of Stuart Park and Winnellie there were well-known huts which would have been regarded as the red light district elsewhere. That was simply because there was no other economic way for a lot of them. Those who were able to get jobs and so on and were married and had stable lives were good. That’s true of our own society too, even now.

**Robert Manne:** Was the administration very worried about the social problems of that kind in the time you were there? In particular, the problem of prostitution?

**Reginald Marsh:** Oh yes. In fact that was a major factor in the decision to establish the Housing Commission. I put the Housing Commission Legislation through the Council. (Marsh 2000: 28-33)

The struggle over accounting for the motives of the removal policies points up that two different interpretive schemes are being deployed in the exchange above. This is represented in Figure 5.5.

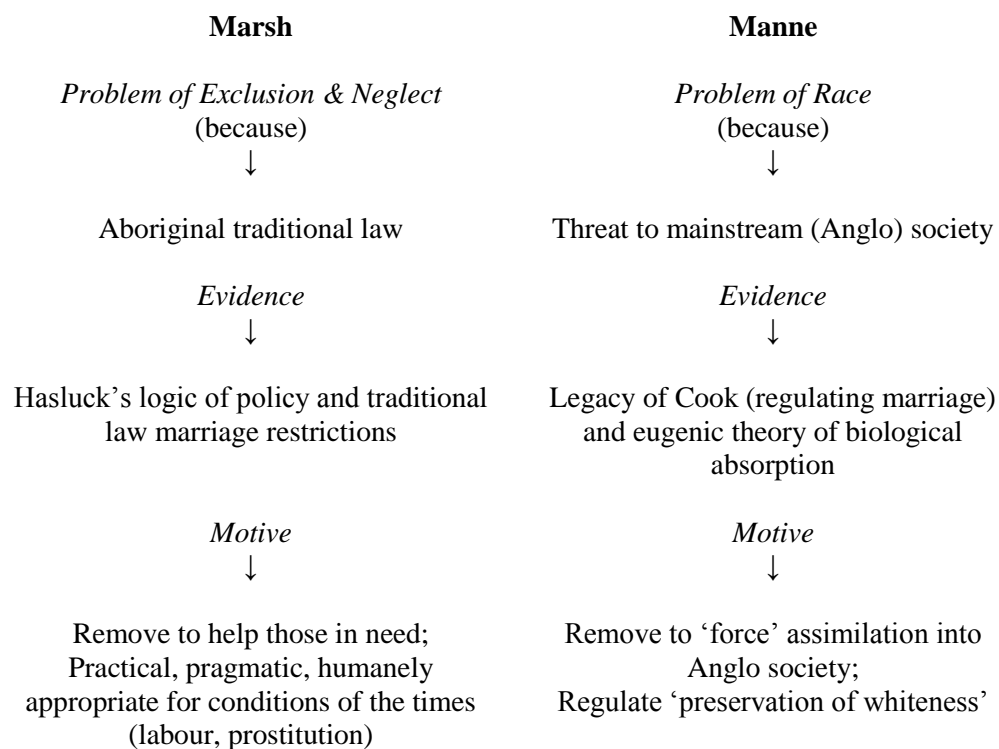


Figure 5.5 Marsh-Manne Ordering the Motives for Removal Policies Version One



Once Marsh articulates his understanding of Hasluck's assimilation policy, Manne questions this against a reading of the removals as concerned with 'preserving whiteness' around a eugenic theory. Marsh uses the Ordinance text as an authority, pointing out that the word 'Aboriginal' is absent from it and suggesting it is to be understood as pertaining to all people in need. However, comparisons with non-mixed Aboriginal people are never mentioned by either of them. Marsh uses Hasluck's "logic" as an authorising device positioning unhealthy, uneducated poor people as unable to make decisions and therefore it being the government's duty to make decisions for them, and thus in assessing need in relation to traditional life or modern life solutions.

Marsh's relationship with Cook is used in Manne's questioning of Cook's policies regarding mixed descent Aboriginal people and removals. In particular Manne raises Cook's 1930s writings to challenge Marsh on Cook's policy actions, which acts as a kind of 'corrective' in his interviewing strategy. The authority of the text initially works to denigrate Marsh's experience. However, Marsh then comments on the context of the times and the conditions that people were in at different times. For him, the what/why of the removal policy involved, in his time and also for Cook in his knowledge of him, being practical, pragmatic and humanely responsive to the grounded conditions then existing. Those conditions are described as the effects of traditional law exclusions, impacting on the health of people, and also the availability of labour and the gendered division of labour.

Manne, however, situates the policy in Cook's time as instead based on a eugenics theory of race and that it was the fear of being 'overrun' by a non-Anglo majority, race alone, that encouraged the policy of regulating marriages and thereby 'forcing' assimilation. In addition, Manne does not address the wider material conditions of the 1930-40s. Rather, selected particulars of Cook's policy and reference to texts organise Manne's interpretation and the

attempted deauthorising of Marsh's knowledge of Cook. The struggle for an account of removals based on race reaches back into Cook's time, and pulls that legacy forward to characterise post-WWII policy actions. Using the history or legacy of prior policy in this way works as a way to place one time on top of another, collapsing and obscuring time periods to generate an implied general knowledge.

A shift in the interview account occurs concerning time. Up until this point, the exchanges have been about policy and actions back then. In responding to Marsh's point that removal was not a contested issue back then, Manne raises the important question as to why it is seen so now.

**Reginald Marsh:** Well I think it's become such a public issue as part of a general movement, that something is owing to the Aboriginal people and the widening of the term Aboriginal to Indigenous, a word which I think is ill-used because I'm indigenous and I have no Aboriginal blood (I wouldn't mind if I had). But anyhow that, I think, is germane to the issue.

**Robert Manne:** Why do you think that this particular issue has?

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, it's part of the widening picture as the public becomes informed. There's a feeling that something is owed. Certainly I think there is something owed. But I don't think it's in regard to part-coloured people, because I'm quite sure that their prospects were better with that policy than if it hadn't existed. On the other hand, I think the Aboriginal people who want to live traditionally would be better off if we'd never come here. But since we did come here and it's a multicultural society, I think they're Australian citizens like the rest of us and should have a say like the rest of us. (Marsh 2000: 35-36)

Marsh's account for the matter becoming a public issue now invokes a wide range of social relations. These include the wider movement regarding land and cultural rights, an informed public, and identity connected with citizenship. His interpretational scheme here represents Australian society now as one based on equality through the practice of multiculturalism.

*Textual Episode 4: The Problem, 'The Traditional Law' and Textual Reality*

Later in this interview, Manne introduces an essay Marsh wrote in the *Quarterly Essay* magazine as a way to organise Marsh's telling of experience. He asks Marsh to provide an outline of this essay about Aboriginal traditional law and the moiety system in relation to why the removals happened. A simple version of this has already been addressed earlier by Marsh concerning how marriage restrictions dictated relationships across Aboriginal groups and concerning management of the land and so on. Marsh points out that the problem is that the traditional law only works in the Aboriginal system of groups; and a new group, such as that mixed descent, cannot be in accordance with the law. Contested meaning over traditional law and its exclusionary effects in accounting for the removals results in a textual struggle about the what/why of the removals. This is not simply a telling of experience or of what one knows, but rather takes on characteristics of a cross-examination ('I'm asking you to respond to that') concerning motives, meaning and time, organising through logical deduction and the suppression of some knowledge an interpretive scheme.

**Robert Manne:** But the heart of your explanation of the child removal, as I understand it, is that the children born of European father, Aboriginal mother didn't fit into the moiety system and thus had no place within the traditional world.

**Reginald Marsh:** Because they didn't have two parents each with a leg in the other moiety.

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**Robert Manne:** Well, I'll put it this way, my understanding, for example, in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, the policy begins of removing what were always called half-caste children, and it's a bit different from one state and territory to another. But basically it begins about 1900, 1910 or '11, it's in that decade that one place after another begins on this policy.

**Reginald Marsh:** Thank you, now I'm on the track, I've got the other leg of the question.

**Robert Manne:** Just one of the things that occurs to me, I've done a lot of research within the documents, I can't talk to people from 1900. But in the documents I've never come across any reference of this kind to the moiety system. Indeed I doubt whether any anthropologist in 1900 or 1910 understood the moiety system yet, I think it was not until the '20s or '30s. Elkin and perhaps before Elkin, Radcliff Brown were

beginning to understand it. But it seems to me the policy begins well before anyone even at the cutting edge of anthropology had an understanding of the moiety system, and thus I'm unconvinced that the reason children were beginning to be removed from 1900 on, you know, half-caste children, could have been related to an understanding of exclusion through the moiety system. So I suppose I'm asking you to respond to that.

**Reginald Marsh:** The point I'm trying to make is that the attitude of the people in the traditional system is dictated by the moiety system.

**Robert Manne:** I understand that. The question I'm asking is to do with the motives of people like Roth in Queensland, or South in South Australia, or Gale and other protectors in Western Australia for having the policy of child removal.

**Reginald Marsh:** I think the policy of child removal in all those other places was due to the knowledge that these illegitimate children who hadn't two genetic legs to stand on would be killed except where our statute law prevented it. And where our law prevented it, the surviving children, disapproved of but not killed, had a hard time. Removal, it was a question of sheer humanity. The policy has grown out of humanity.

**Robert Manne:** And can I say what I've found, and you may tell me that I'm wrong... in general the people like Walter Roth, who was a humanitarian I have no doubt, in Queensland, or like there are other people in different States. They tend to argue not so much that the children will be excluded from the group, but rather that we should give them a chance to become European, that they are half-European, and if we don't remove them they will just live a degraded life as an Aborigine in a camp. And that it is wasting their, sort of, Europeaness to just live their lives out. Often they also do talk about prostitution and other such things that await such people, with the girls.

**Reginald Marsh:** With the girls prostitution was of very serious public concern.

**Robert Manne:** But the general emphasis was not so much on them being excluded by other Aborigines, but rather that we should give them a chance to shed their Aboriginality and become European by taking them away, putting them in an educational institute and so on. And I think Cecil Cook was the same in the Northern Territory, that's the way he saw it. But I just wonder if you think that's wrong the way I'm rendering it?

**Reginald Marsh:** I think though that there's been almost a conspiracy of everybody not to face up to the fact of infanticide. We brought the problem. Before then there were no non-Aboriginals in Australia. Before there were any non-Aboriginal Australians there was no problem, we brought the problem. And the solution under the elders' law was infanticide. Now that's not pejorative, I'm quite sure that in that society I'd have been one of the old men that said, that the individual is subordinate to the community, that bonding the whole of community together is more important than concern for any individual in it. But as to infanticide, people don't like talking about it.

**Robert Manne:** Yeah, but Reg, if it was infanticide as the motive. Infanticide was not a motive but a solution.

**Reginald Marsh:** It's hard to avoid it.

**Robert Manne:** But clearly when a child is two years old it's not been the subject of infanticide. And most of the children that were removed were, as you mentioned it earlier and my studies have shown this too, were older than that were four or five. Very rarely, sometimes, but rarely before four or five from what I've seen. But that

clearly can't be, clearly infanticide hasn't occurred so they can't be saved from infanticide.

**Reginald Marsh:** Now you are getting to the motives of the rest of the community? Once our law was effective in preventing removal by infanticide, the surviving part-coloured children suffered inhumanity.

**Robert Manne:** The motives of the, it was really a policy that was done by protectors and by, you know, people in government, and the rest of the community I'm sure supported it. But their motives couldn't have been saving children from infanticide, because the fact that they were alive showed that they had not been killed. I'm making an, it's a sort of logical point I'm trying to make.

**Reginald Marsh:** Well, I'm quite sure that they knew that the [pause] part-coloured children, by and large, were ill treated. I think that that was the part-coloured problem and, I mean, everything followed from that. Some, of course, were taken, taken into homes. In a lot of the Northern Territory families where one of the original ancestors was an Aboriginal woman, there was no problem then, because they were removed from the camp situation to another stable situation. The child then was probably brought up pretty strictly, but it was someone's son, outside the traditional camp.

I'd only be speculating to answer your question as to people in other parts, but what I am sure of in Northern Territory is that the policy in the time I was there was a policy based on humanity; it was a policy not objected to in any instance that I know of by any tribal group as a group, it was a policy which afforded opportunity of something better than the camp offered such children; it was a policy that didn't always realise that opportunity to avoid prostitution for instance. But in the Northern Territory in my time, this sense of preserving part-coloured because of their white element was not a matter of even casual discussion.

**Robert Manne:** No, from what I've seen the records, it stopped at the Second World War that sort of discussion. I think there is a very big divide because of the Second World War, that's my own view.

**Reginald Marsh:** But as to the early days, the early settlers, I think that was a history of the clash of two civilisations, and the weaker one went under, and as a by-product of that we got a part-coloured problem. For the administrators of those times, it seems to me, their only solution was to have families adopt those children, or have institutions to take them. I don't think that would have happened just because was simply an individual problem. It was an Aboriginal social problem. (Marsh 2000: 38-42)

Marsh and Manne here work again on the struggle to account for the motive of removal policies. This exchange selects and orders new particulars into their own what/why ideological interpretive schemes. Figure 5.5 set up the what/why scheme at an earlier sequence in the interview. Figure 5.6 now builds on this organisation and the new particulars and their assembly are represented in bold text.

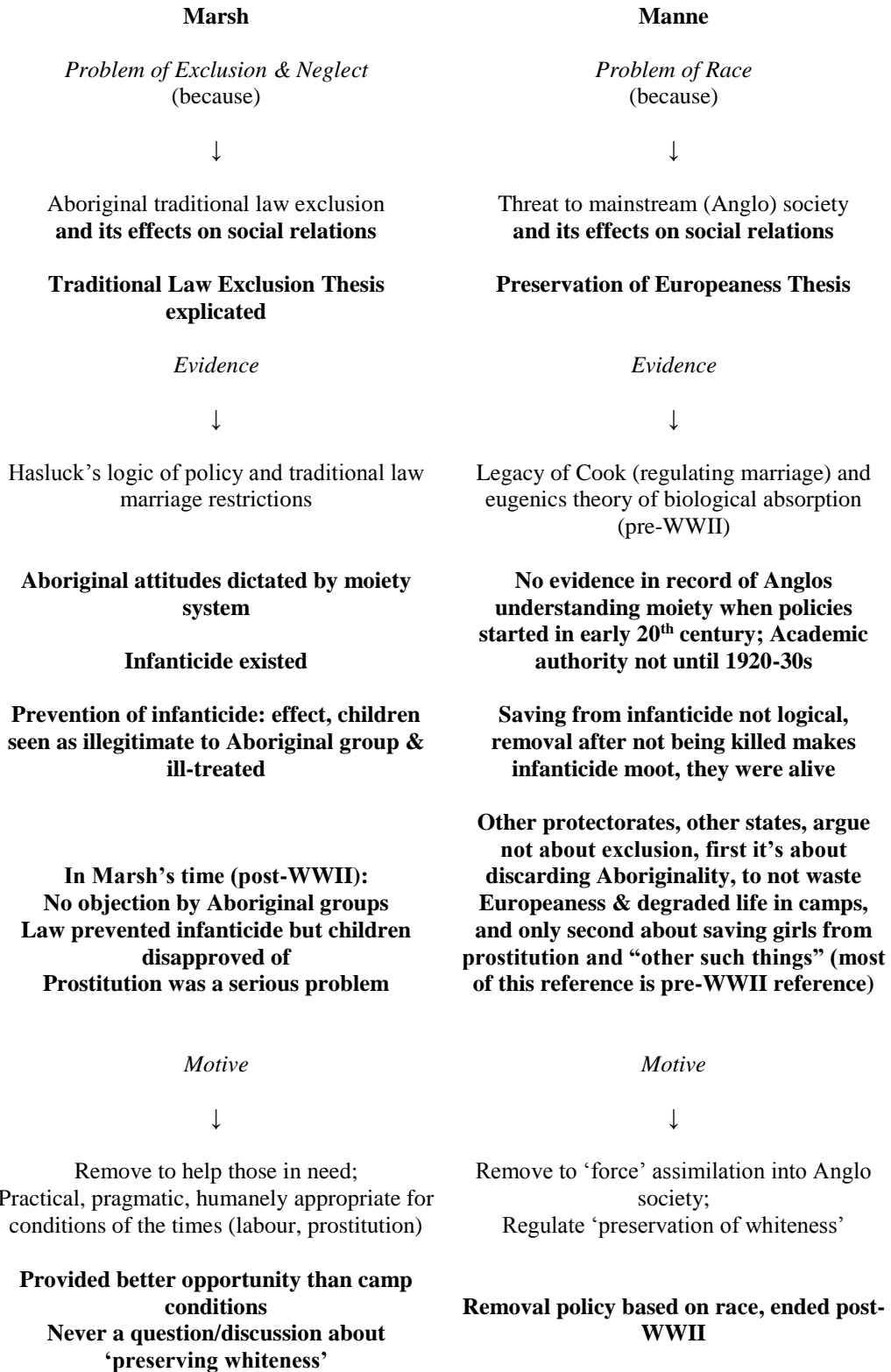


Figure 5.6 Marsh-Manne Ordering the Motives for Removal Policies Version Two

The discussion of motive for removals as developed in the above exchange shows just how significantly Manne's accounting and his references to texts, people and knowledges are oriented around pre-WWII policies. The authority that Manne relies on is imposed to a certain extent and competes with Marsh's experiences. By contrast, Marsh organises his experience in relation to his time, post-WWII. The reader must be actively attentive to the location of the time period and people they are speaking of to understand and evaluate the claims and counter-claims. To be able to read the problem that the time periods pose in making sense of the organisation of these two accounts requires considerable activity by the reader. Also, if the reader is not knowledgeable about what is described, then the what/why of different time periods could easily be misunderstood.

Descriptive strategies are used to provide privileged positions and indicate the direction of the burden of proof, as when Manne uses terms and phrases such as "I'm unconvinced," "I'm asking you to respond to that," "I can say what I've found, and you tell me that I'm wrong...", and "it's sort of a logical point I'm trying to make." Marsh in turn deploys rhetorical strategies: "I'm quite sure that in that society *I'd have been one of the old men that said*, that the individual is subordinate to the community..." The reader is active in filling in gaps around ambiguous language. Manne for instance points to the 'preservation of whiteness' theory that there is a related issue: "Often they also talk about prostitution and *other such things* that await such people, with the girls." The reader must fill in the gap of what "other such things" are, which following prostitution in the list can be interpreted as violence and pregnancies. That fact that this is placed second to the 'preserving whiteness thesis' and the lack of specificity about 'such things' suggests that the conditions of the poor women in these histories remains silenced, or if not silenced then muffled.

Marsh's comments about Aboriginal traditional law and the moiety system occurs within an oral text that structures his accounting of the removal policy, which connects into a nexus of social relations regarding Aboriginal cultures, customs, beliefs and so on. Marsh has taken the complexity of the traditional law (which I also call an oral text) and standardises the moiety system of marriage to indicate an interpretive scheme explaining the motives of the removal policy. For Marsh, it is the standpoint of the oral text and the consequential effects of the traditional law that organises his experience into a personal account concerning the what/why of removal policies.

### **Analytical Reading as a Core IE Practice**

The aim of Institutional Ethnography (IE) is to explicate the ruling relations that coordinate and organise experience in transforming it from a complex set of practices into an objectified form of knowledge that becomes known in common. The analysis in this chapter is consistent with five key characteristics of IE concerning standpoint, which are the 'line of fault', social relations as organising activity, textual mediation, and mapping. However and importantly, my analysis adds to the IE project of discovering how experience is organised and becomes ruling. In doing so, it also expands the 'common' project by focusing on an extra-local empirical site and develops as a research practice methodological ideas in relation to personal accounts, narrative and memory that are lacking in the IE literature, as well as saying something important about the child separations in Australia and the public history concerning them. My analysis contributes some substantial new directions for this methodology and therefore I want to address here how the analysis in this chapter had used these five key IE characteristics and how my utilisation of them significantly and innovatively expands IE methodology and research practice.



## *Standpoint*

A women/people's standpoint is a central axis point from where IE analysis begins. That is, IE inquiry begins from the local particularities of a knowing subject, to examine how sets of social relations organise those particularities through drawing on sets of social relations from somewhere else. Different from a common IE approach, my analysis in this chapter has been organised from the standpoint of the reader/researcher. It centralises the reader as the knowing subject, so as to examine how the experience of reading the BTHOHP personal interview accounts are organised and their effects as written texts are accomplished. There is a necessary relational link between the knowing subject as a reader, and the sets of relations that the experience of reading hooks into; these links are there but not explicitly known in common IE work. My approach is one of activating the texts by continuously asking "what is organising these accounts for the reader to interpret them in a particular way," thereby maintaining the presence of the subject, something which seems to me a critical element of standpoint. From the located position of the reader/researcher, my method of reading, thinking and interpreting the Wenberg/Ritch and Marsh/Manne interview accounts has been organised by the same complex of social relations that organise the accounts themselves. The way that I have operationalised the idea and practice of standpoint therefore has provided a framework within which I have explicated how these interview accounts are organised and the interpretive schemes they establish, including how all participants in the account, including the reader, are hooked into the same sets of relations organising it. Taking the standpoint of the reader has supported my making an ethical and responsible analysis of these personal accounts in an accountable way that other readers, those who read my work, can engage with and evaluate. It has also demonstrated that an IE analysis can be accomplished without beginning from the standpoint of interviewed 'local hero' people and, more

importantly, that the epistemological practices of an IE researcher can be made accountable at this close-grained level of working.

### *'Line of Fault'*

IE makes problematic the knowledge that is known in common, and this is approached by examining the 'line of fault', that is, disjuncture(s) between the actualities of a particular person's life and the social organisation of it by ruling relations. A key to my analysis and the distinctive form it has taken is that it examines a public discourse that has coordinated a representation of people sharing a common experience and which in particular treats in a binary way those separated as children and the officials involved in such separations, as victims v. perpetrators respectively. I have engaged with a disjuncture concerning this public discourse around my detailed account of the interview accounts of Wenberg and of Marsh, doing so through my experience of reading these accounts. This 'line of fault' is as a result not singular or flat as in most IE research – a stark fault-line between interviewed person and their suppressed actuality – but rather is shown to be layered and shifting, and always in process rather than accomplished at one point as an absolute. Exploring the layered 'line of fault' enables me to examine how interviewee and interviewer engage and the kinds of exchanges that occur in Wenberg's and in a different way in Marsh's interview *and* how my account of this as an interpreting reader necessarily engages with the same complex of organisation. One of the aims of IE is to do justice to the complexity of the social relations that people in their everyday/night lives deal with and make happen. The way I have engaged at close quarters with the 'line of fault' and shown its complex and often nuanced character, even in relation to past events generally recognised as very negative, does greater justice to those involved and the complexities involved.

### *Social Relations*

The focus of an IE investigation is on the coordinating activities and social relations that are forms of actions which organise experience and become ruling by coming to stand for ‘the facts’. Social relations in my analysis, sequences of activities in the form of social practices involved in accounting for the past, has shown that post/memory practices are fundamental in organising the accounting for the past that is central to both the Wenberg and the Marsh interviews. And - and it is an important ‘and’ - this also includes the interviewer and not just the interviewee. Post/memory as an analytical tool expands the common IE approach to explicating social relations as organisers by critically engaging with narrative and the production of memory. My analysis in this chapter has paid close attention to post/memory practices as forms of social relations operationalised through ideological practices, the use of narrative and its rhetorical devices in regulating both accounting and reading accounts, and has pointed out difference and similarities in relation to the public history of the Aboriginal Australian child separations. The social relations that arise through post/memory practices are both emergent in the exchanges between interviewee and interviewer *and* they point to the complex of wider social relations and ‘knowledge’ that shape accounts of the past and interpretive readings of them.

### *Textual Mediation*

An IE analysis is centrally concerned with how texts operate in coordinating experience. My approach has added to the analytical repertoire in a productive way here. From the outset it has taken up the active text first and foremost regarding ‘the data’ itself. That is, rather than searching interview content for specific data to recover and code (as many interview analysis more generally do), it takes the entire interview and the means and mechanisms by which ‘the

past', 'the facts' and so on are produced in and from it in an emergent way, including by the researcher as a reader activating the text in actively reading and engaging with it. The ordering, assembly, suppression and valorisation or denigration of particular experiences are accomplished through ideological ruling practices that work to produce such outcomes. My investigation of this has shown in detail how expressions of social relations are tied to the formal materiality of texts, the originally oral text of the interview and the now written one of its transcription, and that the formulation and rhetorical expression of questions and responses are ways in which claims regarding authority, knowledge and warrant are advanced. Both the Wenberg and the Marsh interviews accounts are part of the sequences of action they arose from and they also intend future action, including in readings by unknown third parties, given that they were conducted for 'the public record'.

### *Mapping*

Most IE research now uses its idea of mapping analytically and illustratively to represent complex social relations that work to organise experience through explicating in outline the ruling relations in a particular context. This requires the centralisation of the reader, in the sense that the map metaphor in IE points to a position on the map and states, "The reader is here." Mapping, and the kinds of texts and silences that they make apparent for the reader, show recurring and underlying patterns of social relations. IE maps are a representation, but they are also active texts which concern the organisation of an IE investigation. In this chapter, the methods I have used to analyse social relation and social organisation regarding the personal interview accounts have been summarised in the Figures provided and the sequences of relationship they depict. In this way, for example, mapping how both formal texts and 'soft' texts (theory) in Marsh's interview has highlighted how Manne's line of organising the interview and kind of questioning relates and subordinates, not always

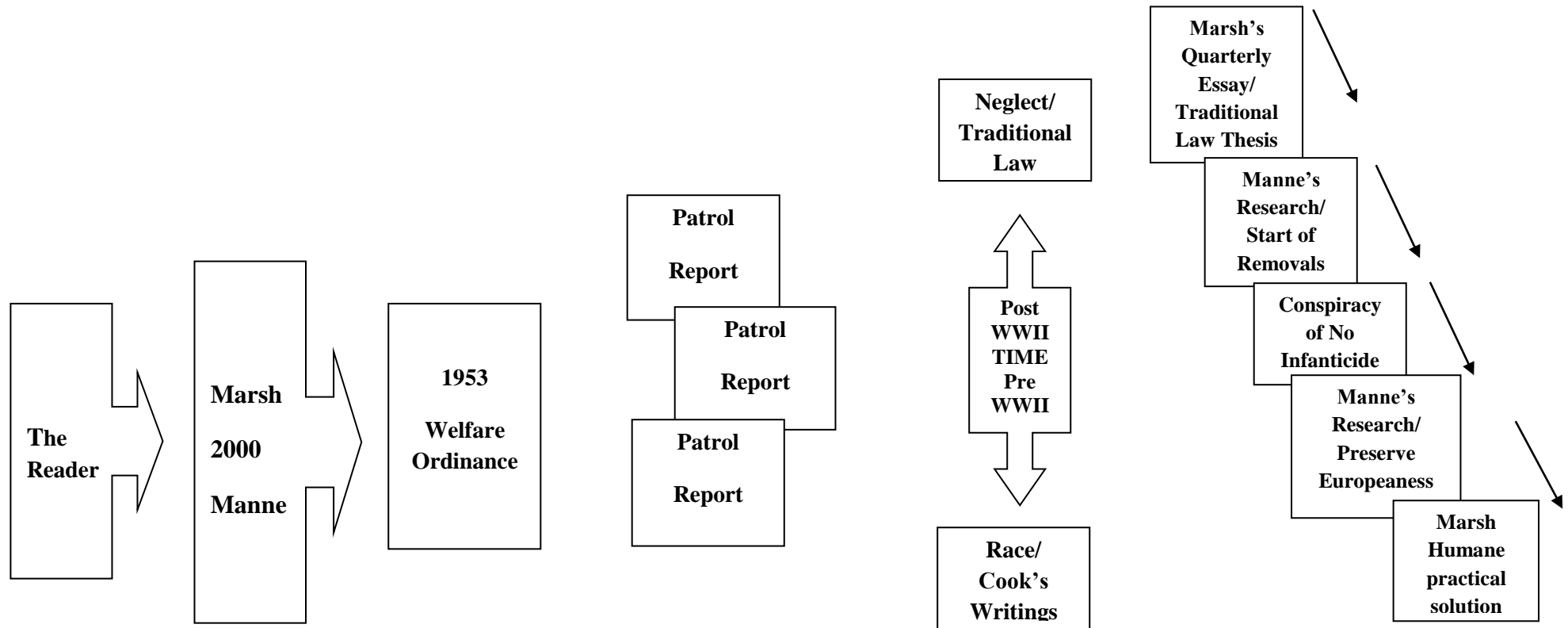
successfully, Marsh's experience to a variety of texts. The Marsh/Manne map overall is provided here. Through this, and through the successive versions of it that were produced, I began to discern the episodic structure of textual subordination and the social relations they are a part of.

However, my use of mapping, while it has many similarities with the 'classic' IE position, has also taken a distinctive form. The reader/researcher positioned in the map: "you are here" operates as a validity criteria in my research practice. Most IEs start in an *a priori* way from mapping the standpoint of the 'local hero', but this does not account for how the 'local hero' was positioned there in the first place. Mapping from the standpoint of the 'local hero' does not account for the reader/researcher activity that places them at "X marks the spot" in the first place. As a result, the organising activity that positions the 'local hero' *as* local hero is completely taken for granted. In some contrast, my analytical mapping, which centralises the reader/researcher's activity in relation to interpreting and placing other participants and their activities on the map, and which is represented in the Marsh/Manne map accompanying this discussion, recognises and proceeds from the sense-making role of the researcher. My approach thereby provides an operational validity to my reading and interpretational practices, by engaging with the textual episodic order and social organising practices that the interviews features and accounting for my interpretations in the ensuing discussion. In addition to this innovative approach to analytical mapping, my interpretations of the social relations operating are detailed in a way that other researchers can take up, dispute or overturn, which possibilities I take to be crucial to accountability.

In this chapter, I have distinctively and innovatively operationalised my version of an institutional ethnography, and shown some of the features of this in a close-grained analysis developed from standpoint and the 'line of fault', in relation to two particular interviews from

the sample I drew from the BTHOHP interviews overall. Succinctly, I have shown that a close-grained analytical reading which centres the standpoint of the researcher in coming to analytical grips with a large text-based data-set enables a distinctive contribution to the IE project. In the next chapter, I look more widely at the BTHOHP interview accounts that my research is concerned with, and in doing so I will show how my distinctive take on IE enables me to engage with these on this larger scale. My approach here is to develop the IE project in analytically innovative ways, by exploring the similarities and differences and then nuanced complexities which organise an accounting of the past across BTHOHP interviews.

## Marsh/Manne Map: Accounting for the Past Through Textual Reality



**Sequence of Textual Episodes (TE):** TE 1 (The Problem)    TE 2 (Attitudes & Motive)    TE 3 (Temporality & Removal)    TE 4 (Theory/Why Removal)

**Social Relations Implicated in Accounting:**

TE1: Wider mixing of racial groups than Anglo/Aboriginal binary; Mixed groups self-identifying; Differentiation of need & labour in town, camps, & pastoral stations  
 TE2: Gender relations & Aboriginal law; state determining need of poor; Labour/boys pastoral stations; Labour/girls few opportunities; conditions position girls subject to sexual abuse  
 TE3: Race & gender relations, inequality & regulation of marriage; conditions Home v camps; health and labour conditions; assimilation; post-WWII immigration;  
 TE4: Disciplinary (anthropological) knowledge; cultural norms & social order; infanticide and the law; neglected poor; culture/race and class

## Chapter Six

### Reading the BTHOHP Interviews: Operationalising IE With a Large Scale Data-Set

#### Introduction

Chapter Five showed how I operationalised key Institutional Ethnography (IE) characteristics in some distinctive and innovative ways through a close-grain analysis of two BTHOHP interviews. This is carried forward in this chapter, which will show that these same reconfigured features of IE can be utilised to look across the wider collection to make interpretations about the interviews as a whole, as a large scale data-set. Chapter Five presented my reading and its interpretations of the social organising practices constituted by ruling relations and I showed how these were shaped concerning ‘the separated’ and ‘the separating’, a kind of ideological apparatus which I shall argue in this chapter is indexical to other parts of the collection. Doing this involves my reading and interpreting the social organising practices of the interviews more widely, and to accomplish this I shall analyse relevant features of a further seven interviews, selected analytically from the forty-four interviews I originally drew as a sample from the BTHOHP collection.

Making this argument does not require an analysis of the entirety of each transcript in the close-grain way I examined the Wenberg and Marsh interviews in Chapter Five. The aim is not to arrive at a totality of social organisation, not least because the social relations producing this always shift in their specifics as differently located participants and then readers take up the texts. This chapter instead builds on the analysis in Chapter Five by highlighting pieces of social organisation producing ruling relations found across the seven interviews. The people who are the interviewees and interviewers are still part of a group of



people that can be represented around the separated and separating binary discussed in Chapter Five. However, the focus of reading here is to read across interview accounts where the social relations operating become hooked interpretively to each other, but without them being positioned specifically around ‘the separated’ or ‘the separating’ binary. The analysis will take up the nexus of social relations pointed to and read across these personal accounts to see how they hook into the same complex of relations and knowledge known in common.

People occupy multiple positions throughout their lives, and it is the broader social relations drawn on in speaking about the past across these interviews that I explore here. The interviews I shall discuss are those of Ken Colbung (Western Australia), Delia Sweeney (Queensland), Ken Stagg (Northern Territory) and Mary Terszak (Western Australia), who were all formerly separated as children; and those of Janne Graham (New South Wales) and Mamie Merlin Moy (Northern Territory), both Welfare Officers during the post-WWII period, and Stuart Phillpot (Northern Territory), a former Patrol Officer. These interviews were analytically chosen from my original selected set of interviews. There is, in addition, a further interview that I am adding to the analysis, and this is that of Delia Sweeney, a former British child migrant in post-WWII Australia. Much of the literature about Aboriginal child separations does not take into account social relations involving non-Aboriginal children in Australia who were also separated and placed in Homes too. However, the BTHOHP’s wide scope of participants enables me to address this gap in the literature.

When I came across Delia Sweeney’s interview at the start of this research, I asked myself “what is she doing here?” This original reading and response is key to the argument about ruling relations organising the public history and what is known in common about the Australian child separation histories. I too was caught up, initially, in the interpretive framework that the child separations were about removing mix-Aboriginal children only. The

inclusion of Delia Sweeney's interview is analytically important for the reasons just summarised; that I could locate and select it is also interesting, given that the BTHOHP provided particular criteria for selecting the interviews of those who were separated and placed in children's Homes. Therefore her interview account muddies and complicates what is known in common and the criteria and representations made concerning separated Aboriginal children in mainstream narratives and the public history. Sweeney's interview also connects with that of Ken Colbung, a separated Aboriginal Australian who comments in his interview about British child migrants<sup>40</sup> in Australia in relation to his own past and how Australian Aboriginal separated children should receive compensation just as a British scheme is doing for their former child migrants.

*The Legal Justice System as Social Relation in the Experience of Telling*

One of the organising features found across the BTHOHP interviews concerns how spoken experience is organised in relation to what can and cannot be told as part of sequences of action in relation to legal discourse and judicial practices and their consequences. The National Library of Australia (NLA) makes a legal disclaimer on each interview transcript: "The National Library of Australia is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views therein" (Adams 1998-2002). This instructs the reader that any claims made within these transcribed interviews cannot be legally imputed to the NLA. As I commented earlier in the thesis, my research quickly came up against the fact that the NLA placed restrictions and sometimes embargoes on some interviews, based on two sets of factors. The

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<sup>40</sup> The history of British child migrants being sent abroad in collective numbers spans colonial and post-colonial times in Australia. However, the British child migrants, by BTHOHP participation, as well as Ken Colbung's reference to the scheme, refers to post-WWII British child migration schemes. For further information on this, see the Child Migrants Trust site <http://www.childmigrantstrust.com/>. See also Coldrey (1999) *Good British Stock: Child and Youth Migration to Australia, 1901-1983*.

first is the NLA's own and is an assessment that such accounts could be seen as potentially libelous. The criteria for determining the access restriction is not provided in the catalogue summary. The second concerns "the access conditions set by the interviewee". My communications with NLA staff about access to interviews which I had analytically and purposively selected shows some of their 'behind the scenes' sorting and accessing activity as it relates to legal activities and access conditions that the interview accounts are regulated by.

I am just updating you on your requests. As you know, we are going through all the Bringing Them Home interviews to verify there is nothing libelous and personal details. When the interviews have these issues we edit the transcript only and then only make the transcript available [not the audio]. This is in addition to the access conditions set by the interviewee.

Patrick McAndrew: We are having difficulty with this one. He agreed to open access, however states within the interview 'What I am saying now can't get out and I'll say it only if it's not put down anywhere.' As you can see, we feel that his wishes were inaccurately represented in the access conditions form which he signed. These discrepancies have only come to light when we were filling your request. What we are looking at now, is whether we can edit the transcript in such a way that the areas which McAndrew was referring to are deleted. Jimmy McCrudden, this interview is also quite sensitive and we are having similar issues. (M. Dudgeon 2009, pers. comm., 20 February)

This note from M. Dudgeon, an NLA staff member involved with the BTH collection, indicates something of the complexities involved, in which the 'access conditions' set by the interviewees, 'personal details' that by implication concern comments about other people and the potentially libelous character of these, and also other 'sensitive' matters, which might for instance concern mineral rights on land, as well as regarding possible libel. It shows how personal accounts in this collection go through social organising activities of surveillance that subject the telling to a complicated set of social relations that result in either permitted access or its denial. The part of such social relations that hooks into legal practices and regulates the telling of experience in the interviews is a significant although usually invisible organising activity, although there *are* interviews that make this explicit. For example, Delia Sweeney's

interview clearly points this out in relation to speaking about her nursing work in a hospital and children's homes after she left a Home as a youth.

**Delia Sweeney:** Do you know what? Even now, for all my nursing years I stayed with nuns because I found... I did work in state hospitals. I just found their morals, especially in obstetrics, they were just so caring of mothers. I just found the nuns so merciful in the eyes of... if there is a God. I found that they were against all medical experimentation on women. I found my way to a Sunshine home in Gore Hill. I worked there for a while, and I stayed about a month there. I just found what they were doing to those children... I mean, probably this could... if you put this on a tape it could be quite litigious.

**Jennifer Gall:** What was the Home involved... what were the kids there for?

**Delia Sweeney:** Mongoloids. See, that was another situation like that hospital. I didn't know what was going on but I couldn't hack it.

**Jennifer Gall:** So what was the kind of treatment that was happening there?

**Delia Sweeney:** Do you want to leave the tape on for this? Only because I could end up in a court. (Sweeney 1999: 42-43)

Sweeney self-captures her telling as made in fear of the consequence of possible legal consequences. The move in what she says is from "quite litigious" to "could end up in court" and the reader, like its original questioner/hearer Jennifer Gall, has to make connections between phrases to fill in the gaps of what the "cause of action" could be to render her comments potentially libelous and leading to a possible legal claim. Sweeney's comments about her work experience, what she knows, and the possible legal ramifications, shape what she says she can and cannot tell. The limitations she articulates require the reader to fill in the gaps from connectives that are laid out in order to make sense of why she cannot tell her experience, relating to "Mongoloids" and "I couldn't hack it". The connectives and interpretation involved are shown in Figure 6.1.

medical experimentation on women → Home involved Mongoloids  
→ Questions kind of treatment → recording tape stopped = illegal  
experimentation on Mongoloids

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Figure 6.1 Reading Legal Relations into What is Told or Not

The judicial practices implicated in accounting for the past around the child separations are also complicated because of the connections between the separations and Aboriginal native title claims. This is a contentious area concerning people who were formerly separated Aboriginal children and regarding ‘custodial claims’ to the land. It connects with a wider public conversation concerning Aboriginal land, mineral and intellectual property rights, and is also bound up in legal evidentiary practices and Aboriginal law. I will not go in full detail about this, but expressions of the loss of cultural rights through the separations impacts on the ability to make native title claims and are expressed as social relations impacting on among other things the ‘sad/loss’ tale discussed in Chapter Five. Raising native title claims in the interviews is a way of talking about what happened ‘back then’ and embedding it in the present ‘now’ of telling in many of the BTHOHP interviews. Ken Colbung and Ken Stagg, for instance, both organise their experience about the past in relation to present time activity regarding native title claims and thereby invoke or help organise legal chains of activity.

**Ken Colbung:** So politics as they happened when I got out, and I was involved in it over in the eastern states, the perpetrator that I saw there then made big money for himself. I see the people that are over here making big money for themselves, and I believe that that sort of thing should cease, that we shouldn’t be saying ... and you can see it continuous, there’s a continuous trend of people who have had lots of money and have done nothing with it except pocket it or do whatever they like with it. I don’t see that the native title is going to be anything more than that, because that one acre of land that’s been given over to Aboriginal people, and I say “given over” because of native title, but I do see thousands and millions of dollars expended, and that goes into the pockets of

lawyers and qualified people at the tribunal and never reaches down to the ground where the native title claimants are. The claimants have not received a cent, their representative bodies have and they've become, once again, avid and greedy Aboriginals who join those sort of committees and executives and they start to use the money for their own specific reasons of large payments to attend meetings, much the same as ATSIC. (Colbung 2001: 39)

The use of Native Title in the BTHOHP interviews always relates to the past social actions regarding the child separations. The fact that the claim process exists in the present, the present moment of telling in the interviews, implicates the contested past regarding land, which is understood on the one hand in relation to international property rights, and on the other regarding Aboriginal cultural rights as conservators of traditional lands, as I discussed in Chapter One. Ken Colbung's telling of his experience of the Native Title process implies his ideological position on this, by indicating that the process encompasses "lawyers and qualified people" and also "avid and greedy Aboriginals" and the exchange of ownership "giving over" the title to the land from one side to another. The monetary exchange that goes with this ideologically structures his narrative with language use that the reader interprets under the heading of 'corruption'. In the above long comment, Colbung presents the hierarchy of this 'corruption' with "perpetrators" at the top, whether as legal practitioners or Aboriginal leadership.

For Colbung, because of the social organising activity of present social actions concerning Native Title, the process cannot positively reconcile the past and what happened in it. However, the same social relations involved in sequences of action concerning Native Title claims does not always arrive at such an inability to reconcile the past in the present as Colbung experienced. For Ken Stagg, the same complex of relations involved in Native Title has a very different meaning in relation to him interpreting his past.

**Ken Stagg:** So I think it's important that because I live in this area, I want to see the family come down and meet ... be introduced to their own family, you know. I had to meet them when I got out of the Home. There's a Native Title claim going on at the moment for Noonkanbah Station, and our family name has been left off the application, so I've approached ... with some other people who also haven't been included on that application, we've approached the Kimberley Land Council to help arrange a meeting with Dickie Cox and that who lodged a claim, to have it restructured so that the rest of us can also be a part of that claim and maybe take it from the old people down, from the old people and not the current generation as the custodians, or however they work it, you know.

**Colleen Hattersley:** (inaudible)?

**Ken Stagg:** Yeah, and all the descendants of these old people are the traditional owners, not this family, that family and this family, that's all, you know. (Stagg 2000: 15-16)

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**Colleen Hattersley:** Oh, okay. So the puzzle goes on, doesn't it?

**Ken Stagg:** So the puzzle ... we still don't know if we are really from this area, like ... that's why I like to have the family talk to ... or have this meeting, you know. It's good that this Native Title thing has come up, because now we can find out whether we really are from this Noonkanbah area or whether we're from another area, you know. Where really is our home? My home isn't in Darwin in Retta Dixon.

**Colleen Hattersley:** It's not Beagle Bay?

**Ken Stagg:** It's not Turkey Creek, it's not Beagle Bay. Where do we come from? (Stagg 2000: 17)

“It's good that this Native Title thing has come up”, Stagg states, representing it in a more instrumental way connected with family identity matters, compared with Colbung's take on it. The Native Title claims process and its eventual legal aspects requires the reader to interpret the post/memory process here in a way that is future looking. Stagg's hope is that the process will enable him to reconstruct his past in the near future so that he will be able to reconfigure “home” regarding a place other than Darwin and his actual life there. The future sequence of actions in the claim process underpins his engagement with post/memory to look forward to a future reconstruction. Here, identity is bound up in the legal process of what the ‘record’ can verify for him, the materiality of identity that he can claim as his own, but also

and importantly “the family talk” and “we can find out... Where really is our home”. This same kind of social organisation about identity as stable and material resonates with Wenberg’s search for her records as discussed in Chapter Five, but in Stagg’s interview is much more connected with family and the strong sense of a ‘we’ being invoked.

Social relations concerning legal practice are active in organising an accounting of the past, although in some cases are interactive with other things, such as involvement with or distance from the interviewee’s known family. These organising practices arise from activities that work to assemble and to discard experience; they may do so through surveillance actions in relation to sensitive material deemed legally actionable at an institutional level; they may involve self-censorship by stopping in telling because of implications of possible libelous consequences. And as I have shown here, they may also organise an accounting of the past in relation to an ideological interpretive scheme regarding Native Title in relation to land, its meaning and guardianship and exchange, and people’s encounters with hierarchical practices that do not help them reconcile the past around a sense of social justice. In this latter case and for Ken Colbung, ‘corruption’ is a connective that tells the reader that reconciliation of the past in this regard is not possible. However, the experience of the Native Title legal process is expressed by Ken Stagg in relation to post/memory practices that look forward to materially restructuring his ‘lost’ identity into the present and future. And of course, as I have emphasised already, social relations, the way the interviewees account for their experiences in their interviews, and my reading and interpretations of these, are bound to the same complex of relations, in this case regarding possible legal activities.



*Reading Accounts of the Absence and Presence of Fathers*

In an earlier chapter, I raised the issue of silence in the BTHOHP collection from the fathers and mothers of formerly separated children. However, although there are no actual interviews with members of either group, interviewing practice regarding those who were separated as children tended to focus on the 'lost mother', with many if not all interviewees talking about this. And in turn, this has become part of the mainstream narrative and the public history of those events. As a consequence, I shall now focus on the silence regarding fathers, many of whom were white men who had been involved with Aboriginal women. In Chapter Five, I suggested that the father is treated as an abstracted figure in Rita May Wenberg's account; and following this I have found interesting similarities and differences in how different interviewees account for fathers and their relationships with them.

**John Bannister:** Would you like to finish it there? Is there anything else that you would like to say in finishing?

**Mary Terszak:** No, I don't think so. I think that's basically it. Oh, there is one other thing that I'd like to sort of just say with my native welfare papers, and it's to do with my father. I don't know if it is my father, but it's just on the papers here. It quotes that:

"My father has left my mother on the birth of a fair skinned child because he wants to know that he is not the father of me."

So where I thought, all these years, that he... (Terszak 1999: 50)

**Mary Terszak:** Yes, well it was due to the papers. I just seemed to be reading over and over. I've brought them over here actually for Sue just to have a browse, to see if she can come up with what I'm thinking about. But I've read it where it says that my father decides to leave my mother on the birth of a fair skinned child, because he claims he's not the father.

**John Bannister:** Mm.

**Mary Terszak:** Now, I never saw it properly before 'cause I was just browsing, but I looked at it and looked at it, and then I thought, 'Well hang on. He is black and my mum is black, Indian and Aboriginal. How did I end up fair skinned?' Now, if I had a picture all of a sudden that I was putting together that that's my

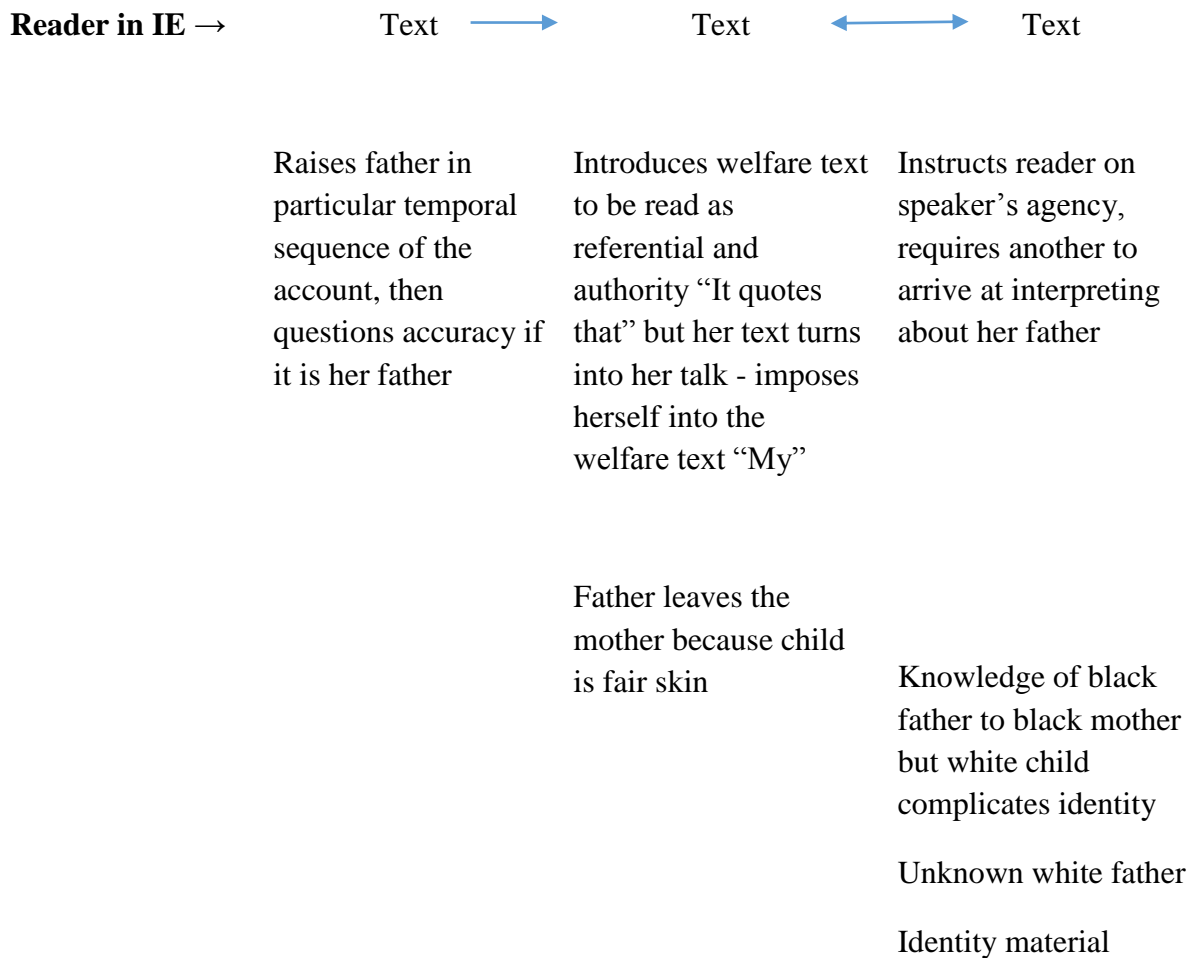
father. I'll never see him 'cause he's passed on. This is my mother. Now I'm back to, 'well, do I find my father?' (Terszak 1999: 50)

Mary Terszak and John Bannister's exchange about her absent father, "my father... who is not the father of me", is interesting firstly in respect to the temporal sequence in which the discussion of any detail about her father arises and that this occurs right at the end of the interview as a kind of afterthought. Her telling about her father does not arise from a specific question about her father or parenting in any way, either. As the interview is ending, Bannister asks "Is there anything else that you would like to say before finishing?", in response to which Terszak brings up her father, which in this sequence leads the reader to interpret the significance of the father as an afterthought, just something to be left at 'the end'.

Secondly, the sequence of the telling also takes on at first glance a common IE talk-text-talk relation which eclipses the *hearer* as having nothing more to add. However, from the *reader's* standpoint this is changed because what is 'talk' in relation to Terszak and spoken is, in relation to the reader, 'text' and written. The afterthought thereby becomes resonant with possible meanings which problematise its seeming insignificance. Although highlighted here in relation to Terszak's account, this interpretive reading framework applies to reading across many interviews and allows the reader to map the levels involved of developing an interpretive scheme for the reader-text relation in relation to the hearer-talk relation. The analytical transformation of reading talk as text is set out in Figure 6.2. In the reader-text relation, Mary Terszak uses an interesting authorial strategy to talk about the welfare paper about her father. She notes: "It quotes that", yet she imposes herself into what is to be found in the quote: "*My father left my mother... he is not the father of me*". Her reading of the text has in part been represented as referential, as quotation, but if this had been quoted from by

another person would not have included “my” or “me”. The reader knows that this is a textual paraphrase that imports Terszak ‘now’ into the text of then that she is quoting from. She also questions her own interpretive agency and asks for someone else – “Sue to browse” - to interpret the text for her.

<b>Common IE</b> →	Terszak’s Talk Spoken expressions	Terszak’s Text (Welfare Papers)	Terszak’s Talk Spoken expressions
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Figure 6.2 Reading Talk as Text: Restoring the Reader-Text Relation in IE

In addition, in Mary Terszak's account as in many other BTHOHP interviews, identity as constructed and interpreted through the welfare papers that people refer to is materially constituted. These written official texts mediate an experience of identity that often remains unresolved. As Terszak comments: "He is black and my mum is black, Indian and Aboriginal. How did I end up fair skinned?" The reader must fill in the gap to make sense of the puzzling association she is making – that is, the conclusion that the Black father was not biologically hers, but was a white person. The welfare papers contain not just the bare bones, as it were, but are quoted as indicating that the Black father did not accept the white child, giving a particular confirmation of Reginald Marsh's general comment that Aboriginal husbands did not accept their wives' mixed Aboriginal children.

However, fathers are not always treated as absent in the BTHOHP interview accounts. The relationship of 'present' fathers to women and children is revealing about the gender and economic relations of the times that are being spoken about. In her interview, former Welfare Officer Janne Graham speaks about the material conditions then existing in New South Wales.

**Jennifer Gall:** Yes, looking back over events, what do you think was the main cause of people reaching that situation of not being able to look after their kids?

**Janne Graham:** They didn't have the resources to do it. You could not feed kids on some of the money that they had. I mean they were often drinking, alcohol was the only drug problem in those days, so that, or some gambling, but I think more drinking, from fathers who really found the whole responsibility and the pressures too great, and they had a way of escaping in a way that the women didn't.

Very many of them came from families where they hadn't had support themselves, or there wasn't continuing support, but I mean it was still basically if you'd been able to put another ten pound into their pockets a week, while there would have been a proportion that would have been spent the ten pound on alcohol, I think probably a good proportion of them could have coped better. (Graham 2000: 39)

The material conditions, gender relations and the prevailing economic circumstances embed a set of social relations that organise how Graham talks about what happened ‘back then’ in answering a what/why question. And although the link is not made explicitly, these social relations also hook interpretively into the relations of welfare practice. Graham’s detailed comment is coordinated in relation to how as a welfare officer would assess “the main cause”. The interviewer has organised an interpretive order of cause and effect which is taken up as a way for Graham to tell about her experience, and this is set out in Figure 6.3. The consequence is that this order often eventuated in welfare interventions, including the separations, which again is not made explicit but is implied by the organisation of Graham’s account.

Lack of resources → resources spent on drinking → drinking fathers (escape as coping mechanism from family life pressures) → Women could not escape = father’s irresponsible allocation of few resources used to drink placed women and children at risk

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Figure 6.3 Reading the Organisation of Cause and Effect Telling

Graham points out that the few resources the families had were sometimes unwisely used by non-coping fathers to drink alcohol (with the implication of drunkenness, not ‘just drinking’) and connects this to social relations concerning the gendered division of labour. However, she also points out that “if you’d been able to put another ten pound into their pockets a week...” things could have been different. Graham’s comment also concerns the economic and welfare conditions of the time. The economic context of a depressed labour market is a wide-spread presence across the BTHOHP interviews, including as discussed concerning the Marsh/Manne interview in Chapter Five, although it is lacking from the literature on the

public history of Aboriginal Australian child separations. There is however a growing literature concerned with the material conditions of the poor that has arisen as a result of the emergent discourse of 'Forgotten Australians' and within this the 'Forced Adoptions' of the children of poor unwed Australian (and by implication white) women. The organisation of what is told in many interviews is of fathers as present but also absent at the same time in terms of them taking responsibility for and an active care of children. This also relates to children at that time who were at risk in other ways too.

Former Northern Territory Patrol Officer Stuart Phillpot accounts for and positions female children/youth in relation to men/fathers in terms of moral risk and gender relations regarding this, and also in relation to the formal ruling relations of the 'white' marriage and family model.

**Stuart Phillpot:** Moral risk mostly applied to young women of mixed descent. Again, here's a further contradiction. On the one hand there was always the risk that the girl would be promised to an older man according to traditional law. The fact that she was of mixed descent, this couldn't happen, you know, as a credible racial ...

**Steven Guth:** Or it couldn't happen from the point of view of the white person?

**Stuart Phillpot:** Yeah, yeah, the white person would be appalled that a child who had a white father might be sold or traded, promised, to a much older man according to traditional law. So there was that element. Of course, there was the other very real element of girls entering puberty and being preyed on by the white jackaroos, the ringers and the overseers and managers and owners of stations.

**Steven Guth:** If the girl said no, what happened?

**Stuart Phillpot:** I never observed this but there was sort of certainly anecdotal stories of girls being physically manipulated or bribed or cajoled or forced, raped, if you will, on stations. The other issue, of course, was that station owners themselves, particularly if they'd subsequently taken a white wife, wished to make sure that the children of previous liaisons weren't present when the white wife arrived. Then you had people like old man Anderson, who was ... I remember doing the census work. He told me he'd jumped ship in Sydney Cove in 1901. He was a station owner up in the Borroloola district. He'd had multiple concubines over many years, and had multiple children by all of them. Yet he'd sent them all to St Mary's Children's Home in Alice Springs so they could get

access to high school education. Subsequently, when St Phillip's College as a proper boarding college was established, he sent them there.

**Steven Guth:** So he paid the bill?

**Stuart Phillpot:** He paid the bills. (Phillpot 2000: 9-10)

In his interview with Steven Guth, Stuart Phillpot connects the mixed-girls in relation to Aboriginal law and its practice as morally risky, and there are connections here with similar comments from Reginald Marsh, that mix-Aboriginal girls were excluded from 'proper' Aboriginal law. The practice of promising (marriage) in Aboriginal law that Marsh spoke of also arises in Phillpot's account as a problem of exclusion because the law could not accommodate mixed-children, but it also adds to this. What it adds is his ideological reading of 'promising' a girl to an older man as being morally wrong even if the law permitted marriage with young mixed-Aboriginal women. The reader has to cover the gap here, to fill in what the moral problem of a young woman marrying an older man is that positions this as something they might feel "appalled" by. The reader interprets "moral" and this type of marriage as sexually risky for the young woman, following the interviewer Guth commenting that if a white person promised a young white woman to an old white man because of the law it would be "appalling" in this way. Without denying the very real problem of power relations about this, morality as a social organiser is culturally and temporally regulated, and these comments indicate another gap, a wide one between traditional Aboriginal mores and social practices and white Anglo ones.

The 'abstract white male' that I commented earlier is a shadowy reference point in many interviews is fleshed out a little more by Phillpot in relation to young mixed Aboriginal women. He represents young women as "being preyed on by the white jackaroos, the ringers and the overseers and manager and owners of stations." These young women are sexualised to make the connection to "being preyed on" by invoking the risks when the girls reach

puberty. A woman's age described in relation to "puberty" implicates the risk of pregnancy and places her in relation to her reproductive age. Moral risk, puberty, sexualisation and being preyed on by white men moves the narrative scheme to interpret young women as being morally at risk in relation to their sexual reproductive position but also and particularly because subject to what Phillipot states is "being physically manipulated or bribed or cajoled or force, raped." The interpretive narrative builds moral risk in this list to arrive at sexual force and rape. These social relations are to be read as white men "preying" on young mixed Aboriginal women and that this could produce young mothers and irresponsible white fathers.

Stuart Phillipot's interview adds another complicating dimension to the social relations involved in the Aboriginal child separations, in relation to fathers removing the children (that is, fathers as separators). Phillipot's experience of this relates to the then prevailing gender relations between men and women inside and outside of formal marriage, and it shows something of how complex the present/absent father supposed binary actually could be, and the reasons for this. Phillipot points out the informal arrangements that could exist between white men and Aboriginal women who had children together, and which led to those woman and children being at risk if the man concerned made a formal white marriage. White women's role in relation to mixed children by white married fathers is another silent area in the literature on child separations. The implication is that mixed children were hidden from the white wife and this connects into activities that culturally and legal rendered these children illegitimate. Absent fathers in relation to this 'hiding children' complicates the narrative that all (white) fathers just left or were not aware that they had a child. As Phillipot points out, men like Anderson had "multiple concubines over many years, and had multiple children" and they were absent in a different way.



Phillpot's account of women being morally at risk of sexual violence and the consequences of having children has interesting links with Ken Colbung's account of his father and mother. Here the father is a generalised white man but is also imputed with particular characteristics. The organising activities relate, not to Colbung's direct experience, but concerning him as a hearer of what other family members – "it was told to me by aunties" - have said about the past. His reinterpretation of what he was told and heard requires the reader to fill in gaps to accomplish connectives that render the narrative into an interpretive scheme.

**Ken Colbung:** Yeah, my mother was at the Grosvenor Hospital, in South Street in Beaconsfield, and she was working there with her sister, and one evening, so it was told to me by my aunties, she was accosted by this white man who ran off with her down the lane, the problem there being that she was not allowed out at night, and she had gone up on the hill from the hospital and the matron had said, "Oh, yeah, well, it's all right for you to go out", but when this man accosted her and the Native Welfare got to know about it, they said that she in actual fact had committed a crime, because she had broken the embargo on them going outside of the place of work. Matron never approved of it, but what was happened was that she was there, and this bloke rushed up and grabbed her and took her down a little laneway there in the bush and by all intents had raped her, or forced her into intercourse. Her sister ran down to get the matron, but by the time the matron came back that was it.

So when that was reported to the police, the police didn't take much notice, but they then had... Native Welfare got onto the police to find out what had happened and they still didn't pursue it. She was then confined to the Moore River Native Settlement in the boob\* there until such time as I was born, and I was born then up at Moore River Native Settlement. So there's a lot that's been said about it. She was then forced into prison and he was the fellow that committed the crime, the so-called crime. But the authorities at the Moore River Native Settlement, when my aunty said they wanted to take me over me, they said no, that they couldn't, I was a native under the Act, and as such... my mother's number was 7081 and my number was 4487, and that's in the files of the Native Welfare Department... so therefore I was the property of the Department of Native Affairs and as such was not allowed to get a job without my number being quoted on the permit. My mother was in the same thing.

She, however, died in February after I was born in September, and so she was buried at the Moore River Settlement. (Colbung 2001: 1-2)

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**Ken Colbung:** Oh, my mother died as a result, on the documents found later on with Native Welfare we found that it was caused through the attack on her body by the white man – we've since learned his name was Carlson\* and that he had caused internal damage to her. But there's also a case that she had tuberculosis,

so there's a matter of injuries that were there and then brought about by an attack on the body that incurred her death. But according to the coroner's report it was tuberculosis she died of and that it was also by the police records that it was incurred by the attack on her body from the fellow that raped her. She suffered quite a bit, I guess, in regards to this, but I guess in some ways one shouldn't hold grudges and one shouldn't lean back to all these sorts of issues. Far too often I'm finding that stolen children, or whatever it is, are being interpreted that they've had a hell of a time and a rough time, and I've been in other parts of the world where I've seen people that have had far more difficult times to endure and they've come through it. (Colbung 2001: 3-4)

Reading this reinterpretation of Colbung's birth as told by others as the consequence of forced intercourse or rape results in the reader interpreting Colbung's father as a white rapist without him directly saying this. The narrative sequence involves the reader in filling in the gap to produce the interpretation which is set out in Figure 6.4

Mother raped by white man → mother placed at settlement → Colbung born = Colbung's father the white rapist
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Figure 6.4 Sequence of Action Establishing a Father

Colbung's father is the absent white father, and he may not have known that his sexual attack resulted in a birth. That is an interpretive reading of the account, although the account makes explicit only the connectives that move from rape, to placement at the settlement, to Colbung being born at the settlement. The accounting involved leaves room to discern that this man who raped his mother is in fact his biological father. The sequence and connectives drive toward this as 'a fact', but the reader must provide the gaps to fill in and complete that interpretation. The account 'as fact' rules out interpretations that Colbung's mother might have already been pregnant, that she could have become pregnant while in the Hospital and so on. He is clear about the sexual violence spoken of and how the authorities treated his

mother, but his accounting does leave gaps that the reader must fill to complete the intended interpretive scheme of who his father is.

The ‘fact’ of Ken Colbung’s absent white father being his Aboriginal mother’s sexual attacker arises from subsequent actions and searches for native welfare document from which Colbung obtains the ‘fact’ of his father and that “we’ve since learned his name was Carlson”. Despite his accounting for how his mother became pregnant and that she died of internal damages from that attack by one account, or from tuberculosis by another, the absent father for Colbung does not hook into the sad/loss tale of separation as it does in many other BTHOHP interviews, such as those of Wenberg and Terszak. Indeed, he characterises some ‘stolen children’ as exaggerating their circumstances and loss, but in doing this he manipulates time by stepping out of one time and into another. That is, he places his knowing about the world as an older person onto the past by comparing what formerly separated people are saying about back then in relation to his different experience, and his learning about other people in equally bad or worse circumstances. Knowledge of “other worst places” is a temporal post/memory practice in how Colbung looks to interpret ‘back then’, as well as his interpretations of others looking back then and what they made of this.

Interaction between men and women, and relationships amongst women, organise how former Welfare Officer Mamie Merlin Moy represents the presence and absence of fathers. Moy makes a distinction between the types of women she is talking about in relation to Aboriginal women and mix-Aboriginal women because the interviewer Jordens inappropriately uses them interchangeably in relation to Moy’s experience. In Chapter Five, I discussed how these categories of types of people can be confusing because treated as interchangeable in these histories. However, for Marsh in Chapter Five, and here for Moy, the social relations organising these two types of people’s lives are different. Moy’s welfare work

was primarily in the towns of Darwin and Alice Springs, and the extract of her interview account below she refers to Darwin and relationships between mixed Aboriginal women and men.

**Mamie Merlin Moy:** Aboriginal women, full-blood Aboriginal women stayed on the settlement. Part-coloured Aboriginal women did not stay on the settlement, because there was no room for them usually, and they always used to group together and find somewhere to live together. They always used to dress up and look very attractive, you know, with pretty bright coloured jackets and skirts, hang around the pubs, The Don and the - what was the other one called [the Vic], the two pubs. Then there were always the stockmen, the part-coloured stockmen would come in on payday and they'd all be dressed up with bright shirts and long boots with spurs and big two-gallon hats. The pub was always a meeting place. That's where they always ... and they'd party on, ten o'clock, and then they'd party on after that to the next day. They were quite happy all living together, or camping together. And there were all these men from Belsen looking for something. What were they to do? There was no TV, there was a picture house, an open air picture house - Abos once a week, and they used to go, but it was always cowboy films. There was no ... as a matter of fact, a lot of those children reputedly had policemen fathers, teacher fathers. A lot of them said so-and-so was their dad, but of course we never knew [for sure].

**Ann-Mari Jordens:** You would never admit to it?

**Mamie Merlin Moy:** Oh, we'd never mention it. (Moy 2000: 60)

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**Ann-Mari Jordens:** So you didn't supervise any institutions or any families that took Aboriginal children?

**Mamie Merlin Moy:** Oh, [yes] only if there was trouble. Yes, I did, if there was trouble, if the child was not attending school I would go and I would get the Education Branch to help me. Also, if they were being molested, yes, I did, yes. [Mostly Aboriginal children stayed on the settlements].

**Ann-Mari Jordens:** In an institution, or just in a family?

**Mamie Merlin Moy:** No, the families [part-coloureds]. Yes, I followed up the families. Like at Winnellie, this big hut, I always went down there to make sure that the kids were still together, had not been left by their parents, by their mothers - usually they only had a mother, they never had a father. Then in the town area there were lots of huts. If there was trouble there I was to go there, mm [and check on the children]. (Moy 2000: 61-62)

The social relations that organise “part-coloured Aboriginal” women living collectively and “quite happy” according to Moy has significant implications regarding child separations and

the care of children. The women living together can be understood as providing a resource and a reliance for each other, particularly as they had children with absent fathers. The mainstream public narrative about these separations and also the way that many BTHOHP interviewees account for it is that the children were cared for even though a mother was away. This is often expressed as the involvement of “the aunties” throughout these interviews. Despite the collectives of women who lived together and shared resources, including the care of children, children were still separated when the biological mother and father were absent. This closely connects into what is conventionally seen to constitute a ‘proper’ parent and by implication a ‘proper family’ too, which regulates the responsibilities required of parents in relation to the state acting on behalf of their children.

Fathers are situated in Moy’s account through an interpretation of the prevailing gender relations of the time. Her accounting establishes a temporal sequence of cause and effect and implied connectives that render a reading that arrives at who these fathers were. This temporal narrative sequence is set out in Figure 6.5.

Attractive mixed Aboriginal women → pubs → mix-Aboriginal stockmen → party all night/day = sexual intercourse and implied pregnancies

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Figure 6.5 Reading Gender Relations through Connectives & Cause and Effect Telling

This interpretive scheme of sexual relations here is tied to the temporality of paydays and by implication of the labour involved occurring in a place at a distance from where the men and women concerned interacted. The reader interprets the social relations Moy speaks of as being itinerate relations that were coordinated around “payday”, the pub and partying. She

does not indicate the frequency of this, but it certainly implicates and explains the present-and-absent father relation. Relations that were contingent and itinerate because of labour located elsewhere and the temporary sexual relations that went with this leads the reader to make the connection that children would have been born out of these relationships. Labour, particularly those men working on the stations as stockmen meant that their movements from place to place would make them an absent father, whether men knew they were fathers or not. Although not raised here in this extract from Mamie Merlin Moy's interview, the BTHOHP accounts do raise issues about single mothers also moving from place to place because of labour market factors and their children being left with others to care for them. In addition, from reading other BTHOHP interviews, the predominant mixed Aboriginal station labourers lived at the stations often with their families. These same men that Moy is speaking of often would have a partner and a family on the stations they worked on, while also having sexual relations with town women, who would then produce children under these circumstances.

The reader must fill in gaps and make connectives to read the gender interactions as sexual ones. This is set up by positioning the women concerned as "dressed up" and "attractive", while the drinking taking place in a pub all night and into the next day implies 'drunkenness' and also raises the possibility of manipulation or constraint as well as consent to sexual relations. The qualifying phrase that completes the interpretation of sexual relations here comes by Moy adding: "... all these men from Belsen looking for something." Sexual relations is implied as the "something" here, and it is then possible to further infer that children were born and the stockmen were the fathers. However, Moy also expresses a shift which makes the connectives and the cause and effect problematic. She states, with authoritative rhetoric: "... as a matter of fact, a lot of those children reputedly had policemen fathers, teacher fathers". The sequence of male and female relations and the particular

characteristics of them, dressing up and drinking and partying all night, is read as also “as a matter of fact” involving policemen and teachers [implicitly white], not just stockmen [part-coloured]. This comment is at first read as the women were saying the policemen and teachers were fathers, in the phrase “a lot of them said so-and-so...”; but then the last part of the phrase points to the agency of children in naming “their dad” as policemen and teachers. Who is saying who the fathers are, and in what context the sexual relations involved occurred, becomes convoluted and the associations less clear.

The interviewer Ann-Mari Jordens questions Moy’s account of the fathering involved with “you would never admit it?”, while Moy’s response regarding her comments that “we’d never mention it” hooks into the prevailing mores of the time that did not pursue absent fathers when children resulted from such circumstances. Moy’s account does not provide any indication of follow-up claims concerning who the fathers were. This implies that absent fathers were not held responsible for non-knowledge as well as non-involvement concerning the children who resulted from casual sexual unions. In the end, this placed the responsibility and the burden on women, who were left with a child or children to care for, often in vulnerable conditions, and therefore subject to state concern and the possible removal of children. The state’s inability or refusal to hold fathers as responsible and accountable changes the way the removal policy is seen, because this implicates the state as having to deal with neglected children because of its failure to hold men accountable for their sexual behaviours and the consequences thereof.

The absent father is a decided presence through Mamie Merlin Moy and the interviewer Ann-Mari Jordens assembling Moy’s welfare circumstances around supervision checks, which occurred primarily with families in relation to mixed Aboriginal children and less so in the institutions. In another part of her interview, Moy discusses how the mission institutions such

as Retta Dixon in Darwin did not like government officers doing checks or monitoring how these institutions were run (Moy 2000). These checks occur around “troubles”, issues of schooling, neglect and sexual violence in mixed Aboriginal families as well as ensuring that parents did not leave their children; and in doing so she then qualifies the absent father presence in her statement that “they never had a father.”

Moy’s interview provides an account of present and absent fathers, in contrast to the ‘generalised white man’ found in other BTHOHP interviews, including Phillpot’s comments about the white men overseeing stations. The fathers that Moy points to include mixed Aboriginal men and also the implicitly white men who were policemen and teachers.

The interviewer, Colleen Hattersley, sets up an opportunity for Ken Stagg to talk about fathers, and she does so by a question that goes through the mother and uses connectives to imply mother’s partner = father. As many other BTHOHP interviews show, a privileged narrative is assumed concerning mothers, and the partner and father assumed to be secondary and of less concern. Hattersley does not in fact directly ask for Ken Stagg to talk about who the father(s) of the siblings are. His response organises an interpretive scheme that abstracts the father on the one hand but also locates the father and his consequential “take off” around the present-absent relation. Reading through this account too requires the reader to fill in gaps and make associations and also allows for Stagg and the reader to make plausible associations in relation to the prevailing material conditions of the time.

**Colleen Hattersley:** So your mother’s partner ... was she married or she had a partner or you’re not sure about those things?

**Ken Stagg:** I’m not sure about those things. I think Bernadette was born before Christopher, so she must have been pregnant with Bernadette when she got down there, and then they were down there for over a year or so and Christopher was born, and I think his father was one of the Weetras\* from that side, Katherine side and that. Then Bernadette was born down there as well. And then after the war



and that, they came back up, and then who was born then? Neville was born, then two twins were born then, Phillip. Phillip was born ... they call him Butchy, Phillip. He also had a twin who never lived. Then there was Leonie.\* Leonie was born. I think Leonie was older than Phillip, round about Neville's ... after Neville, I think, or 'round about there somewhere. Then after Phillip there was Alphonse.\* So that's eight. And then Beverley was born. This is in my family, you know?

**Colleen Hattersley:** Yep.

**Ken Stagg:** And then Veronica from my mother, then me, Kenny, and then Kevin, and then a couple of years later, Brian, and then Ronnie. So that makes it fourteen. Have I missed anybody out here? Richard, Dorothy, Christopher, Bernadette, Neville, Leonie, Phillip, Alphonse, the other twin was born, Beverley, Veronica, myself, Kevin, Brian and then Ronnie. So there was fourteen. Now, I was born in 1959. When I was born, I think Beverley and that were already in Melville Island. Most of the older kids, like Alphonse and Phillip and that, I think they spent some time in the homes, but not very much. It was mainly Veronica, myself, Kevin. Us three grew up together, Veronica, myself and Kevin. We grew up together in Retta Dixon Home. (Stagg 2000: 5)

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**Ken Stagg:** But what I think it was that my mother, who was living with my father, Kenny Stagg again - he was from Moe in Victoria, in the Gippsland, East Gippsland - they weren't getting on any more, so he took off back to where he came from. So I don't know whether he arranged with welfare or anybody to put us into a home, or whether the welfare ... he just took off, and welfare considered the numbers of children that my mother had, she wouldn't have been able to look after us, so placed us in a Home, into that Home. (Stagg 2000: 6)

The interviewer has set up the association of partner = father and inquires whether Stagg is aware of "those things". Stagg takes up the association, affirming he is "not sure about those things" and then provides a list of his siblings, when they were born and the locations of their births, including himself in this. In the first passage, the narrative order generates the association of the unknown generalised father for the children, except for one, and this is represented in Figure 6.6.

Mother married or partner → Not Sure → List of 14 children & birth locations = Unknown generalised multiple (implied white) fathers
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Figure 6.6 Associating the Generalised Absent Father

His brother Christopher's father is more specifically included, with "I think his father was...", which enables the reader to interpret the list of siblings as having multiple fathers without this being explicitly said regarding the others. Multiple fathers is also implied by Stagg interpretively locating the siblings' births in the different places his mother lived in, which includes when she was evacuated as discussed in another part of the interview and referred to here in the sequence of births "after the war".

The exchange between Stagg and Hattersley involves him speaking about his mother and partners and then providing a list of names of children, with the births of him and his siblings appearing in the absence of any relation to fathers, only to his mother. The list of names, and the type of names these are, provides for the possibility of associating the children's European names with the generalised white father. That association, however, can be misleading, because the mixed Aboriginal population took up these types of names for their children by choice, and also under imposition by authority figures and institutions. For example, mixed Aboriginal children who were placed in Homes were given European/Christian names if they did not know their names, and these thereafter became the name associated with them in the official records. The BTHOHP interviews also raise the practice of mothers giving male children the name of a local policeman, patrol officer or station manager whether he was the father or not. The complexities of the time make a more certain attribution of fatherhood based on personal names complicated and sometimes impossible, but nonetheless the imputation concerning the generalised absent father remains.

Ken Stagg also locates his father as present but then absent, although the reader is not provided information about whether he is Anglo/European descent or a mixed Aboriginal. Again, the name cannot stand in for a representative 'race'. The present father who 'takes off' and becomes absent is a common relation found in the BTHOHP interviews when fathers are

raised. Stagg interprets his father's 'take off' as a result of his parents not getting along. As I discussed in relation to Moy's interview and its accounting of male and female relations, this points to the mores of the time that made it easy for men to leave women and children. Accounting for his father's absence and his own placement in the Home for Ken Stagg is organised around a post/memory practice, in which he sorts out the plausibility of his father's involvement: "I don't know if he arranged with welfare... he just took off". The material conditions existing in the relation between the absent father, the number of children, and the mother, is the site where the state assessed the situation and intervened. Stagg qualifies his assessment of the removal in stating here that "she wouldn't have been able to look after us", which is in considerable contrast to the dominant theme in the public narrative that people formerly separated as children often represent, that the mothers could and did.

### **IE and Analytical Reading Across the Data-Set**

The analysis in this chapter has built on the key IE features I operationalised in reading in detail the two interviews examined in Chapter Five. This chapter moves my version of an IE analysis forward, to show that reading with and through the text can also be deployed in reading across multiple texts and documents. The experience of reading across texts allows the researcher to join up analytical observations of represented social relations that work to coordinate people's experience as it is elicited or constrained by interviewers, as it is initiated and told by them. Reading across these seven personal account interviews highlights the similarities and differences in how such social relations operated as post/memory practices that helped organise knowledge that is known in common about the Aboriginal Australian child separations. By attending to the precise manner of this telling and its nuances and gaps, as I have done in this chapter, the more complicated character of the separations as people

remember and tell their experiences and the longer-term consequences has come to the surface through the readings thereby provided.

The ability of my analytic strategy to work across selected components of a large-scale dataset, the BTHOHP interviews, substantially moves IE investigation into new directions, both epistemologically and methodologically. Relatedly, my analysis in working across the dataset has shown that specific components of each of these interviews has form and content that are indexical to the collection as a whole. In turn, what this points to are the operations of social relations involved in accounting for the past of the separations that have not adequately been taken up in the literature or in wider public discourse about this. It has become amply clear that the collection is a significant resource that requires further in-depth analysis to understand and ‘know’ - in the sense of producing knowledge claims about this - the complexities concerning the child separation histories that those who experienced these often invest them with. Succinctly, their tellings are more complex and nuanced, as well as more specific and particular, than ‘the public history’ recognises. I will now go on to address in more detail how I utilised the five key IE features in this chapter so as to expand an IE repertoire of methodological strategies for analysing the coordination of social relations that become ruling across many people’s different experiences so as to produce ‘the public history’ of these matters.

### *The Researcher’s Standpoint*

Analysis in this chapter has taken up and proceeded from operationalising the standpoint of the reader/researcher in reading interpretively across texts. I have shown that this approach maintains keen awareness of the presence of the reader in analysing the social organising practices in providing a framework for seeing how such social relations construct particular

kinds of interpreted experiences. That is, readings are always made from a located position and my approach to standpoint has demonstrated the nested character of this, that the reader's interpretations follow but also extrapolate from those of the teller and the hearer in the original interviews. This makes the reader, and the interpretations she has produced, both visible and also more accountable. In short, present readers can engage with both sets of interpretations.

Taking up the reader standpoint has ensured that that the reader's interpretive actions can be seen as central to a process of explication, of demonstrating the indexicality of the implicated social relations. Providing the reader's interpretive practices allows for others, yet further readers, to assess the validity of these analytical moves. Following the interpretive frames that I have identified across texts - the interviews - that rely on very different specifics and particularities makes joining them up for critical analysis challenging. What the researcher's standpoint does is to keep the reader visible as a constant, as social relations across texts are identified. Standpoint is an anchor for the analytical moves across these texts, the large scale data-set of the BTHOHP collection and its interviews, that is embedded with a wide range of social organising practices and constituted in ruling relations.

### *'Line of Fault'*

An immediate 'line of fault' arose in reading across interviews, concerning what was for many the practical and experiential complexity of the separation process such that the relationship of 'the separated' and 'the separator' was challenged as a simple binary, and also some of its stark moral assumptions problematised. While the binary remains, following the 'line of fault' has shown that people on both 'sides' often invest it with things other than a 'good v. bad' moral ordering.

From this process of reading across the texts, a problematic, another ‘line of fault’, then arose. This concerns the complicated silence about fathers, despite social relations that implicate them but are insufficiently attended to in the literature regarding child separation histories. Reading across the texts here has allowed me to show how the generalised (and implied) white father is often represented in a shadowy way. Taking up the line of fault and following this cleavage has allowed the researcher as reader to focus on and delineate the social organising activity that renders fathers as silent, abstracted and depicted by means of a present-absent ruling relation set of moves.

Following the line of fault has also raised as a problematic how the law is implicated across the interview texts, through ruling relations that constitute what can and cannot be told, and social relations that organise the telling about this. Doing so has enabled the reader to explicate how ‘the law’, both actually and in how people invoke and use their references to it, impacts on what data I can and cannot research, the ways it structures what people tell, and how this impact on the present time activity of the ‘now’ of telling hooks back into past social relations.

Reading across the texts allows for the layering of a number of ‘lines of fault’ to be discerned across differences and similarities so as to provide insight into relations that rule as these are told and heard, questioned about and responded to. Using the IE idea of the line of fault in the way I have provides I would argue a powerful methodological and analytical tool, enabling me to discern and follow links across analytically chosen interviews by attending to first one line of fault – that the telling complicates the separated and separator binary – and then others. It has thereby of course also shaped up here as closely connected with the reader-researcher standpoint, rather than as in common IE being treated as an *a priori* feature of the data itself.

*Texts: From Talk and the Spoken/Heard to Text and the Written/Read*

The innovative way of reading across texts developed in the chapter has recognised the transformed character of the oral interviews through transcription into written texts. This has allowed for an analysis which moves beyond the common IE focus on the talk-text-talk relation and its eclipsing of the reader as the activator of the text in a strong sense. Succinctly, a written text has different properties and different effects from a spoken one, as commented earlier. With a written text, the sequence of the telling may appear at first sight to have the common IE talk-text-talk relation. However, from the *reader's* standpoint this is changed because what is 'talk' in relation to an interviewee and interviewer and 'spoken and heard', in relation to the reader is 'text' and 'written and read'.

In addition and relatedly, rather than being a part of the interview action - the position of the researcher in common IE - the reader of the transcribed text is loosened from the specifics of this interview and that, and can produce interpretive frameworks to read across many interviews and map the levels of interpretive schema involved (with something of the analytical transformation of reading talk as text provided in Figure 6.2 earlier). This has allowed me to see organising practices over the materiality of particular texts across the collection which have mediated the telling involved and constituted relations of ruling. In particular it has permitted an approach to analysis which has found, discovered is not perhaps too strong a term, large scale underlying patterns of organising activity and the social relations that constitute the ruling character of these, something that in my view has not been satisfactorily done in other IE research.

### *Social Relations*

This chapter has showed how analytically reading across texts in a way that conjoins the researcher's standpoint with pursuing lines of fault produces results, 'findings', that can be 'joined up' to interpret the coordinating activities that render the same complex of social relations similar and different in different cases. Reading social relations across texts in this way brings into sharp focus conditions organising particularities as these relate to, regarding the interview texts discussed herein, how persons and circumstances mediate the moral ordering of how the separated and separators are positioned and perceived; what and how something can be talked about regarding perceived legal ramifications and consequences; and fathers, gender relations and the prevailing material conditions of the times in talking about child separations.

Reading social relations across the interview texts has demonstrated the nuanced and complicated characteristics that talking about the past has and the post/memory practices involved in this. What that talk indicates are things absent from or muted in the public history and literature about the Aboriginal Australian child separations. The social relations that are spoken about and which structure everything spoken about in the BTHOHP interview texts also indicate, in interview after interview, how complicated these histories are but with various aspects of this complexity lacking in the wider discourse. One of the implications here is that being able to point to a more complex history can only be achieved by reading across the texts across the collection, rather than focusing on single texts in it.

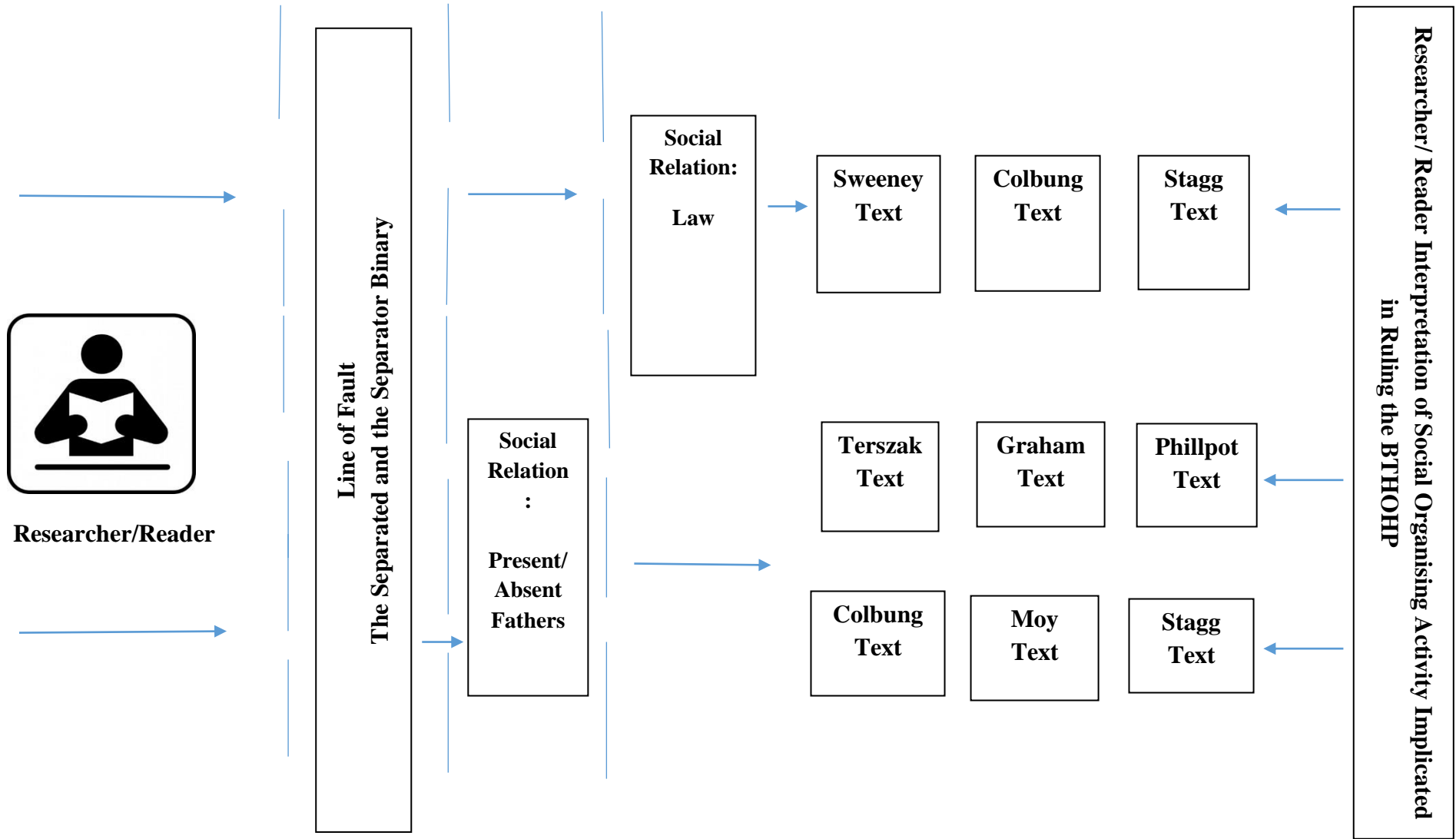


## *Mapping*

In this chapter I have also extended in my revisionary IE approach what I previously wrote about mapping as a tool. In particular, the way I have approached it has shown the contrast between the common IE emphasis on talk-text-talk relation and instead focused on the text and the relations of reading that I have operationalised. Innovatively, mapping social relations across texts as I have done provides a larger picture of how particular relations implicate social organising practices on a considerably wider scale, and by implication in a way that is indexical to the collection as a whole. That is, these specifics point to a characteristic of the collection as such, something I have been able to show by demonstrating their existence across analytically selected interview texts.

To pinpoint the analytical activities involved, a ‘Reading Across the BTHOHP Texts’ map accompanies this discussion and represents the text-reader/researcher relation as operationalised in my analysis. The ‘Reading Across’ map indicates the social relations examined that hook into each other and are coordinated in extra-local space. The conclusion to the thesis will continue this argument about reading as a core IE practice as developed in the innovative ways I have operationalised an IE research process and its power in demonstrating aspects of the telling of people’s experiences of the child separations previously absent from or subjugated in ‘the public history’ and the research on such matters.

Reading Across the BTHOHP Texts Map



## Chapter Seven

### **Reading Through the Research Text: Implications of Social Organising Practices**

This thesis critically engages with the important sociological question of ‘how we come to know’. It explores this in the context of researching Aboriginal Australian child separation histories, through the experience of reading the discourse or public history and also a set of research texts about these events. And it does so by conducting an Institutional Ethnography (IE) investigation of these matters, one which departs from common IE in what I have argued are innovative and productive ways.

In the Introduction and Chapter One, I introduce the relevance of investigating situated knowledge production in relation to the standardised ‘shared experience’ narrative which constitutes the public history generated about the Aboriginal Australian child separations. In doing so, I argue that what is known in common about these events is constituted by ruling relations (Smith 1987) that coordinate multiple experiences. Chapter One also points up that the contested past in Australia concerning colonial and post-colonial times implicates coordinated ruling practices in how people account for that past in relation to the child separations.

Chapter Two provides an account of the development of IE in its defining origins in the successive publications of Dorothy Smith, a text-based approach, and then in how this has been taken up by others, in largely interview-based investigations. From this, five key features of an IE analysis are identified and discussed. These are the knowing subject, personal accounts, ideology, texts and mapping, and I propose that epistemologically,

methodologically and ethically these are appropriate for researching personal accounts about the child separation histories.

Chapter Three discusses how I take up these key features in my own IE and how they innovatively move IE investigations in new directions. Chapter Four then highlights my reading process regarding the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* as a collection, with this eventuating in the development of my large scale data-set of selected BTHOHP interview texts, and it also comments on the ideological organising practices that have impacted on what data I collected.

Chapters Five and Six together present the results of how I have operationalised my IE investigation. Chapter Five uses each of the five key features of my IE methodology to read in a close-grained way two individual personal account interviews, which I deliberately selected because they enable the social relations that organise these respective accounts to be discerned and thereby to show how my analytical reading of them is at the core of the interpretive process. This has indicated, among other things, a major 'line of fault', and this is that the 'separated and separator' binary can be experienced and told about in a complicated nuanced way that challenges a 'good v. bad' moral ordering. Chapter Six starts by backgrounding the five methodological tools and foregrounds the 'what' that my deployment of them brings to the surface through an analytical reading across some analytically selected interview texts. Doing this shows that the line of fault concerning the separated and separating binary, something with powerful ideological force, is more complicated in these analytically selected interview texts too. In addition, my reading across these analytically selected interviews also shows that the social relations that coordinate multiple personal account interviews acts to homogenise the similarities and silence the differences which arise

under the same complex of relations but unfold concerning different people in very varied circumstances.

There are three important aspects of what my thesis has accomplished that I now want to comment on. These are, first, that the research originated and is organised to explicate the Aboriginal Australian child separations and people's tellings about these important and challenging matters; second, it provides new and innovative ways to operationalise an IE in a non-common way and in a different kind of research context from that which has become canonical; and third, it provides an ethical framework for carrying out accountable research in this context, by recognising the material consequences to knowledge production generally, and specifically concerning the sensitive characteristics of this data. I discuss these three points in turn.

It must be made clear my research focuses on the social organising practices involved in the production of the BTHOHP personal accounts and does not deny in any way the dimensions of agency, race, culture, violence and lives lived out in particular ways regarding these histories. The intersectionality of this thesis analyses how ruling relations socially organise and structure implicitly and explicitly particularities and nuances of experience about the separations, including race and culture. But the research goes further than the mainstream discourse and points not to an alternate 'truth' but to additional complex and nuanced dimensions such as class, gender and labour as well as implications of how narrative, language and memory practices operate in how we come to know about these histories.

How the Aboriginal Australian child removal and separations histories eventuated into a social problem in the 1990s and the subsequent public history that has been assembled about these experiences encompasses different people in different locations with different

experiences in different circumstances, but with the similarities attended to and harnessed within the public history. What is known in common about these events is embedded in social relations around a contested past and a reconciliation process between settler and indigenous Australian populations. My argument is that knowledge production is local, situated and generated in time, as are the many hundreds of people who experienced the separations, although this has resulted in an apparently common experience which accounts for the past in a way that has strong homogenising aspects. However, I have made clear that I eschew placing my own research as though outside the knowledge production process. Indeed, I have stressed the nested character of the different layers of accounting going on, with the implication that there is no 'outside' in which pure uncontaminated fact can be arrived at, not least because of the key role of post/memory practices in accounting for the past, and of other interpretive processes in accounting for the now of sense-making in the interview texts. Examining how these histories are accounted for and what is expressed about these accounts is important, for the people concerned have lived lives caught up in the social processes that their accounts are concerned with and indeed they continue to be caught up in processes that contemporary knowledge making produces about them, including my own. As this last comment indicates, I have found that inquiring in detail about how people represent their experience is neither methodologically nor politically nor ethically easy to do. The regulation of who can speak about what is important but is however not to be just accepted, as my discussion with an Australian IE scholar discussed earlier indicates: the implication there was that no one other than insiders, specifically the separated, can now engage with such things, a position that I do not agree with.

The insider/outsider issues are relevant in this research. In a narrow sense, at the outset of this research, I was an outsider to these histories in that I was not knowledgeable about

Australia's social and political histories nor was I related in any way to individuals in the communities that make up most of the content of material my research is concerned with. The heightened attention that being an outsider, in the narrow sense, had in the research process allowed me the space to not take for granted multiple dimensions of these histories and accounting of them. Because of this position, I was able to problematise those aspects that have taken on a homogenised character for which many narrowly understood 'insiders' have taken for granted. However, in a broad sense, I argue I am an insider in relation to my reader/researcher standpoint and the ruling relations that organise my interpretive practices across the research process. In this broader sense, the insider/outsider distinction becomes blurred. Smith (1990a) has argued that standpoint is necessarily an insider position, it cannot be otherwise. My research remains consistent with Smith's argument. I am an insider through centralising the experience of reading into how I have interpreted and produced knowledge claims through this research. As an insider, what has become known through my research is organised by ruling relations in terms of how I was able to 'find' the research topic, access material, carry out fieldwork, interpret data, the types of discussions I had at conferences and during fieldwork, and all doing so with the constant diligence of sensitivity to the political and ethical ramifications this research is embedded in. From the reader/researcher standpoint, I am an insider.

The National Inquiry into the separations brought forth a political and social storm about the personal testimonies, concerning the separations and its public representation as a moral history of the past, including criticisms of these personal tellings as one sided and surrounded by a lack of research. As a result, the subsequent *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project* was established to provide a wider history of the separations, although in practice it was institutionally organised so as largely to 'match' the mainstream narrative. However, despite

this, the collection does in fact contain a wider range of testimony and constitutes a resource that can, potentially at least, produce different knowledge about these events than what the mainstream public history valorises. In this context, it is perhaps surprising, and a matter of concern, that my research on the collection is a rare engagement with it on the part of academic scholarship. The collection is referenced, but not widely engaged with in any sustained way, perhaps because of the credentialism commented on above.

Personal accounts are the central resource of the mainstream narrative of the separations. Their telling of the past as transformed into transcribed text is also the analytical focus of my IE investigation. How people's experiences of removal and separations hook into the social relations seems to govern what can be told, who can and cannot speak, under what material conditions people are able to speak, and what social relations become ruling, all need to take into account the role that narrative and memory making plays in this. Common IE tends to pay little attention to the referential issues of its subject position, the 'local hero' who is found at the centre of most IEs, and the truth claims they make and the researcher then makes in turn. However, in my revisionary approach to IE, narrative structure, and particularly in this context memory-making practices, are problematised in the sense of closely investigating the 'how' and 'what' of their occurrence in what is said and the written text in which the researcher reads about this. Utilising the analytical tool of post/memory and its practices (Stanley 2006), the researcher/reader's gaze is attuned to the interpretive significance of referentiality claims and narrative structures that work to organise experiences that are 'memory after the fact'. This arises in complicated ways, in which the experience of people telling about their lives interfaces with the coordinated commonness that this process produces through relations of ruling. This is the nexus of my research, and I would argue that



working in this close-grained way and not just taking this production process for granted could helpfully become more central to IE generally.

In operationalising my analysis as an IE investigation by using five key methodological tools derived from the literature and then deploying these in ways responsive to the interview data and the wider collection from which it derives, my aim has been to explicate how ruling relations coordinate experience, and in this research specifically, how they coordinate the experience of telling about the separations. I have shown how the development of IE has occurred through the works of Dorothy Smith and the rather different ways that others have taken it up. However, the now common practices that have come to dominate this methodology do not translate well with my data and my research problematic. I have therefore innovatively moved IE in new directions. This has been done methodologically – I have operationalised standpoint, the line of fault and so on in distinctive and non-common ways, as has been discussed here and in Chapters Five and Six. It has also been done substantively – I have engaged with a new *kind* of empirical site, by examining the extra-local textual discourse of a large scale data-set which has been generated and rendered into textual form by various combinations of other people. This has raised many issues along the way, including how to work this data in a very practical and grounded sense, as well as how to do so in an ethically accountable way.

The *de facto* textually ordered character of the BTHOHP collection has meant that I could not approach my IE in a common way of interviewing those people in it who were once separated or part of the separating policy-makers and officers, even if I wanted to. Common IE positions the people directly interviewed as the ‘local hero’ of their standpoint, something not possible for my research because there was always an array of people, as interviewers, as library staff members, as transcribers and so on standing between ‘me’ and ‘them’. To adhere

to what are for me the underlying principles of an IE, I therefore needed to modify the standpoint in accordance and position the researcher as reader at the centre of the analysis. The conduct and experience of reading is the core practice in my IE. Importantly, it allows and supports the presence of the knowing subject, the reader, to make interpretive analytical moves about the social organising practices that the interview accounts point to, and to do so in an accountable way that allows other people, yet further readers, to evaluate them. As such, this situates standpoint as itself a form of knowledge claim that others can assess, something which is eclipsed in common IE, where the ‘local hero’ remains heroic. Also eclipsing the reader in the way a common IE does prevents linking the knowledge making processes with the researcher’s interpretive meta-narrative about what is claimed. However, my research into the production of knowledge in the context of the BTHOHP interview texts has not only uncovered social relations that coordinate multiple accounts within the same complex of social relations, but has also shown that my own participation is also coordinated by the same complex of relations that coordinate the data-set I use. I will now discuss more explicitly the five key IE features I have used - standpoint, ‘line of fault’, texts, social relations and mapping – and point up how these have been developed in what I propose have been innovative ways in this research.

### *Standpoint*

The women’s/people’s standpoint is central to an IE investigation. My IE innovatively sets aside the ‘local hero’ standpoint for reasons mentioned above and centres the researcher’s standpoint. This provides a stronger grounding for analysis and knowledge claims about the organising practices in personal accounts and their effects because it opens up for scrutiny the actual grounded processes involved, theirs and mine. In Chapters Five and Six I operationalise this standpoint as a reader. Centralising reading of the individual interview

texts enables my analysis to look closely and also accountably at organising practices as these evolve in the sequence of telling. The standpoint of the reader centralises the researcher as activating texts that are intended to be read. The reader standpoint provides a position to examine how people and texts arise for the researcher and how particular interpretive accounting is assembled by an interviewee and interviewer in their development of sense making, which provides the ‘how’ of their interpretations of past events which are constituted by ideological ruling relations. The reader’s standpoint allows these social organising activities to come to the surface of analysis of the text and also to be interpretively accounted for by the researcher-reader too. The standpoint hooks the reader into the social relations that organise the single interview account and, crucially, it enables an accountable research practice to be carried out and accountable knowledge claims to be made.

In Chapter Six, the researcher standpoint anchors the interpretive lens for evaluating knowledge claims that operate across interviews within the BTHOHP data. The multiplicity of accounts in a large scale data-set can make the presence of the knowing subject difficult to attend to. However, the researcher’s standpoint provides for the constant locatedness of the reader in making accountable interpretive claims about these texts. It maintains the organisation of accounts and interpretive claims, by the interviewees and interviewers, and also positions the researcher’s interpretations as part of this. The researcher’s standpoint makes actionable for other readers the interpretive activities that join up multiple organising practices about the past of the separations and the ruling relations surrounding this. Most of these issues are ignored or elided in now common forms of IE, while my centering of the researcher’s standpoint provides a strong foundation for making claims about the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ of such complex challenging texts.

### *'Line of Fault'*

The 'line of fault' is the framework for starting an IE investigation. In a common IE, this is usually utilised as a singular position or moment for investigating the disjuncture between actuality and organising activities. In my IE investigation, the line of fault as commonly used was untenable. In Chapter Five, the line of fault was instead approached as a process that is layered and shifting and exploring it problematised the disjunctures that constitute ruling relations around the 'separated' and 'separator' binary.

In Chapter Six, the nuanced character of a layered and shifting line of fault was further demonstrated as analysis moved across a number of the BTHOHP interviews. Approaching the line of fault in this way enables the analysis to move from small to large scale data. The line of fault accumulates layers, working out from the challenged and nuancing of the separated and separating binary, to specific social relations that arise from this, which were then further investigated across multiple texts. Whereas in Chapter Five, analysis from the line of fault pointed to the social relations this connected with, in Chapter Six particular social relations were revealed and examined through a further layering of additional lines of fault. Recognising that the line of fault analytically moves is something which takes an IE analysis to a new methodological and substantive level, for this shows how to account for the social relations that organise experience and become ruling across different experiences and varied tellings of this.

### *Texts*

IE's central concern with texts makes it an appropriate methodology for investigating the organising practices of personal accounts in the BTHOHP and related materials. However,

although common IE investigations treat texts as part of the action, they generally arise secondary to interviewing ‘local heroes’ in the context of the talk-text-talk relation. My IE analysis, in contrast, situates activating the text first and foremost. Although IE makes the argument that analysis should start before discourse and before people are positioned by texts, that does not work in my research context and many others. I also find this notion of a ‘before the text’ rather unconvincing, a kind of Eden before the Fall. I take up the textual mediation involved up front and as a reader. In Chapter Five, I analysed in a close-grained way the texts of individual interviews, treating these as a whole to interrogate the organising activities used to generate interpretive accounts of what happened ‘back then’. This analysis paid close attention to how ‘facts’ were accomplished through primary and ideological narrative productions, the authorial regulations and rhetorical force deployed in exchanges between interviewee and interviewer, and such accounts as coordinators of experience. The texts operate as ones intending future sequences of action as they are taken up by readers.

Chapter Six situates and centres a reader-text relation, utilising this to analyse across analytically selected interviews in the BTHOHP interviews. The common IE talk-text-talk relation is incompatible with my research, while the strategy used in Chapter Six has shown that the text-reader relation provides good defensible analytical grounds for interpreting talk that has been spoken and heard by others and transformed into texts that are written and read (and indeed, this applies to all interview-based research that transcribes and presents sections or the whole of such data). Talk as text allows the researcher to pay close attention to the narrative and referential issues that operate as organisers and which common IE’s approach of *a priori* talk is questionable. The text-reader relation also enables the researcher to explore tensions between hearing and what the transformation involved ‘does’ to the data, something which most common IE fails to recognise as involving issues.

### *Social Relations*

The purpose and aim of an IE investigation is to investigate how people's experiences are coordinated by ruling relations. The concept of social relations, treated as activities, is an analytical tool which helps orient the research to the goal of identifying the coordination of social life and interactions. My IE investigation has significantly expanded the notion of social relations, by examining the post/memory practices involved and how the related narrative activities unfold in the context of interviewer/interviewee exchanges. In Chapter Five, I analysed how post/memory practices are active in producing interpretive schemes of 'the facts' of what happened 'back then' in the individual accounts. The 'it is so' character of unfolding accounts can easily capture the reader into dealing just the narrative content rather than attending to its coordination. Common IE investigations have often been 'captured' in this way by not engaging with such issues of narrative in the way or to the extent that I have in this thesis, nor investigated the complex characteristics that memory has in the 'talk' (including its textual variants) constituting forms of ruling relations.

In Chapter Six, social relations were examined as they were pursued and read across multiple texts. Moving an IE investigation from a small scale to a large scale in this way has not been attempted in common IE projects. Common IE largely stays small scale because it is tied to the single 'local hero' it valorises. However, reading social relations across texts shows how particulars are joined up within the same complex of social relations. I have shown that social relations that arise in the two interview accounts I analysed in detail can be discerned, pinpointed and engaged with on a wider scale across multiple on the surface seemingly unconnected accounts. The result provides expanded knowledge about the Aboriginal Australian separation histories and how people understand and represent their experiences of this.

## *Mapping*

Analytical mapping is a research activity that provides a way of ‘writing’ as a tool through the research process, is analytical useful in ‘seeing’ the social relations that work to coordinate experience, and offers a representational form of analysis to assist others in making sense of what is written about by the researcher. Such mapping, as I have earlier pointed out, is part of the same social organising activity that is under investigation and this is a strength rather than a weakness. In Chapter Five, I used mapping to show the organising activities that were raised in reading the text. This included mapping pieces of organisation in relation to ordering sequence, associations, connectives, accounting practices and so on, so as to show how texts structure, organise and suppress the experience of accounting for the past in relation to removal policies. My revisionary IE approach attends more closely to narrative structure, rhetorical force and authorising practices than common IE literature provides for. This is largely because common IE relies on ‘grand’ mappings, signifying the end product of the map. My approach by contrast has been more concerned with mapping the significance of small pieces of social organisation as well as larger ones.

In Chapter Six, mapping particular social relations away from the text-talk-text relation to the reader-text relation has provided a means to map how a number of unconnected people account for their experience in ways that show that this occurs under the same complex of social relations. It has also shown the complexities and nuances that underpin the separation histories and demonstrates their differences from as well as similarities to the public history and published literature. From the standpoint of the reader, mapping particular social relations and how they operate across ‘local sites’ and particular interviews, to the contents of the collection more widely, provides a substantial and defensible account of how relations of ruling are constituted and how these then inform interpretations of past, present and future

relevancies. This in turn points to important matters that can be further researched and hopefully lead to fuller understanding of the separation histories.



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