NARRATING THE ACCUMULATION OF DISPOSSESSION: STORIES OF ABORIGINAL ELDERS

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The lifeworlds of Aboriginal people and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia continues to bear the scars of a colonial past and present. Liberation oriented approaches within psychology have emphasised the role of storytelling and the recovery of historical memory in processes of community healing and restoration. In this article we draw on stories shared as part of a community arts project and in conversational interviews, to explore the ways in which Aboriginal Elders have understood oppression in their lives. Following data analysis, three community narratives were identified that collectively narrated the history, continuity, and psychosocial legacy of colonial dispossession. These reveal circuits and consequences of dispossession and can be mobilised to challenge dominant cultural narratives that minimise, deny, or silence the history of dispossession. Aboriginal people are not passive victims or the problem in need of being "fixed". The Elders expressed agency and communicated knowledge of an ongoing history of dispossession and its cumulative and insidious impacts.

Keywords: *storytelling, structural violence, Aboriginal, oppression, praxis.*

1. Introduction

As a settler colonial nation, Australia's history has entailed the systematic dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[1] people from land, culture, language, community and family (Walter, 2010). This dispossession was achieved through frontier violence and paternalistic and assimilationist policies, practices, and discourse predicated on notions of racial superiority. While there has been a decisive move from the blatant racism of the past, the lifeworlds of Aboriginal people and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia continues to bear the scars of a colonial past and present. Ongoing forms of structural and cultural violence continue to afflict the lives of both colonised and coloniser though in different ways (Memmi, 1974/2003). Those colonised continue to fight for recognition as a self-determining people as their collective biography, and ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world are marginalised, subordinated, and silenced (Smith, 2012). Aboriginal people in Australia have persistently said that they do not feel like they belong, that they do not feel welcome, and that they "carry their skin heavy" in this country (Grant &

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[1] In the remainder of this paper, for the purpose of brevity, we use the term Aboriginal to refer to Indigenous people of Australia. We use Noongar to refer to the traditional owners of the south-west corner of Western Australia.

Derschow, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Walter, 2010). The colonisers are also marked and at the same time unmarked by this longer history of colonial dispossession, assimilation, and racism. Positioned in dominant subject positions in terms of race, White settler Australians are often blind to the impacts of this history and the continuity of colonial violence and dispossession in the present (Maddison, 2011; Rose, 2004).

In this paper we draw from a larger research study conducted alongside a community arts project with Noongar people in Western Australia (WA), to elucidate the history, lived experience, and continuity of colonial and racialised oppression and its psychosocial legacy for individuals and communities. By listening to and sharing stories from the margins, we can better understand the workings of power and the ways in which Aboriginal people have made sense of oppressive policies, practices, and discourse, and individual and community impacts. Further, in examining the stories told, we can inquire into the functions that storytelling as the recovery of historical memory (Martín-Baró, 1994) might serve as part of a transformative psychosocial praxis (Stevens, Duncan, & Sonn, 2013).

2. Theorising Oppression

Different writers (e.g., Collins, 2000; Deutsch, 2006; Fanon, 1952/2008; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Memmi, 1974/2003) have shown how over time, different forms of oppression including colonialism have "become institutionalised and shrouded by ideology such that it becomes difficult for both the dominants and the subordinates to recognize them" (Moane, 2011, p. 36). Within this writing, various mechanisms of control or forms of violence have been identified. For example, Galtung's (1990) violence triangle included direct, structural, and cultural violence. For Galtung, "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right, or at least not wrong" (p. 291). For Galtung, "the culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them … at all" (p. 295). Fine (2006), drawing on Deutsch (2006) and Harvey's (1999) concept of civilised oppression, asserted that oppression is "structural, institutional, interpersonal and intrapsychic; outrageous and civilized; cultivated in the media, the market and the academy" (p. 85).

In their circuits of dispossession framework, Fine and Ruglis (2009), among others, have emphasised the relationality and historicity of dispossession and privilege, as well as the interconnectedness of structure and lives. Indeed, many have argued that it is the taken for granted power, privilege, and normativity of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2004), stemming from the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2007), that dulls non-Aboriginal Australia into seeing Aboriginal marginality and entrenched disadvantage as normal and natural, as reflecting something about "them" and "their" culture, or not seeing it at all (Quayle & Sonn, 2013; Sonn & Quayle, 2012). This misrecognition or failure to see must be placed in the context of a longer but ongoing history of colonisation characterised by relations of domination and subordination. As articulated by Maldonado-Torres (2007):

> Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (p. 243).

3. The Everyday Violence of Coloniality in Australia

In Australia, Maggie Walter's (2010) conceptual framework, the domain of Aboriginality identified the disregard for, and absences of Aboriginal people from all spheres of influence, as defining the everyday lived experiences of Aboriginal people in the era of neoliberalism (1990s-2000s). Walter argued that disregard for Aboriginal people is sewn into the cultural fabric of the nation; it is part of our national psyche (see also Maddison, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Such writing has pointed to the spatial separation and distancing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia and has highlighted the invisibility and at the same time, hypervisibility of Aboriginal people as social problems or alternatively, "usurpable cultural icons" (Walter, 2010, p. 130).

In line with other post-colonial and critical race scholars (e.g., Fanon, 1952/2008; Memmi, 1974/2003; Smith, 2012), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) has asserted, "aborigines have often been represented as objects – as the 'known'. Rarely are they represented as subjects, as 'knowers'" (p. 75). She described the many negative ways that Aboriginal people have been represented, including as "treacherous, lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty, ignoble, noble, primitive, backward, unscrupulous, untrustworthy and savage" (p. 76; see also Fanon, 1952/2008; Memmi, 1974/2003; Smith, 2012). For Moreton-Robinson, whiteness as a regime of power determines what representations or knowledge is valued, and what is not, and "the universalisation and normalisation of whiteness as the representation of humanity worked to locate the racialised other in the liminal space between the human/animal distinction" (p. 77). Similarly, in her writing on decolonising methodologies, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) discussed how cultural imperialism has silenced Indigenous histories, and objectified and dehumanised Indigenous people who have been constructed as inferior, primitive, and "Other" (see also Ladson Billings, 2003; Spivak, 1988).

Along with highlighting the violence of western knowledge production about "the Other", critical race and Indigenous scholars and advocates of liberation oriented psychology (e.g., Lykes, Terre Blanche, & Hamber, 2003; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero & Sonn, 2009; Segalo, Manoff, & Fine, 2015; Stevens et al., 2013; Watkins & Shulman, 2008) have also underlined the silencing and exclusions that have been central to colonisation/coloniality. Given that the production of knowledge and subjectivities of both colonised and coloniser, are shaped and constrained by and within coloniality, one intervention has been working in solidarity with "the oppressed" and listening to voices from positions of alterity as a means of interrogating and explicating power relations, resignifying experience, and affirming identity and community (Lykes et al., 2003; Segalo et al., 2015; Sonn & Lewis, 2009; Sonn & Quayle, 2012). The elevation of voices from positions of alterity decentres the taken for granted power, privilege, and normativity of whiteness/coloniality, and can contribute to processes of cultural reclamation and renewal (Sonn & Lewis, 2009).

4. Engaging with the Lived Experience of the Oppressed

The reorientation of psychology to the lived experiences of oppressed groups is central to liberation oriented approaches (Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2007; Segalo et al., 2015). Martín-Baró who is recognised as the pioneer of liberation psychology, articulated three urgent tasks: the recovery of historical memory, de-ideologising common sense and everyday experience, and recognising and strengthening the "virtues of the people". For Martín-Baró, "liberation can only come from a praxis committed to the suffering and hopes of peoples…"

(p. 32). This has similarly been emphasised by critical race and Indigenous scholars in various contexts (e.g., People Culture Environment, 2014; Segalo et al., 2015; Smith, 2012).

The recovery of historical memory is central to the liberation process because for oppressed groups such as Indigenous people, the deliberate disconnection of them from their history and ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world, was part of a systematic process of fragmentation that was central to colonialism and imperialism (Smith, 2012). The recovery of historical memory involves the mobilisation of resources that can nurture identity, facilitate pride in belonging, and thereby disrupt the internalisation of oppression. These symbolic resources can also be mobilised to challenge internalised privilege, reflected in collective amnesia (Haebich, 2001) or wilful ignorance or forgetting of a history of oppression (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007), and dominant discourses of culture blame (Bell, 2010; Sonn & Lewis, 2009; Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Seedat (2015) has recently discussed oral history as the enactment of critical community psychology. For Seedat, oral history projects facilitate "expressions of individual and collective narratives, the affirmation of social agency, and the restitution of a marginal community's own generative narratives of past and contemporary realities" (p. 23). Also in South Africa, Segalo has shown how women reclaimed their voices and narrated suffering through the creation of embroideries. These embroideries, as counter narratives, could also disrupt dominant narratives of equality and democracy, and allowed the women to recognise the "multiple narratives that they all carry: narratives of trauma, silence, gender, and the role played by history in the present" (Segalo et al., 2015, p. 349). Apfelbaum (2000) has also articulated the significance, for personal, social and collective identities, of telling ones story as part of maintaining memory in the face of dislocation and uprootedness. Other scholars have discussed the role of liberation arts, including oral history and storytelling, for public witnessing, mourning, and remembrance (see Lykes et al., 2013; Watkins & Shulman, 2008), remembering, reclaiming and celebrating survival/survivance (Smith, 2012).

Highlighting the constitutive role of stories in identity and community making processes, Rappaport (1995) and colleagues (see Thomas & Rappaport, 1996) linked narrative theory with empowerment. For Rappaport (1995), "the ability to tell ones story, and to have access to and influence over collective stories, is a powerful resource" (p. 802). Rappaport (2000) described a personal story as "an individual's cognitive representation or social communication of events unique to that person…organized temporally and thematically" (p. 4). He defined a community narrative as a story "common among a group of people…shared through social interaction, texts, pictures, performances, and rituals" (p. 4). As articulated by Rappaport (2000), personal stories "are negotiated in the context of narratives told by the communities in which we live" (p. 6), therefore by understanding community narratives, we can inquire into "culture and context and its profound effects on individual lives" (p. 6). Community narratives need to be understood in relation to dominant cultural narratives, which are the "overlearned stories communicated through mass media or other large social and cultural institutions and social networks" (pp. 4-5). Bell (2010) has similarly discussed stock stories as a "set of standard, typical or familiar stories held in reserve to explain racial dynamics in ways that support the status quo" (p. 29). In her work on critical race counter-storytelling, Bell recognised concealed, resistant, and emerging/transforming stories, which can be mobilised to challenge stock stories, and contribute to anti-racism.

Segalo et al. (2015) have articulated "the obligations, of a decolonizing praxis for psychology situated in/with/beyond the academy" (p. 19). These obligations included, but are not limited to, conducting research for provocation and action, challenging collective lies, and revealing what has been concealed, honouring local knowledge and struggle, and

recognising and showing up the dialectics of oppression and resistance (pp. 19-20). Given these obligations, the authors emphasised the need for research practices that amplify unheard voices (Segalo et al., 2015). Sonn, Stevens, and Duncan (2013) argued that storytelling can be a "tool for critical, participatory and socially transformative praxis", and thus a decolonising method (p. 295). They wrote that stories "provide an opportunity to explore the mundane and routine ways in which social structures penetrate social relations in everyday settings, and…a means to understand the historical and continued exercise of, and responses to, racialised power relations" (p. 295-296). Moreover, the authors emphasised storytelling as a method that can disrupt "the power relationship inherent in traditional modes of knowledge construction and production" (p. 303; see also Bell, 2010; Ladson Billings, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Informed by this understanding of the power of stories and storytelling and the "obligations of a decolonizing praxis for psychology" (Segalo et al., 2015, p. 19), we have focused on the opportunities created through participatory, community based arts and cultural development activities to actively engage with the symbolic resources available for meaning making in post-colonising Australia (e.g., Quayle & Sonn, 2013; Sonn & Quayle, 2012). This includes a focus on identifying and problematising the dominant cultural narratives that can disempower Aboriginal people and that reflect and reproduce hegemonic power. It also involves a focus on identifying and mobilising the personal stories and community narratives that serve important protective, restorative, and resistant roles within marginalised communities but are often concealed or silenced within the broader cultural context (Bell, 2010; Ramirez & Hammack, 2014; Sonn & Fisher, 1998; Sonn & Lewis, 2009). Importantly, this work thus requires that we recognise and engage with the multiple stories or narratives we carry (Segalo et al., 2015), as situated social subjects/knowers (Montenegro, 2002).

5. Rekindling Stories on Country

This paper draws on research conducted alongside community arts activities, specifically the Bush Babies project, which was delivered by Community Arts Network (CAN) of WA in Narrogin, as part of their Rekindling Stories on Country strategy (see http://www.canwa.com.au/). Narrogin is a town in WA's Wheatbelt, 192 kilometres southeast of Perth. At the 2011 census, Narrogin had a population of 4,731, with 8.5% of residents identifying as Indigenous (ABS, 2011a) compared to 3.7% of the population of WA, and 3% nationally (ABS, 2011b).

CAN expressed the goals of the Rekindling Stories on Country strategy in the following way:

> Through this strategy, we honour the stories and wisdom of Noongar Elders; work alongside young people and families to help them celebrate their culture with pride; facilitate intergenerational sharing and expression of Noongar language and culture; … celebrate Noongar language and culture with local, state, national and international audiences; and address what's been silenced and left out of Australia's story (CAN, 2014a, p. 13).

The Bush Babies project is a community arts project that has been delivered in a number of towns across WA's Wheatbelt since 2010 (see http://www.canwa.com.au/project/bush-babies/ for more on the Bush Babies project). Utilising a variety of arts practices including photography, textile craft, oral history recordings, short film and portrait painting, the project

involved "Bush Babies" and their descendants sharing stories about "a time when Aboriginal people were not permitted to give birth in hospitals so many Aboriginal Elders living today were born in reserves, missions or on the outskirts of towns in tents, makeshift shelters or under the stars" (CAN, 2014b, p. 2). As part of the Rekindling Stories on Country strategy, the Bush Babies project sought to create spaces for Aboriginal storytelling on country, as well as capturing and archiving the stories of Elders for current and future generations.

Specifically, the Narrogin iteration of the project involved the Honouring our Elders Portrait project and exhibition, which emerged from the community (see Quayle, Sonn, & Kasat, 2016). Sixteen Elders[2] had their portraits painted as part of this project. A snapshot of their Bush Baby story was included as part of the exhibition and catalogue (CAN, 2014b). Bush Babies in Narrogin also involved the creation of opportunities for sharing and recording the stories of recognised Noongar Elders, who were asked if they were a Bush Baby and to share memories of growing up during this era. To create opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and cultural transmission, the agency facilitated a two-day storytelling workshop with Elders (four) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media studies students (approximately twelve) at the local high school. During this storytelling workshop[3], Elders first shared stories of their life as part of a storytelling circle. The Elders were free to share whatever stories they wanted to share with the students. Students then had the opportunity to speak with Elders in small groups; they could ask questions, and explore specific aspects of their story. Next, the Elders stories were recorded, and using photographs, the students were supported to use a simple software program to produce digital stories. They shared stories about living on reserves, being taken to missions as young children, and of how tough it was for them growing up in those days. These are stories told by those far from the centre of power, people who directly suffered under the 1905 Act, an Act in WA that controlled every aspect of Aboriginal life and was not repealed until 1964 (Haebich, 2000). In their lifetimes, these Elders have thus witnessed the shift from blatantly racist and assimilationist policies, practices, and discourses to more recent efforts aimed at self-determination, reconciliation, and closing the gap. At the end of the workshop, each of the digital stories produced were played for all participants to witness. The digital stories were also shared publicly as part of the Elders portrait exhibition, and have been made available on CAN's website (see http://www.canwa.com.au/project/bush-babies/)

5.1 Data Gathering

The larger research study that this article draws from includes a variety of data sources including conversational interviews, surveys, archival sources (e.g., digital stories, media reports), and various participant groups (i.e., Aboriginal Elders, adults and young people, non-Aboriginal people). In this article the focus is on exploring the stories shared as part of the Narrogin iteration of the Bush Babies project (i.e., recorded/digital stories of 12 Noongar Elders), and in conversational interviews with four Elders, to examine the ways in which Noongar Elders have made sense of the experience of colonial and racialised oppression in their lives, including implication for communities.

Alongside the project activities, the first author conducted conversational interviews with four Elders (Frank, Mick, Caroline, and Enid[4]). The central topics explored during interviews

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[2] Two of the Elders had their portraits painted posthumously (CAN, 2014b).
[3] These storytelling workshops were facilitated by CAN with digital storytelling company, Chronicle: http://www.chronicle.net.au/
[4] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of research participants.

were life for Noongar people in Narrogin, past and present, involvement in project activities, and if/why Aboriginal storytelling on country is important and for whom. The four Elders who were interviewed had participated in the Honouring our Elders portrait project. Three had also participated in the storytelling workshop at the high school and had digital stories produced (Frank, Caroline, Enid). There was consistency in the stories that Elders chose to tell across settings with stories that were shared during the storytelling workshop often shared in interviews as well. Frank, Caroline, and Mick were interviewed on two occasions; unfortunately Enid was not available at the time of the second interviews. The first interviews occurred after the official launch of Elders Portrait exhibition, and the second, approximately ten months later. The second interviews provided the opportunity to feed back some of the emerging themes that were being developed following fieldwork and the initial stages of analysis, and to have a more focused discussion in these key areas.

We have come to recognise the research interviews as an extension of the platform created through CAN's broader Rekindling Stories on Country strategy. The Elders came to the CAN office to share their stories, and were often prepared with documents including newspaper articles that captured some of their life story, and importantly, the way the blatantly racist policies, practices, and discourses of the past intruded into their own personal histories. The Elders wanted to tell about their history, which has been marked by dispossession, the continuities of the asymmetric relations of power in the present, and the cumulative and insidious effects for individuals and communities. The Elders stories also captured strength and resilience, resistance and survival, cultural continuity and change in the face of adversity (Gone, 2013; Ramirez & Hammack, 2014), however an exploration of this aspect is beyond the scope of this article.

5.2 Data Analysis

Rappaport's (2000) framework of personal stories, community narratives, and dominant cultural narratives guided how we understood the connection between the personal stories being told, and the community narratives that were identified across the corpus of Bush Baby stories (i.e., data generated from interviews and recorded/digital stories). The community narratives that were identified were reflected in each of the Elders' personal storytelling. Our analysis of the stories was also guided by writing on counter-stories and counter-storytelling within Critical Race Theory (Bell, 2010; Ladson Billings, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In particular, we recognised the need to read these emerging community narratives against dominant cultural narratives or stock stories (Bell, 2010; Rappaport, 2000), and the significance of these stories as concealed and resistance stories, and as the recovery of historical memory.

Interviews and digital stories were listened to several times, and transcribed verbatim, by the first author. Transcripts were then read multiple times for familiarity. The first author then undertook a free coding process, where initial notes were made throughout the transcripts with a particular focus on aspects of the storytelling that captured the various forms, experiences, and impacts of oppression. Individual summaries for each of the Elders stories were produced, which outlined significant life events (e.g., taken to mission as a young child), and key themes or emphases in their storytelling including across settings. Based on the initial free coding exercise, a coding scheme was developed which included the emerging categories and subsidiary themes that were identified across the corpus of "Bush

Baby stories". The coding scheme was used to code all transcripts and modified throughout this iterative process. Tables containing the many examples illustrative of the community narratives identified were produced.

In this paper we present three community narratives that were constructed from this process, which collectively narrated the accumulation of dispossession, namely:

- "Life was put on us": Naming colonial oppression.
- "It's still going on": The continuity of structural, cultural and interpersonal violence.
- "This is where it all stems from": The psychosocial legacy.

An outline of the key community narratives identified following data analysis has been provided to CAN, including the Noongar staff based at the Narrogin office, for their information and feedback.

6. Narrating the Accumulation of Dispossession

The Elders' Bush Baby stories provide deep insights into the operation of oppression, including impacts on individual subjectivities, families, and communities. In amplifying these stories, this research seeks to position Aboriginal people as the knowers rather than as the objects of knowledge (Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Smith, 2012). Examining the stories shared by Elders' provided an opportunity to learn from Aboriginal people about the experience of oppression, implications for subjectivities, and impacts on communities. In naming suffering, its continuities in the present, and the insidious and cumulative impacts for individuals and communities, the Elders expressed their agency. Their stories problematised dominant cultural narratives that pathologise Aboriginal people and obscure relations of domination/subordination. Turning the focus on whiteness/coloniality and its implications for material realities and the cultural resources available for meaning making, the Elders were resisting over-determining social scripts, and naming the source their suffering as well as possible solutions.

In the next section we briefly sketch the three community narratives. As non-Aboriginal authors, differently positioned in relation to race, the findings and interpretations presented here is our retelling of the stories of Noongar Elders. Whilst we recognise the tensions inherent in re-presenting the stories of Aboriginal people, we do so not to speak on their behalf, or to appropriate their stories. Rather we seek to amplify these stories as we recognise them as important resources for public pedagogy, which can be mobilised to challenge structural and cultural forms of violence. This retelling reflects a deliberate effort to take a performative position against whiteness/coloniality (Laubscher, 2006).

6.1 "Life was Put on Us": Naming Colonial Oppression

The first community narrative, "life was put on us"*,* captured the many forms of violence and dispossession suffered by Aboriginal people historically. In sharing their stories, the Elders' narrated how paternalistic and assimilationist policies intruded into their own lives, but also drew on stories about the treatment of Aboriginal people historically (i.e., collective memory; Stevens et al., 2013). The Elders' stories captured various mechanisms or manifestations of colonial oppression, including: the ideology of race, direct violence, exploitation and exclusion, fragmentation of families and communities, and the forceful erosion of culture and language. Various scholars have identified similar mechanisms (e.g.,

Collins, 2000; Deutsch, 2006; Fanon, 1952/2008; Martín-Baró, 1994; Memmi, 1974/2003; Moane, 2011).

For example, Caroline (born late 40s-early 50s) reflected on the treatment of Aboriginal people historically.

> Every country in this world is made up of the Indigenous race, …and they was made to be …as a different type of, …person to everyone else in society because of…the colour of our skin and 'cause how, who we are, Aboriginal people…Because of that, this is the way we were firstly treated, we was taken away from our parents and put in the missions and that, put in the reserves outside of towns, near dumps, near the bush where they segregate Aboriginal people away, out of sight because of their status in life, being a lower class people. But it's not right really.

In the above excerpt Caroline explained to the students bearing witness to her story, how the social construction of an inferior and superior race (i.e., *the ideology of race and racism*) was used to justify dehumanising policies such as segregation and child removal. Evidently, Caroline wanted Aboriginal young people to understand that the construction of Aboriginal people "as a different type of person" was used to justify or legitimate their "lower status in life", and that this is "not right".

The role of *direct violence and fear* was also evident in the Elders' storytelling. For example, Enid (born late 40s-early 50s) spoke about the brutal history of an Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island where Aboriginal men from across WA were sent from 1838-1907 (Haebich, 2000).

> The farmers…they couldn't do without the Noongars, it's like the African slaves you know, did the work for the white people…. These Noongars…just had a fear of a white person over them, they did whatever they could. 'Cause you could see in the history, those men were healthy people who were chained around the neck.

In this excerpt, Enid discussed how violence was used as a method of putting fear into Noongar people. She explained that this was central to economic exploitation, which the white farmers depended upon. Stories about the Pinjarra Massacre of 1834 were also shared during interviews, as many Noongar people in the area are descendants of the Binjareb tribe involved in this attack, which was led by Governor James Stirling (see Contos, 2002). In interviews, Elders often also retold stories of control and surveillance of Noongar people on reserves, curfews, racial profiling, police brutality, and Aboriginal deaths in custody, which further capture the mechanism of violence and fear.

Other stories exemplified *exploitation and exclusion.* For example, many participants told how they were born in the bush because if you were Aboriginal "you weren't allowed to go to the hospital, you know, to have babies in the hospital" (Doreen, born 1929). Mick (born 1952) shared that he was born "at the back of the hospital…where the morgue was". Participants also spoke about how "Aboriginal children, people weren't allowed to get education in those days" (Doreen). Doreen recalled that "a lot of people, like the farmers, like a lot of the racist ones would say no they don't want the Aboriginal kids in the school". The Elders' stories showed how they were excluded, pushed out onto the fringes of town, yet were exploited for their labour. They recollected how "they had to have permits" for work, they were only paid in rations, and "when the farmers finished with the Noongars", they "kicked them off the land" (Mick).

The deliberate *fragmentation of families and communities* was also evident in the Elders' stories. Many of the Elders were members of the Stolen Generations. Those who escaped this fate spoke of how they lived on reserves in tin humpy's, with the threat of being taken ever-present. Others camped on the property of the farmer's their parents' worked for, and so avoided being stolen. The suffering caused by child removal was evident throughout the storytelling. For example, Caroline expressed the sense of loss associated with not being "allowed to know and bond with our sisters and brothers…because the situation in life we were put into because of superior people". She emphasised to the students listening to her story:

> our people were put into the situation against our will you know, we was put away in a mission against our will. It wasn't our idea. It wasn't our parent's idea, it wasn't our grandparent's idea; it was the government's idea.

Further highlighting the fragmentation of family and community, Enid spoke about how classifications of Aboriginality (i.e., "Full blood", "half caste", "quadroon", "octoroon") which was driven by the ideology of race and racism, meant that her own grandfather was not allowed on the reserve "with his family…'cause we were darker than him, but he was still our grandfather". Others spoke of the impact of native citizenship certificates (or exemption certificates) on Noongar families. Recipients of these certificates were required to renounce their Aboriginal identity and thus relinquish ties with others not exempt from the restrictions imposed by the 1905 Aborigines Act (WA) (Haebich, 2000).

As well as being dispossessed of family, the Elders' stories highlighted the *forceful erosion of culture and language,* and how they were indoctrinated into Christianity. For example Enid said: "We were all these little white angels, little black fellas in white (laughing)". Elder's discussed how because of assimilationist policies, they and their parents before them were dispossessed of culture and language. As articulated by Caroline:

> Like when we were growing up with our parents, we wasn't allowed to be told anything about their life, their culture.…'Cause we were supposed to adapt to white people's lives you know. We weren't allowed to learn no Noongar culture, no Aboriginal culture.

Trevor commented: "When our parents used to talk Noongar way the…people around government they'd put 'em in jail and chuck the woman's and all, they chuck 'em all in jail, to stop them talking Noongar way".

The importance of remembering and telling about these experiences of suffering was captured by Caroline, who felt disappointed that her "old people" never told them about the suffering they had been through.

> See, this is what I don't understand…our old people, they never told us nothing about themselves…about what they'd been through, you know… They took it to their deaths. You know, they gone took everything with 'em.… They never told us how hard life was. How they had to work in the fields, burning up, clearing land. They never complained.

When asked why she thought that was, she reflected that "They must've thought that was their job to do- that was a natural thing in life". Evidently, the denaturalisation of oppression (Martín-Baró, 1994) has been possible for Caroline but this was not necessarily the case for

her 'old people' given the harsh reality of the time. As expressed by Caroline, "I think life in general, has been put on us". Being able to name how life has been put on them, and to communicate this knowledge to the younger generations, can therefore be understood as a significant and resistant act.

6.2 *"It's Still Going on": The Continuity of Structural, Cultural, and Interpersonal Violence*

The second community narrative identified, "it's still going on" highlighted the continued experience of structural, cultural, and interpersonal forms of violence in the everyday lives of Noongar people. Within this community narrative the Elders' asserted that, "we need help for our Aboriginal people" (Frank), "we still crying and dying and all the rest of it" (Mick). Elders were therefore not only narrating the injuries of the past but also pointing to the continuity of coloniality and racism: the fact that they are "still underneath" (Mick). We focus most of our discussion on structural violence, but also provide brief examples of cultural and interpersonal violence.

The stories showed the continued experience of oppression at a *structural* level. As expressed by Mick, "a lot of it's still going on, because we still below". In the excerpt below, he reflects upon growing up and seeing the disparity in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal lives emphasising that Noongar people have never moved from that spot because "this racism business is still going on".

> All of us Noongars, Aboriginals, you know we walking around seeing…white fellas over here driving new cars and putting up new houses and all this and that and we still in the one spot, never moved (laughs)…. We are supposed to be the first people of this country yet we wasn't getting recognised as that and I don't think we are ever gonna get recognised.

Therefore, for Mick, "Not much has changed, it might look good up on the surface but underneath, still the same" (laughs). Along similar lines, Frank commented that Aboriginal young people are now being taken to jails rather than missions: a concern expressed by many.

> That's why all our young kids are getting in jail now it's sort of gone back…. Some of them are in there for nothing. So that comes from what we have come, been through, we been through it, you know, I did nine and a half in that prison, in convent prison[5] there.

Frank was thus identifying the circuits of dispossession for Aboriginal people (Fine & Ruglis, 2009).

In the excerpt below, Caroline discussed how Aboriginal people historically have not been allowed to be in control of their own lives, and how they are "still coming up from behind".

> What these people say 'Oh, Aboriginal people, why don't they get up? They could have the same things as us'. You hear some of the white people say….But all that was kept away from them, it was taken from them. They're not allowed to have, they're not allowed to be people of authority. They're not allowed to be

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[5] Frank is referring to being in the mission like being in prison.

people of their…own destiny. They have to be backwards all the time, keep out of sight you know…and our people – we're still coming up from behind. We're never gonna be there to be counted for as the rest of the human race, you know what I mean?

Caroline's reflections, point to the inherent ignorance of assertions of a level playing field (i.e., why don't Aboriginal people get up?) given the circuits (and consequences) of dispossession (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Exemplifying the continuity of *structural violence*, she went on to explain the Aboriginal people still "got nothing": "Our life is still struggling. We're still trying to establish ourselves…. There's no freedom there. We're still controlled, you know?" For Caroline, prejudice equates to exclusion and is still a pervasive experience in the lives of Aboriginal people.

When you're not included in the mainstream of education, employment, that's prejudice within itself. That is prejudice. And you know it's not the Aboriginals doing it, it's the white people doing it. That's what you call prejudice there unna? So it's through every town and if they change that, tell you now, Aboriginal people will be able to be something, be something good, good people.

Throughout her storytelling, Caroline often spoke of how Aboriginal people are and can be good people if they were given the opportunities, which in itself is illuminating of the impacts of oppression on Aboriginal subjectivities.

Cultural violence was also captured in the Elders' storytelling. For example, pointing to the silencing and erasures of a history of dispossession, which can be understood as a form of *cultural violence* (Galtung, 1990), Mick discussed the barriers to Aboriginal empowerment and reconciliation in terms of white people not wanting to know: "they don't want to; they don't want it known to anybody about what happened". He went on to explain that while there may be some "good people", he has never seen them "speaking out against…all the wrongs and all the um unequal stuff". Further exemplifying silencing and erasures, Mick used the example of the memorialising of the Anzacs[6] to highlight the way Aboriginal histories of suffering are silenced.

Well, take for instance the um, the white race, Europeans say, now they got, next year, they got um 100 years celebration of the Anzacs, that's in your face…how they, you know how they went over and fought for this country and all that, and the pain and the suffering they went through and they still going through it, their families still going through it, you know they still cry today when they talk about their grandfathers and great grandfathers that went to war and ah. Yet us Noongars been at war here for the last 200 years, you know…with the Governments.

The stories shared also highlighted the continuity of racism at an interpersonal level, as captured in the excerpt below:

Mick: 'cause when they go to the white, wadjela things, well they don't feel, they don't feel right; they feel like they're trespassing… You take this place, up here, the rec (i.e., Recreation) centre, you go there you get all these looks at ya, and

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[6] Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACS).

you, think you've done something wrong or something for just walking in there…like I say you feel like you're intruding, they give you funny looks.

This is in line with Walter's (2010) discussion of disregard, which continues to characterise the lived experience of Aboriginal people.

6.2 "This is Where it all Stems from": The Psychosocial Legacy

The third community narrative highlighted the psychosocial impacts of dispossession for Aboriginal identities and subjectivities, as well as a cycle of despair produced in conditions of oppression that are transferred inter-generationally. Highlighting the implications for subjectivities, Mick said, "a lot of people think that everything's alright you know, but it's not". He problematised the desire for white Australia to "leave it buried in the past", stating that, "the past is always here with us, you know, you can't get away from it until you die". Mick emphasised that unless you "live it everyday day", you will not understand what life is like for Aboriginal people "'cause your brain, never been to that place before so you can't, you know, bring yourself to get that, to see, or get that feeling of how, what I feel".

The idea that Aboriginal people are shy or frightened people, was often expressed by Elders', which might be understood as a consequence of subordination and the internalisation of inferiority. For example, in the excerpt below, Frank emphasised the need for Aboriginal young people to speak up and not be frightened which points to the impacts of this history on Aboriginal subjectivities.

They are shy people you know, they are shy, Aboriginal people are shy…don't want to talk. Don't be frightened to talk, talk, tell people what you want, where you want to go, 'cause otherwise you not going to get anywhere.

Each of the Elders who participated in the storytelling workshop relayed a similar message to the students about being proud of who they are and not worrying about the colour of their skin.

The Elder's often expressed concern for young people being "led astray", and about them being their "lost generation" (Caroline). The threat of going down the wrong path or being led astray is revealing of the intergenerational impacts of oppression and the continuity of structural, cultural, and interpersonal forms of racialised colonial violence.

Further highlighting the legacy for Aboriginal subjectivities, Mick discussed how fear was put into Noongars and how he is "still a bit fearful":

We was fearful. I'm still a bit fearful myself. When we was young, we see the police or welfare people come (*Smacks hands together*). We used to take off running in the bush, hiding, and they used to come and say "what you running for, what you done, you done something wrong? Hmm", you know, trying to get us to retaliate and then they take us for anything so that's the way it's, it came down through history and it's still going that way.

The Elders' stories also highlighted the insidious and cumulative impacts, which are expressed at an individual and community level and transferred intergenerationally. The Elders' emphasised that what they, and previous generations, have been through, is "still being carried by" their young people (Caroline). For example, Caroline said: "All of that fell back on our kids unna, our families now. That is why they have never progressed … from when the white people came over…. Living in that era has an impact on our people now".

Highlighting the extent of child removal, Caroline stated: "every family was affected. Every one of our extended family and immediate family right through was affected by being in a mission". Caroline described the devastating impact of child removal on the family unit, and alluded to the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma (Gone, 2013). She explained: "It's just there's something that I couldn't, I couldn't um tap into at the time that there was a, there was a space in between our lives that never…between me and my children's, there was a space". She understood this "space" as a result of her and her husband both being "mission kids". She identified the struggles that the children of "mission kids" go through, such as drug and alcohol abuse, incarceration, having their own children taken, as the intergenerational impacts of child removal policies of the past. From her view, "whatever we went through, maybe they could've went through in life, but no speaking about it because it's a quiet silent thing". Caroline emphasised that while she could share these stories with the Aboriginal students, she is not able to tell her own children.

Many Elders' spoke about how being taken to a mission broke people's spirits and often lead to alcoholism and suicide. Enid commented, for example: "a lot of them were sent to drink, you know what happened to them, and some committed suicide". The stories thus captured the cycle of despair and dysfunction produced in conditions of oppression. The issue of feuding, which has been understood using the notion of lateral violence (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011), was often evident in the stories.

7. Conclusion

This research sought to understand and explicate the experience of oppression by drawing on stories shared by Noongar Elders in the context of a community arts project. These were stories from positions of alterity that are often silenced within the post-colonising Australian context. Together the community narratives exemplify the accumulation of dispossession and its cumulative and insidious impacts, connecting the past with present lived realities (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). The stories showed the harms produced by oppression, which the Elder's understood as transmitted intergenerationally.

These stories demonstrate that in order to understand issues currently facing Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities, it is necessary to recognise the interconnectedness of structure and lives, and the historicity and relationality of dispossession and privilege (Apfelbaum, 2000; Fine & Ruglis; Segalo et al., 2015). By listening to stories of those from positions of alterity, the circuits and consequences of dispossession are exposed (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Moreover, in the spaces created for storytelling and the recovery of historical memory, those from positions of alterity are given the opportunity to name their suffering and to have their suffering and its insidious and cumulative impacts, recognised and acknowledged (Segalo et al., 2015; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The naming of dispossession and suffering by Aboriginal people in the Australian post-colonising context is particularly important in challenging stock stories (Bell, 2010) or dominant cultural narratives (Rappaport, 2000), that locate the source of the problem in Aboriginal people and culture, and deny, minimise, or silence the reality of coloniality, by and within which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjectivities are constituted.

The larger research project that this article draws from explores the significance of the stories from the perspective of differently positioned social subjects (i.e., Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults and young people), to interrogate the pedagogical role of these stories both within and beyond Aboriginal communities. Given that Aboriginal people are a subordinated minority, the importance of these counter-stories as resources for public pedagogy that can

awaken a sense of injustice in those in dominant subject positions, cannot be overstated (Deutsch, 2006; Fine, 2006; Quayle et al., 2016). These stories are also important in affirming and reclaiming identity, culture, and belonging within Aboriginal communities (Smith, 2012). Whilst, we recognise the importance of capturing the many stories of Aboriginal people—not only stories of disruption and loss, dysfunction and despair, but also the stories of resilience, resistance, survival, and cultural continuity despite systematic efforts at annihilation, an exploration of this aspect of the research was beyond the scope of this paper.

By partnering CAN in their collaboration with Noongar people in the Wheatbelt (see Sonn & Quayle, 2012), we continue to honour the knowledge and struggles of Aboriginal people in post-colonising Australia, recognise the damage caused by oppression but ensuring damage, dysfunction, trauma is not all we see, and to challenge collective lies that construct Aboriginal people and culture as the problem, thus blaming the victims of dispossession for their suffering. Such work is considered central for a decolonising praxis for psychology (Segalo et al., 2015), or a transformative psychosocial praxis (Stevens, Duncan, & Sonn, 2013).

Acknowledgement

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