

Intersectional Lives

Chinese Australian Women in White Australia

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Chapter 2

Intersectionality and postcolonial feminist geography as a way of inclusion

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2 Intersectionality and postcolonial feminist geography as a way of inclusion

This book reconstructs past geographies (historical geographies) of Chinese Australian women and, as such, is situated in the 'borderland' of history and geography (to borrow a phrase from Darby 1953: 1). Within the sub-discipline of historical geography, feminist concerns and perspectives have begun to emerge, although this has been a relatively late and somewhat uneasy development (Morin and Berg 1999: 312). In 1988, Rose and Ogborn made the first call to historical geographers to consider feminism, claiming that 'the theoretical and empirical achievements of feminism in increasing our understanding of past societies have been almost completely ignored in the sub-discipline' (Rose and Ogborn 1988: 405). By ignoring feminist perspectives and approaches taken up in other areas of the discipline and across the social sciences and humanities, Rose and Ogborn (1988) argued that the gender-blindness and patriarchal assumptions within the sub-discipline would not be revised or corrected. Women would consequently remain marginalised and hidden from the geographies of the past: 'disappear[ing] from the reconstructed past as if they had never been' (Rose and Ogborn 1988: 405). According to Rose and Ogborn (1988), 'this is a political act [as it] demeans women's historical roles in society, the economy and the polity and so helps sustain their present oppression' (p: 405).

Other feminist geographers were quick to follow Rose and Ogborn's call. In North America, Kay (1989, 1990, 1991) critiqued the androcentrism of frontier historical geographies and called for a reassessment and insertion of women into historical narratives. Kay (1991) identified three dominant gender biases in existing North American historical geographies. They were: (1) the invisibility of women as subjects in historical geographies; (2) authors' androcentric and ethnocentric biases about people in the past; and (3) assumptions that societies and communities refer to both men and women (as well as White and coloured experiences; see also Kay 1990). According to Kay (1990, 1991), when women did appear in historical geographies they were not referred to as actors in the context of standard geographic themes relating to regional expansion and settlement. Instead, women were constructed within the context of sexual relations and reproductive roles as wives or families of men.

Through Kay's feminist critique, we can see some similarities between North American frontier historical geographies and existing literature examining Chinese settlement in Australia. The 'grand narrative' histories of Australia's White settlement have been broadened and stridently challenged to include non-European migrants and Indigenous Australians as well as more localised and individual histories. However, there is still much room to reassess our understandings of the White Australia period. The patriarchal assumptions that have permeated the regional historical geographies of North America have also dominated understandings of twentieth-century Chinese Australia. For example, like the women who participated in the regional development of the United States and Canada, Chinese Australian women have been largely rendered invisible in the understanding of Chinese migration and settlement in both urban and regional areas. This invisibility has been due to the construction of Chinese Australian history as a history of men and their economic activities, or because Chinese Australian men's activities and experiences have been generalised to include the experiences of women. When Chinese Australian women have been mentioned in the literature, they have been constructed as dependents of their male counterparts. Thus, following Kay's (1990) argument that this treatment of women 'leads to logical fallacies and factual contradictions' (p: 620; see also Kay 1991), I also argue (and will demonstrate in the following chapters) that existing literature regarding Chinese Australian history has largely perpetuated inaccurate understandings of Australia's past. Chinese Australian men's histories cannot be understood as complete histories of Chinese Australian migration and settlement. Like Kay (1990, 1991), I do not demean the importance of existing male-oriented literature in uncovering the experiences, roles, identities and contributions of Chinese Australian males to the settlement and development of Australia in the twentieth century. However, they must be identified and understood as such.

The feminist advances in historical geography established by Rose, Ogborn and Kay have inspired and informed the research presented in *Invisible Lives*. In this chapter, I will trace these advances to establish the central theoretical and methodological position of this book¹. I will pay particular attention to the postcolonial feminist approaches which have moved to decolonise the sub-discipline (and geographical research more broadly), privileged women's voices and experiences, and utilised intersectionality as a conceptual and methodological tool. In this chapter, I also detail the way in which I have uncovered previously invisible lives and experiences of Chinese Australian women through interviews and re-reading of historical census data. This functions to demonstrate how and why postcolonial feminist approaches can be used in practical terms to bridge the gaps between history and geography, historical geography and postcolonial feminism. I hope the transparency of my approach and reflections inspire (and perhaps guide) other researchers to revisit the archives, draw on postcolonial perspectives, utilise intersectional approaches, and be creative in the ways in which information about seemingly obscure and hard to reach realms of our histories and geographies can be uncovered.

Revisiting the national epic and including 'home' and household geographies

In order to negate the androcentrism of North American historical geographies and near absence of interactions with feminist perspectives, Kay (1989, 1990, 1991) made a number of recommendations. She urged geographers to look towards historical research which had been influenced by feminism and were making important contributions to the understanding of women's roles and experiences in frontier expansion and development (Kay 1989). In her call to correct the gender imbalance, Kay (1991: 441) also advocated a reinterpretation of national epic style historical geographies. Historical geographers could, she argued, include women's roles in the specific themes of the national epic such as earning a living, working the land and migration. More attention could also be paid to the individual experiences of actors in the national epic rather than summarising male-centred expansion and settlement experiences. Additionally, rather than focusing on spaces and places at large scales which ensured a bias towards male public activities such as neighbourhoods and towns, Kay advocated a shift in attention towards smaller scales such as the household. This would allow women's (and others') roles in the domestic economy to be made visible. While being careful not to perpetuate definitions of the public/economic/male and private/domestic/female spheres, Kay suggested a shift to smaller scales would allow an inclusion of women's economic activities. This dual economy model also provides space to consider the experiences of other ethnic groups who were excluded from the larger scale export economy (Kay 1991: 445).

Kay's call to pay attention to the more personal space of the house and home in historical geographies was followed by similar calls made by feminist geographers within and beyond the sub-discipline. As Blunt (2005) asserted, the domestic sphere is 'material and affective space' that is most often embodied by women and 'shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions' (Blunt 2005: 506; see also Massey 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Blunt and Rose 1994; Domosh 1998; and Blunt and Varley 2004). Importantly, postcolonial feminists have found that, like other 'places', the household is not fixed or neutral 'but a geographically and historically dynamic social institution in which gender is embedded and negotiated' (Chant 1998: 5). Given that postcolonial feminism focuses on women's multiple identities, different experiences and positions within various power structures and relations (i.e. intersectionality), postcolonial feminists in geography have thus explored the ways in which the 'home' and household are constructed differently for and by different women (Blunt and Rose 1994; Silvey 2006; see, for example, Yeoh and Huang 2000; Dwyer 2002; Chapman 2003; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Quinn 2010; and Ratnam 2018, 2020). This is based on the assertion that spaces and places 'are not neutral backdrops or uncomplicated stages for people's lives' or 'simply containers within which social relations develop' (Pratt and Hanson 1994: 25). Rather, '[p]laces are constructed through social processes and, so too, social relations are constructed in and through space' (Pratt and Hanson 1994: 25). Identities and experiences are thus constituted in different ways in different places (Pratt and

Hanson 1994: 6; see, for example, Radcliffe 1994; Peake 1993). Such understandings challenge dominant Western feminist understandings of the household as a universal site of patriarchal subordination.

Since Kay's initial prompts and alongside advances in postcolonial feminist geography, historical examinations of the complex ways in which the domestic sphere has functioned as a site of identity construction, survival and/or resistance have emerged. For example, Blunt's (2000) examination of British women's experiences in India during the Lucknow uprising/siege of 1957 highlighted the way in which 'home' functioned as a space of survival rather than 'embodied and domestic defilement' (p: 229). In a similar way, her following work explored the complex relationships between the concepts of home, identity and nationality for Anglo-Indians in colonial India. Blunt (2002) found that the domesticity of Anglo-Indian women (particularly mothers) often took on a political role—being central to a 'new' national Indian identity that served to resist British imperialism. Blunt has also examined the complex nature of experiences of 'home' among Anglo-Indian migrant women in the West (including Australia), which is particularly pertinent to this book. For example, by examining first-hand accounts of life in the late 1940s and 1950s Britain, Blunt (2008) argued that domestic challenges associated with settling into an unfamiliar culture and lifestyle were felt mostly by Anglo-Indian women, yet their adaptation to their new home can be viewed not simply as a narrative of domestic servitude but also as a story of survival and success. In light of these historical geographies of home and homemaking, the private realm can be viewed as a dynamic site of transformative potential (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 215)².

As these historical geographies highlight, feminist geographers have also been centrally concerned with bringing into focus the links between the public and private 'to challenge and reformulate the simple categorization of home with domestic and private spheres' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 16). According to feminist geographical perspectives, no longer can the public and private spheres be imagined as disparate geographical locations in which the private is the site of the feminine, familial, domestic, and non-economic, completely outside and irrelevant to the public sphere of the masculine, work/production, and politics. Instead, critical examinations of the public/private dichotomy have found that the public and private are interdependent. Thus, home 'is best understood as a site of intersecting spheres, constituted through both public and private' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 18; see, for example, England and Stiell 1997). As such, not only are 'the intersections of public and private in creating homes [...] geographically and historically specific', but are shaped by 'processes of commerce, imperialism and politics' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 18–19). The experiences of Anglo-Indian women and British women in colonial India in the above-mentioned work of Blunt highlight the intrinsic links between the domestic and the political in geographies of the past. However, the historical blurring of public/private domains has also been examined by feminist geographers in regard to the important interconnections of home and work. For example, Cope (1998) has explored the relationship between home and work for wool mill workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts between 1920 and 1939 and the way in which gender

and ethnicity functioned in the construction of place. Similarly, the work of McGurty (1998) on settlement house workers and their efforts at garbage reform in Chicago at the turn of the nineteenth century is also useful in highlighting the relationship between home and work in a specific historical and geographical context. These postcolonial feminist ways of conceptualising ‘homes’ and ‘homemaking’ are adopted in this book to provide a lens through which to assess the complex relationship between ‘inside’/private and ‘outside’/public spheres in Australia’s past. For example, I will demonstrate in Chapter 4 that some Chinese Australian women physically blurred the boundaries between the public and the private by participating in family businesses, either in subordinate positions or in the ‘front of house’. However, on a more conceptual level, when women’s ‘homemaking’ and unpaid work are acknowledged as important contributions to family economies/economic survival, the blurring of the public and private spheres and the empowering potential of the domestic realm can be seen.

Overcoming ‘numerical paucity’ and methodological challenges

Kay (1989) also argued that an inclusion of women in North American historical geographies could be achieved if ‘historical geographers [do not] assume that low percentages of women in some regions correlated with obscurity’ (p: 304). She illustrated this point by highlighting a small sample of women in frontier Montana who influenced public policies and had significant impacts on the much larger cohort of men in the region. Kay’s (1989) findings raise an important and relevant point—the presence of a relatively small number of women does not warrant exclusion from research. As I discussed in the previous chapter, many researchers have justified their focus on Chinese Australian men (and disregard of Chinese Australian women) on the basis that there simply were not enough women present in Australia to warrant investigation. However, like the Montana women at the centre of Kay’s study, the relatively small number of Chinese Australian women did influence the wider public, economic and political arena (see, for example, Couchman 2004; Khoo and Noonan 2011; Martínez 2011; Kamp 2018; and Fong 2021). And, beyond these ‘large scale’ impacts, I reiterate Loh’s (1986) argument that the day-to-day activities and experiences of Chinese Australian women also need to be investigated for a more complete understanding of Chinese Australian historical geographies.

Despite Rose and Ogborn’s (1988) general calls for more gender-balanced research, Kay’s more specific critiques of North American scholarship, and the emergence of feminist historical geographies that examine the blurred boundaries between the public and private, historical geographies have largely continued to lack engagement with feminist perspectives and approaches. In Morin and Berg’s (1999) terms, ‘this subfield often seems like one of the last bastions of empirical geography complicit with masculinist language and values’ (p: 315). Indeed, as is the case for feminist research across the social sciences and humanities, feminist historical geography remains on the margins of the sub-discipline. Domosh and Morin (2003) suggested that ‘institutional problems’ are not the only factor that has shaped the ‘uneven travels of feminist historical geography’

(p: 262). Methodological difficulties in incorporating historical analysis into feminist geographies are also an obstacle in bridging the two sub-fields. While both historical geography and feminist geography are largely based on qualitative research methods, the qualitative methods favoured by feminist geographers are ethnographic—‘bottom up’—in nature. Thus, there is the obvious limitation for feminist geographers to conduct research ‘from below’ on long-deceased historical subjects. Domosh and Morin (2003) highlighted that this incongruity between research content and method therefore ‘raises the thorny issue of for whom is historical geography research conducted?’ (p: 262) and whether historical geography, in lacking specific subjects to emancipate, lacks political weight.

The methodological incongruities do not end there. While feminist geographers privilege ethnographic methods, historical geographies largely rely on historical documents housed in archives. These documents have generally been produced and stored by society’s elites—White, heterosexual, literate men—and thus are limited in their ability to contribute to reconstructing historical geographies that include women and other previously (or continually) marginalised groups. As an alternative, non-traditional sources can sometimes be used to uncover women’s historical geographies, but when that is not possible the challenge is to ‘[discover] appropriate strategies for approaching the archives and reading the silences embedded in them’ (Domosh and Morin 2003: 262).

Moves to correct the gender lacuna

Notwithstanding such limitations, it would be imprudent to overlook the small and important body of feminist historical geographies that has begun to overcome such conceptual and methodological obstacles. In North America, this emergent body of research has been informed by postcolonial theories and has taken into account the interplay of multiple axes of difference (race, ethnicity, culture, class as well as gender) in past geographies (Morin and Berg 1999). For example, Schuurman (1998) examined the movements of First Nations women between their own communities and White settler society (in the form of cohabitation and marriage) in colonial British Columbia, Canada. By providing a postcolonial feminist reading of official colonial records, Schuurman’s (1998) study can be seen as a “protest [...] against the [White, masculinist] narratives which have marked settler society” (p: 155). Not only did Schuurman insert First Nations women into understandings of colonial Canada which have previously, almost exclusively, focused on White men, but she also allowed their position as mobile actors in the colonial context to be revealed. In this way, Schuurman’s study questioned the legitimacy of dominant (colonial) discourse and “unsettle[d] the history of colonial power (Schuurman 1998: 155). Other important feminist historical geographies in North America include the work of Gulley (1993), Kobayashi and Peake (1994), Morin (1995), Heffernan and Medlicot (2002), Dua (2007), and Zagumny and Pulsipher (2008).

Historical geographies in the United Kingdom and other White settler societies such as Australia and New Zealand have also followed the North American lead, engaging with feminist theories and methods to uncover particular

geographies of migrant and Indigenous groups and females in national histories (Morin and Berg 1999; UK examples include Rose 1997; Blunt 2000; Tamboukou 2000; McDowell 2004; and Wainwright 2007). It cannot be denied, however, that feminist contributions to Australian historical geography continue to be marginal. Some examples of works in the small body of research include Teather's (1990) investigation of the use of literature and official documents to uncover the nature of working-class women's experiences in post-war inner-Sydney; Teather's (1992) examination of the role and impacts of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales between 1922 and 1992; Anderson's (1995) examination of the history of representational practices at the Adelaide Zoo³; Gleeson's (2001) investigation of domestic space and disability in nineteenth-century Melbourne; and McKewon's (2003) historical geography of female prostitution in Perth. Within this literature, historical geographies that focus on or specifically include the experiences of non-White women in Australia are few and far between. Exemplary works include Fincher's (1997) discussion of immigrant women's representation in post-WWII Australian immigration selection and Ramsay's (2003) investigation of the complex negotiations of place identity in Charbourg's 'Chinatown' in the early twentieth century—in which Princy Carlo, an Indigenous woman of mixed Chinese descent, played a central role.

Invisible Lives contributes to this small, yet important, sub-disciplinary field and draws particular parallels to North American literature. For example, despite obvious differences between the Canadian study conducted by Schuurman (1998) and my own research on Chinese Australian women in White Australia, some commonalities are evident. Like Schuurman's (1998) investigation, my research focuses on a group of women who have been largely excluded from male-oriented understandings of the national development of a White settler society. Schuurman's (1998) study and my own both move beyond traditional assumptions of women's positions as dependants of men within the national narrative. Instead, women are positioned as active agents. While the First Nations women at the centre of Schuurman's research showed initiative and agency in their active pursuit of relationships with White men, my research investigates the active role Chinese Australian women played within the family and broader social/economic contexts. Both Schuurman (1998) and I also took into account intersectionality, that is, issues of patriarchy, race, class and gender, in examinations of the experiences of these previously invisible women.

Intersectional Lives focuses on a group of women whose historical lives are still within the reach of living memory. As such, it is uniquely positioned to demonstrate how some of the methodological barriers between historical geography and feminist geography can be overcome. It is also positioned to demonstrate how the perspectives and approaches of history and geography can be bridged for fruitful research (following on from the work of Clayton 2000; Anderson 2018; Gorman-Murray et al. 2018; Gibson and Warren 2018; and Darian-Smith and Nichols 2018). And finally, its methodological approach provides insights into the ways in which we can move away from colonising research traditions in history, geography and the broader social sciences.

In the remainder of this chapter, I detail what this approach looks like in real terms. I position intersectionality not just as a theoretical perspective, but as a methodological approach that can be used to avoid the Orientalist perils of ‘monolithic Othering’ and instead understand the diverse lived intersectional experiences of women. I also reflect on the use of colonialist tools (such as census records) for postcolonial purposes, the documentation of women’s own voices and perspectives, and my own positionality. While this book as a whole indicates how these methods and approaches facilitate a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural construction of spaces, knowledges, identities and power relations in Australia’s past, they can also be adapted and built upon for investigations of other national contexts and sites therein. I, therefore, hope to provide further impetus for researchers in other contexts to revise dominant understandings of identity and belonging across time and place, take on the methodological challenges of examining ‘subaltern’ lives of the past (and present), and consider the defining role of gender, race and class (among other subject positions) in our everyday experiences.

Postcolonial feminism and intersectional approaches in geography

Feminists, particularly anti-racist feminists and feminists of colour, have been increasingly engaged with postcolonial critiques established and developed by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (e.g., Mohanty 1984, 2003; hooks 1981, 1989, 2000; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Lake 1993; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Raju 2002; Rajan and Park 2007; and Ahmed 2017). Emerging alongside postcolonial demands for constant interrogation and self-reflexivity, ‘enabl[ing] a wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power’ (Mongia 1996: 2), these relatively recent feminist approaches no longer privilege women’s shared gendered experience of patriarchal oppression. Rather, the focus is on women’s multiple identities, different experiences, and marginalisations within various power structures and relations—what is now commonly referred to as ‘intersectionality’ (after Crenshaw 1989). Via intersectional frameworks and approaches (of which there are many, see Carbado et al. 2013), we are able to move beyond arguments of the centrality of gendered identity, no longer simplifying women as ‘women first’ and Black, working-class or lesbian second (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Johnson 2000; and Ahmed 2017). This shift is pertinently illustrated in hooks’ discussion of American imperialism:

Despite the predominance of patriarchal rule in American society, America was colonized on a racially imperialistic base and not on a sexually imperialistic base. No degree of patriarchal bonding between white male colonizers and Native American men overshadowed white racial imperialism. Racism took precedence over sexual alliances in both the white world’s interaction with Native Americans and African Americans, just as racism overshadowed any bonding between black women and white women on the basis of sex. [...] In fact, white racial imperialism granted all white women, however

victimized by sexist oppression they might be, the right to assume the role of oppressor in relationship to black women and black men.

(hooks 1981: 122–123)

Within the context of American colonisation, shared experiences of gendered oppression did not unite White women and women of colour, and thus gender should not be privileged in analyses of these women's experiences. Rather, hooks suggested that the experiences of these women should be addressed in regards to their differing positions of power within the imperialist framework⁴. In this vein, feminists have moved towards the possibility of many 'feminisms' within the context 'of past and ongoing imperial power relations' (Johnson 2000: 5, 152).

Theories of intersectionality and developments in the full acknowledgement of power relations and differences between women (and men) have, once again, turned the feminist critique towards (Western) feminism itself. Postcolonial theorisations and critiques from feminists of colour within and beyond Western academic traditions have highlighted that inclusions of females of colour and females in other marginal positions in research have actually reinforced unequal power relations between White Western feminists and the females they seek to represent (see, for example, Mohanty 1984). This is because, in attempts to acknowledge difference, females of colour have been represented as a 'singular monolithic subject'—the 'third-world woman', or more recently, the woman of the 'Global South' (Mohanty 1984: 333; see also Gandhi 1998). There has been the continued assumption that the experiences of White, heterosexual, middle-class women are the 'norm' against which all other females are measured or compared and thus females of colour (and working class and homosexual, etc.) have been constructed as the 'Other'. In the case of the 'non-White female Other', constructions have particularly followed the lines of the 'exotic Other', the 'oppressed Other', or the 'victimised Other' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983). Feminist geography has not been immune to such categorising assumptions. While feminist geographers have increasingly worked towards recognition of difference—spatial and social—between women/females, there have been criticisms that the White, western, heterosexual, middle-class assumptions of feminist geographers continue to focus research (Christopherson 1989; McDowell 1991; and Johnson 2000). In doing so, it has been argued that feminist geographers have continued to silence and/or marginalise females of colour and thus feminism is directly linked to imperialist processes (hooks 1981; Kobayashi 1994; and Johnson 2000: 6).

One way in which females' experiences can be assessed without resorting to imperialist representations of monolithic 'Otherness' is to understand and acknowledge female diversity in terms of social positions, roles, and differing/intersecting marginalisations—the core of intersectional approaches. This can be achieved through the comparison of different communities or discussions of differences *within* communities in terms of class, religion, age and other social indicators (Ganguly 1995: 39). For example, the work of Mohammad (1999) on Muslim Pakistani women in Southern England highlighted the necessity of

acknowledging and understanding differences within 'Other' groups. Her study found that experiences and views on education and employment, the upkeep of Pakistani traditions such as dress, female roles in the family and marriage, as well as willingness to accept or contest 'group' identity, were in no way homogenous. Rather, experiences and opinions differed according to age and whether the women were British-born and/or raised. Like the participants in Mohammad's (1999) study, the Chinese Australian women at the centre of this book differed in regards to a variety of social indicators (e.g., age, class, education/employment status, whether they are migrant or Australian-born, place of residence, marital status) and as such, their experiences differed. Therefore, informed by Mohammad's (1999) approach, Chinese Australian female experiences are examined in this book in relation to their varied identities and subject positions within multiple structures of power. In this way, I seek to acknowledge 'internal' differences and reduce the risk of 'Othering'.

Postcolonial and intersectional approaches have also prompted questions as to how (or if) researchers can ever unproblematically conduct research outside one's own class, racial and privileged position (Johnson 2000; see Peake 1993: 19–20; Kobayashi 1994, Raju 2002; and Staeheli and Nagar 2002). More particularly, the authority of White, middle-class women to represent 'those who remain on the margins' has been challenged (Kobayashi 1994; see, for example, hooks 1981, 1991; Lorde 1984; and Spivak 1988). Implicit in these concerns is the question of who is speaking for whom and the consequences for such representations. Researchers are no longer viewed as 'a disembodied, rational, sexually indifferent subject—a mind unlocated in space, time or constitutive interrelationships with others' (Grosz 1986). They occupy privileged positions in having the power to obtain information from the 'researched', to interpret that data, and disseminate it (Oakley 1981; and Winchester 1996). The research is more than likely a contributing factor to the researcher's academic credit and career. Thus, there exists a 'socio-political distance between the researcher and the "researched"' (Moss 1995: 82). Feminist and postcolonial academics have argued that when this 'gap' (as termed by Moss 1995) is exploited, discourses of colonisation and imperialist processes are maintained. This has been particularly highlighted when research 'subjects' are in more socially, economically, or politically disadvantaged positions than the researcher. But rather than abandon social research that focuses on women unlike themselves (ethnically, economically, sexually, etc.), White feminists (and other researchers engaged with the postcolonial critique and intersectional approaches) have come to understand the relationship between the researcher and the researched and how they can use their privileged positions to socially just ends (e.g., England 1994; and Kobayashi 1994, 2007).

In geography, feminist considerations of differences among women and ways of including 'Other' groups in research are particularly pertinent due to the discipline's historical ties to processes of colonisation. Just as mapping, 'discovery' of new places and people, and the documentation and description of such discoveries—precursors to the discipline—were historically (predominantly) the endeavours of men, such endeavours were also central to European imperialist

expansion and colonisation. As Johnson (2000: 163) explains, map-making and 'the construction of 'othered' places through forms of description' facilitated acts of invasion and European settlement. Hudson (1977) has argued that modern geography itself continued this relationship with Empire. According to his essay, geography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was promoted 'to serve the interests of imperialism in its various aspects including territorial acquisition, economic exploitation, militarism and the practice of class and race domination' (Hudson 1977: 12 as cited in Driver 1992: 27; see also Wood 1992; Duncan and Sharp 1993; and Duncan 1993). Postcolonialism has therefore not only prompted feminist geographers to reinsert the silenced or 'subaltern' in research and consider the diversity of intersectional experiences, it has also prompted geographers to move towards revealing the ways in which the discipline has been grounded in acts of colonisation and oppression. Furthermore, the ways in which the discipline continues to be implicated in the process of colonisation—by ignoring or minimising issues of racism, ethnic difference and power structures in research—have been critically examined (Peake 1993; Smith 1994; and Johnson 2000: 162). For example, a growing body of postcolonial geographies has emerged in Australia and overseas that address ongoing power relations in and across place and space (Johnson 2000; see, for example, Keith and Pile 1993; Massey 1994; Radcliffe 1994; Sibley 1995; and Jacobs 1996). My own research project follows in a similar vein via its conceptual and methodological grounding in understandings of intersectionality. Of my particular concern is the way in which colonialist (and nationalist) discourses represent females, particularly females of colour.

There is an interesting tension to be noted here between locating, mapping and knowing as a colonialist move, and unearthing, hearing and bringing to the fore the subaltern experience as advocated by postcolonial geographers. This book plays on this tension by drawing attention to the ways in which 'colonialist' tools central to geography's tradition can be used for postcolonial agendas. That is, just as early geographic endeavours were concerned with the documentation of places and the people in those locations in order to bring such knowledge back to the Western world, this book documents the experiences of a 'subaltern' group of people in order to make them visible to the broader community. However, rather than utilising such documentation of people and places for the purpose of oppression and other colonialist motives, this book aims to give voice to the 'subaltern' group and provide a space in which they can be more carefully present in understandings of Australia's past. Thus, I point to the fine line within geographic research between tools of oppression and tools of emancipation, and highlight the powerful postcolonial capability of the discipline.

Listening to women's voices

One strategy called upon by feminists to ensure colonialist tendencies are not perpetuated is the provision of a space in which previously (or continually) silenced women (and men) can have their *own* voices heard (Radcliffe 1994; and Johnson 2000). This follows research 'from below' approaches used by historians

and subaltern studies scholars who aim to allow previously silenced groups to be 'the subjects of their own history' (Chakrabarty 2005: 472; Sharp 2011). Geographers have also begun to engage with the experiences of subaltern groups such as migrants, however, it is feminist geographers who have particularly answered calls to insert the voices of the colonised (including 'subaltern women') into the discipline (Peake 1993; Johnson 2000; see, for example, Hopkins 2010; Quinn 2010; and McDowell et al. 2012).

The research at the centre of this book privileged this approach and utilised in-depth interviews with nineteen women who identify themselves as being 'Chinese' and who were resident in Australia prior to 1973 (whether Australian-born or migrant; see Appendix A). Participants were also invited to volunteer any personal documents such as family photographs, newspaper clippings or birth/marriage/migration certificates that would aid in the understanding of their experiences, many of which have been included throughout this book. Participants' years of birth ranged from approximately 1920 to 1952. As such, participants' ages at the time of interviews ranged from between 57 and approximately 80 years of age. In addition, six of the interview participants are foreign-born, with the remaining thirteen being Australian-born. Of the six migrant participants, three were born in Hong Kong, two in mainland China, and one in New Zealand. All migrant participants arrived in the post-war period—between 1947 and 1971. Australian-born participants included second and third generation Australians, with some having forebears (male and female) who migrated to Australia as early as the 1860s (see Appendix A). While this group of participants is relatively diverse, the limitations of this sample must be acknowledged. Women who migrated in the first half of the twentieth century are under-represented with no women who migrated in the pre-war period being represented, and only one participant having migrated prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Information regarding the migrations of older-generation women was obtained in the form of Australian-born participants recalling the migration stories of their mothers or grandmothers. It is acknowledged that the passing of time may have impacted the 'accuracy' of participants' recollections and that experiences of the older generation of women (mothers) are recalled from daughters' perspectives (they are not first-hand accounts). Characteristic of qualitative research, the arrival at an 'objective truth' was not the aim of this project, but rather how individuals remember/perceive and voice their experiences.

Even with such limitations, interviews with these nineteen women provided an opportunity to record the voices and recollections of a group of individuals who had actually lived throughout the White Australia Policy period and gain insight into their feelings of identity and experiences across a variety of spatial and temporal contexts. This collection of first-hand accounts was not only a practical and efficient means of gathering experiential data which, in the words of Blunt and Dowling (2006) have 'remain[ed] hidden in more public historical narratives' (p: 34), but also provided important insight into their intersectional experiences and everyday realities throughout many stages of their life—in childhood at home and school, as young adults at university, as mothers and workers. By shifting focus away from the authoritative frameworks and views of

the dominant 'White' society and instead allowing previously 'invisible' Chinese Australian women a space to speak for themselves, hegemony was acknowledged and anti-elitist approaches were privileged. As such, Chinese Australian women played an important role in the research process.

While my approach places great value on research 'from below' and more specifically, the interview method, I do acknowledge that other researchers (particularly advocates of participatory action research) would be critical of interviews as a means to generate substantive empower/power dispersal. They would point to the need for the 'researched' to have a say in the project aims, method, protocols, etc. (see Pain 2004), for research to fully '[affirm] people's right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them' (Reason and Bradbury 2006: 10 cited in Klocker 2008: 31). In addition, it must also be acknowledged that interviews, as a research method, have been particularly scrutinised for the unequal power relations that they can exploit. The 'myth of neutral detachment' (Kobayashi 1994) has been replaced by understandings that the interviewer and interviewee are both positioned subjects who enter into a social relationship shaped by broader societal power structures (Kearns 1991; and Smith 2006: 647). Stemming from broader understandings of the researcher-researched relationship, it is assumed that interviewers are more 'powerful' than their participants in ultimately having control of the interview process and, where the interviewer is also the author, the interpretation and dissemination of results (Pile 1991; Winchester 1996: 122; and Smith 2006: 248). Due to the potentially exploitative capabilities of the interview process, postcolonial and feminist researchers have pointed to the need for constant critical self-reflexivity (Dowling 2005). As McDowell (1992: 409) has argued, as researchers 'we must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice rather than continue to hanker after some idealized equality between us'. By doing so, we can acknowledge and make visible the 'ways that knowledge is produced through the social relations of the interview' (Baxter and Eyles 1997: 510).

Such self-reflexivity in the research process has, however, indicated that the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee is not so rigidly defined. Scholars such as Smith (2006) and Pile (1991) have challenged unidirectional conceptions of power in interviews, claiming that 'the structures of power between the interviewer and the interviewed are complex and unstable' (Pile 1991: 464). As Smith (2006: 650) has argued in regards to interviews with societal 'elites':

'[a]lthough, in terms of authorship, the researcher (where this is also the author) *does* exert significant levels of power in relation to the voices of the researched, this does not necessarily mean that the researcher is always in a position of power within the research encounter'.

My own experiences of the interview process confirmed these assertions and was a stark reminder of the complexity of the lived reality of intersectionality. Within the interview process, the information obtained in our interactions was

generally unidirectional—I obtained information from the participant. Furthermore, I occupied (and continue to occupy) a privileged position by having the power to interpret, organise and disseminate that information in the form of this book and associated publications, lectures and other mediums. However, given my epistemological and political convictions, the collaborative and non-exploitative potential of the interview method was maximised. It was made clear to the interview participants that I was advocating their presence, contributions and experiences in the nation throughout the White Australia period, and as such would use their voices and recollections as a means of inclusion. In this way, I maintained a sense that the participants and their recollections were pivotal to my research project and broader public awareness and understanding. Furthermore, times and locations of interviews were chosen by participants, I maintained flexibility in the interview schedule to allow participants to speak about what they felt was important, and interview participants were able to edit their transcripts and provide additional information at later dates if desired. This ensured that informants were not exploited and maximised the postcolonial capabilities of the research.

The power relations between myself and participants were further complicated by our age, gender and ethnic backgrounds. Dowling (2005) has argued, as researchers,

... [w]e have overlapping racial, socio-economic, gender, ethnic, and other characteristics. If we have multiple social qualities and roles, as do our informants, then there are many points of similarity and dissimilarity between ourselves and research participants.

(p: 26)

This was a case in point during my own interview experience. As a female researcher who was in my mid-twenties at the time of interviewing and is of mixed Chinese-European ancestry, I was positioned as both insider and outsider—in a state of ‘betweenness’ to borrow the term from Nast (1994)—of the group of women that I was researching (see also Kobayashi 1994 and Dowling 2005). My role as researcher positioned me as an ‘outsider’ and my age and outward (‘White’) appearance further positioned me in this way (see also Kamp 2021b). It was perhaps because of my age and non-Chinese appearance that participants often took on a ‘teacher’ role, educating me about past times that I did not experience and cultural aspects that I did not (or which they assumed I did not) know about. In these instances, I not only felt like an outsider ‘looking in’, but the interview participants took on an empowered position. The ‘teacher’/‘student’ relation that was established between me and some of the interview participants was not only extremely useful in negating the exploitative potential of the interview method but also the collection of detailed and well explained qualitative data. My position as ‘outsider’ was, however, complicated by our shared gendered identity which, I am sure, contributed to the ease and comfort in which participants shared their experiences about gender roles and relationships, discrimination, etc. In this way, I was positioned as an ‘insider’ with the ability to share

some aspects of experience. My own Chinese ancestry brought further complexity to my insider/outsider status. Although I have Chinese ancestry, it is not clearly marked by my appearance. Therefore, I often found that participants were initially curious as to why I was researching Chinese women. It was usually in my responses to this question that I told participants of my Chinese ancestry. Interestingly, once women were knowledgeable of my Chinese heritage, I became, in a way, an insider—some participants asked me to share my own experiences and those of my ethnically Chinese mother or drew similarities between me and their children or grandchildren. As I aimed to maximise the collaborative and non-exploitative potential of the interview method, I always shared my own experiences when asked.

It is through such approaches that I assert that researchers can conduct postcolonial research outside their own subject positioning (arguably, we will never find another individual with identical subject positions as ourselves). It is clear that distance between White, Western, heterosexual, middle-class researchers and the ‘others’ whom they research have resulted in problematic divisions between researcher and researched. However, I believe it is important to emphasise that such distance has been the result of *constructed* (rather than innate) divisions between the ‘self’ (researcher) and ‘other’ (researched) (following Kobayashi’s 1994 assertion). It is important for researchers to acknowledge their own positions and lived experiences of intersectionality; however, it is not beneficial to accept that differences between researchers and research participants prevent the conducting of fruitful research.

Re-examining historical census data

In addition to presenting the voices of Chinese Australian women themselves, in *Intersectional Lives*, I also re-examine census data—a source of information typically associated with research ‘from above’. I utilise these official records as they provide the most accurate and efficient means of examining the diverse demographic characteristics of the total Chinese Australian female population throughout the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1973, the formal years of the White Australia Policy period, eight national censuses were conducted by the Commonwealth (later Australian) Bureau of Statistics. The first was conducted in 1911 and the last of the period in 1971⁵. Included in the census records were information on age, education, occupation/employment, marriage status, geographical location, birthplace, and length of residence of racially defined ‘Chinese’ females⁶. Given the breadth of the national censuses (in terms of population coverage, time span and information collected), they can be used to piece together a broad national picture of female presence, experience and contributions within various social contexts across time (e.g., within families, schools, workplaces, and communities). Furthermore, given that many researchers have used demographic information obtained from censuses and other official records to discount the inclusion of Chinese Australian females in research and analysis—pointing to low numbers to justify their ‘absence’ claims—I deemed it essential to revisit official sources of information to provide statistical evidence

of female Chinese Australian presence and thus correct the historical record. While nuanced or textured insights into the everyday lives of Chinese Australian women could not be obtained from these official records, their analysis did provide insight into the mobility, settlement, marriage, education and employment experiences of thousands of Chinese Australian women across the country. This information simply cannot be obtained elsewhere. Therefore, I was able to utilise the census records for postcolonial feminist purposes, that is, a means of 'putting women into' Australia's historical geography of Chinese settlement and national development.

Despite reservations about using racialised data, I decided that collecting and aggregating the data pertaining to females who were racially defined as 'Chinese' (both 'half-caste' and 'full-blood'), rather than those who were of Chinese nationality or birth, would be the most informative and relevant information. While the census of 1971 did ask respondents to identify their 'racial origin', the collected information was not provided in the subsequent census publications beyond Indigenous and non-Indigenous counts. This was perhaps a reflection of shifts in government attitudes towards racial identification. Given that I only examined census data that is contained in publicly available census reports, my analyses of racialised census data were therefore limited to the 1911–1966 date range (see Appendix B). I have also used this information as a marker of population size, and thus the presence of female Chinese Australians in the White Australia Policy era, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, while it is widely agreed that 'race' is a socially constructed category with no scientific or biological grounding, racial categories in censuses are important reflections of how social groups have been counted and classified in particular contexts. Just as Australian immigration policy can be understood as a way in which ideas of the White nation and those who belong in it have been constructed (see Fincher 1997), the racial categories in the Australian censuses reflect racial ideologies of the time and the way governments dealt with the 'colour issue'. Thus, the 'race' category provides insight into the ways in which Chinese Australian females were classified and racialised by authorities. Secondly, census data on 'race' have been directly linked to policy—in this case, perceived threats of 'coloured others' reflected in census data justified the White Australia Policy and its associated discriminatory legislation. In this way, the racial inventory would have had real impacts on the lives of Chinese women in Australia. Thirdly, despite the obvious inadequacy and racist underpinnings of the categorisations, 'race' provides the closest numerical reflection of those females who identified themselves as ethnically 'Chinese'. Using nationality or birthplace data would disregard those individuals who were Chinese nationals or China-born but did not define themselves as ethnically 'Chinese'. Similarly, utilising the latter categories as markers of 'Chinese' identity would overlook those 'Chinese' who were born in countries other than China or who were not Chinese nationals. Lastly, while categorisations of 'full-blood' and 'half-caste' are problematic on a variety of levels, their use in the censuses indicate the extent of racialisation in the period.

This use of data obtained from such colonialist classification systems may seem at odds with my postcolonial feminist epistemology. Earlier, I highlighted

my awareness that geographical research has, in the past, utilised racist tools to classify people and places. I also noted that there exists an interesting tension between these colonialist tools and postcolonial ways of unearthing, hearing and bringing to the fore, 'subaltern' experiences. My use of racialised census data exemplifies this tension. I have actively sought to undertake research that is not complicit in processes of colonisation yet I have used racialised data to identify population numbers and other demographic characteristics of 'Chinese' females who were present in the nation during the White Australia period. This tension has been negotiated in a variety of ways. I have not used these data uncritically but acknowledged the constructed nature and power dynamics of racial classification in the censuses. By doing so, I have not analysed census constructions/definitions of race as individuals' own feelings of cultural or ethnic identity. Furthermore, classifications of 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' were used in the censuses to *exclude* undesirable 'Other' groups from the broader White community and subsequently identify them as divergent from the national identity. I, on the other hand, have used the definitions and classifications created by Australian statisticians as a means for the *inclusion* of a 'subaltern' group—hence my use of the identifying term 'Chinese Australian'. I have utilised the same data to illustrate the diversity, presence and contributions of Chinese Australian women in the White Australia era. Therefore, I not only include this 'Other' group within the Chinese Australian community—commonly assumed to be a community of men—but also included them in broader understandings of national belonging.

My utilisation of racial data for *inclusive* research is particularly evident in my inclusion of 'half-caste' Chinese females. While some of these females may never have identified themselves as Chinese in day-to-day life, according to census definitions they could never be considered part of the European/White population. Therefore, I, unlike Choi (1975), have included 'half-caste' Chinese females in my understandings of the total Chinese female population in Australia. Another reason for their inclusion is that they reflect an important component of Chinese presence in Australia, that is the formation of intimate relationships between Chinese and non-Chinese Australians and Chinese-European families who were integral to the development of Chinese Australian communities (see Bagnall 2011). Thus, the inclusive connotations of 'half-caste' have been utilised.

Other geographers have also taken up 'colonialist tools' for postcolonial purposes in their research. For example, Barnett (1998) conducted a postcolonial reading of nineteenth-century accounts of African exploration published by the Royal Geographical Society in order to draw attention to 'the historical processes that condemned certain knowledges, meanings and subjects to a place outside the field of what was considered intelligible, rational and disciplined scientific discourse' (Barnett 1998: 248–249). His postcolonial re-reading of geographical discourse can be viewed within the broader area of Indigenous geographies—an area in which moves to 'de-colonise' the discipline through the use of what were colonialist practices have become particularly strident. In their guest editorial for a special edition of *Geographical Research*, Johnson et al. (2007) also commented on the shifting nature of the discipline's engagement with Indigenous peoples. They asserted that '[w]hile defining [I]ndigenous peoples was once asserted as

a clear and unambiguous process', a 'political imposition' (Johnson et al. 2007: 117), today the discipline's interactions with Indigenous people can and should be used to create postcolonial geographies which are 'concerned with breaking, and writing, the silences of the present as well as the past' (Gilmartin 2001: 35 quoted in Johnson et al. 2007: 119). The approach to census data I have used in this book parallels the postcolonial tenets of this emerging engagement with Indigenous geographies.

Historical geographies and contemporary contexts

It is often assumed that historical geographies are of no present relevance (Clayton 2000). However, by drawing connections between geographies of the past and their relations with the present, historical geographers have keenly argued the 'presentist' characteristics of historical geography research and thus advocated its relevance and utility (Clayton 2000). Morin and Berg (1999), for example, argued that:

...even geographies of the past are concerned with the present, even if they do not explicitly narrate a contemporary situation. Histories are almost always 'presentist'; they narrate the past in order to provide some understanding of the present.

(p: 313)

In a similar way, Schein (2001) asserted that 'historical geography is poised to contribute a sense of the past in themes that pervade contemporary geographic thought' (p: 10). In making such connections between past and present it has been argued that historical geographers may be able to reinstate the sub-discipline as central to the study of geography more broadly (as it was considered between the 1930s and 1960s) and provide important contributions to the wider social sciences and humanities (Schein 2001).

This book follows such notions. Indeed, through the uncovering and analysis of the experiences of Chinese Australian women in the White Australia period, my research provides insight into past understandings of Australian identity, belonging and exclusion. However, this research not only fills gaps in understandings of past Australian geographies; it also facilitates a clearer understanding of the contemporary Australian context and contributes to current thematic concerns regarding identity and difference across space and place. The link between past and present is also particularly pertinent to my research project as the women at the centre have left legacies in contemporary Australia, be they cultural, economic/business, or familial. Indeed, many of the women themselves are still living and thus, in understanding their past experiences, we are able to more fully understand and address their and their descendants' contemporary situation. In this way, *Invisible Lives* ties in with much broader debates on national identity, diversity, cohesion, multiculturalism and Australia's place within the Asian region. It also ties in with work on the politics of recognition which assert that acknowledging and recognising previously silenced histories—such

as Indigenous histories in Australia—can help processes of reconciliation (see, for example, Haebich 2000). While official apologies have been offered in other ‘Gold Mountain’ countries (Canada, the United States and New Zealand) to address previous discrimination and marginalisation of Chinese communities (see Li 2008; Beaglehole 2009; Blatz et al. 2009; and Edwards and Calhoun 2011), in Australia, such recognition of past injustices to this immigrant group remain overlooked (Han 2011; and Lowe Kelley 2011). In this way, the research I present in this book highlights the important role of feminist historical–geographical research in the Australian and broader global diaspora context.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish the central theoretical and methodological position of *Intersectional Lives*. I endeavoured to do this by first grounding the research presented here within the context of postcolonial feminist critiques and advances in (historical) geography. More specifically, I detailed calls made by feminist geographers to include women’s voices and experiences in research and illustrated ways in which conceptual and methodological challenges of working with ‘subaltern’ groups have been overcome. The research presented in *Intersectional Lives* has been inspired and informed by these previous critiques of ‘gender blind’ and colonial traditions of the discipline, and subsequent feminist advances. As such, this initial framing was essential in positioning this book’s contribution and perhaps, as a historical geographer, I was intent on locating the book within its own historical geography of academic research. I then moved on to provide detailed insights into how I have responded to feminist critiques, detailing the conceptual and methodological approaches used. In doing so, I hope the transparency of my approach and reflections (as well as the outcomes of my research presented in the following chapters) are useful and encourage others to take up the call to engage with postcolonial feminist historical geographies.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is derived in part from Kamp 2018, ‘Chinese Australian women’s ‘home-making’ and contributions to the family economy in White Australia’, *Australian Geographer*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 149–165, copyright the Geographical Society of NSW, available online: <http://www.tandonline.com/DOI:10.1080/00049182.2017.1327783>. This chapter is also derived in part from Kamp 2021a, ‘International migration and mobility experiences of Chinese Australian women in White Australia, 1901–1973’, in K. Bagnall and J. Martínez (eds.), *Locating Chinese Women: Historical Mobility between China and Australia*, HKU Press, Hong Kong, pp. 105–128 (Copyright Hong Kong University Press).
- 2 Beyond the sub-discipline of historical geography, see Burton’s (2003) study of twentieth-century Indian women’s memories of home in colonial India, and Johnson and Lloyd’s (2004) examination of the relationship between Australian women’s empowerment/disempowerment in the domestic realms of the 1940s and 1950s as constructed in women’s magazines.
- 3 Anderson’s contributions to the sub-discipline are not confined to the Australian context. See for example Anderson’s (1991) examination of racial discourse in Vancouver’s Chinatown.

- 4 hooks' theory of gendered and racial oppression in America was later adapted by the Australian historian, Jackie Huggins to describe the Australian colonial context. Huggins tailored hooks' words as follows: 'Australia was colonized on a racially imperialistic base and not on a sexually imperialistic base. No degree of patriarchal bonding between white male colonizers and Aboriginal men overshadowed white racial imperialism. White racial imperialism gave all white women the right to oppress Blacks—women and men' (Huggins 1987: 77).
- 5 The 'Federation Census' of 1901 was the last of the co-ordinated colonial censuses that were implemented in the later decades of the nineteenth century. While the date, the form, the questions and the occupation classifications were all standardised across the various state censuses of 1901, final results varied in their tabular presentation, for example, calculations of groupings. There were also subtle differences in who was included and excluded in the population (Wright 2011). It is for these reasons that I did not endeavour to include state census data for 1901 where it had not been previously aggregated.
- 6 A question regarding the 'race' of individuals was included in the Australian national census from the first national census in 1911 until 1966 and in a 'new guise' (to borrow the phrase from Horn 1987: 2) until 1981. For the first five national censuses (1911–1954), racial classification was dependant on self-reportage with non-European residents asked to classify their race according to the categories of 'full-blood' or 'half-caste', for example, 'full-blood' Chinese or 'half-caste' Chinese, as they had been in the colonial censuses up until 1901. Despite this self-reporting, the racial categories for data presentation were defined by the Commonwealth (later Australian) Bureau of Statistics.

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