# Women on the run don't cook:

# Responding differently

# to Intimate Partner Violence in

# Aotearoa New Zealand

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## Abstract

Intimate partner violence is a wicked problem in Aotearoa with no singular cause or solution, but what we do know about this social problem is produced through the Western, neoliberal knowledge economy that disregards the intersecting power relations that leave women vulnerable to gendered violence. Research and interventions into intimate partner violence produce and reproduce a statistical figure of violence that reinforces identity categories of difference as deficit that limits the visibility of Pākehā intimate partner violence and obscures institutional indifference to the impacts of gendered social power relations. The aim of this research, therefore, was to examine what possibilities emerge when we are no longer held captive by the dominance and legitimacy of current understandings of and responses to intimate partner violence, what can be imagined when we disarticulate the knowledges that close down spaces for thinking and doing differently. Taking hold of this opportunity to do differently, a creative methodological approach was utilised where figurations that emerged through a cartographic practice were used to engage with sites of alternative knowledges to vitalise marginalised voices that then act as counter-memories to disrupt the dominant narrative and imagine lines of flight for thinking and 'being' differently in relation to one another. This research involved a close textual analysis of the feminist activist organisations The Backbone Collective and The Aunties' who centre their responses through gender and privilege the voices of those women with lived and situated knowledge of men's violence. The analysis identified that women's narratives of pain are misheard by the community and the institutional response and the inattention to gendered social power relations contributes to feelings of social entrapment that hold women vulnerable to men's violence. The analysis takes up the potential that exists when we prioritise listening to women's voices for real, and the possibilities that emerge when we allow ourselves to be moved by and act upon the affective flows generated through connection and ethical

relationships. It is this connectedness that increases a sense of collective responsibility and accountability for social problems which foregrounds the development of response-able responses that privilege women and children's safety and wellbeing.

**Acknowledgements**

The journey of this research project has been tumultuous, the unpredictability of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic created unexpected challenges and at times working through school closures, illnesses and house moves - I felt like this was an impossible task. It was reading reports regarding the surge in family violence during the pandemic that motivated me to keep listening and working on this project. I am inordinately grateful to my supervisors Leigh Coombes and Stephanie Denne, thank you for your patience and grace in helping me get this across the line. Thank you both for motivating me through those wobbles of confidence and sharing kind words when this all seemed insurmountable. I have learned a great deal during this process and this research has reinforced the collective responsibility we hold to address intimate partner violence and structural inequality. The insights I have gained about the importance of compassion and ethical relationships will not remain on the pages of this thesis but will shape the course of my life going forward and the relationships within it.

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# Chapter One: Literature Review

## Introduction

My interest in intimate partner violence [IPV] research was initially triggered by my experiences on the periphery of the Family Court system, when my partner was working through care and contact negotiations for his young child. I was financially and emotionally invested in my role as stepmother, yet I was excluded from the formal proceedings of the Family Court and my investment was infrequently recognised socially or institutionally. I embodied this exclusion by channelling efforts into resisting the stereotype of the 'evil stepmother' and I governed my behaviour according to gendered expectations of this role, by directing my time and resources towards child-centred pursuits rather than pursuing my own interests. Over time I began to question the gendered expectations of parenting pre- and post-separation and how assumptions of gender equality were informing the institutional response in ways that disadvantage women, particularly women who experience men's violence and abuse.

When we grew our family and my children were young, I was extraordinarily sleep deprived. I struggled to meet the needs of two children under two years old whilst trying to accommodate the needs of an older stepchild. The juggle left me emotionally and physically exhausted and while the difficulties of broken sleep were spoken of often, my struggle was always dismissed with platitudes of how wonderful motherhood was and how it was 'normal' to have tough times with babies. There was no malice just a collective understanding that motherhood was difficult and so I just needed to get on with it. As I reflect on those memories it felt like I was drowning, pushed under by the sheer lack of sleep and the weight of expectations that I associated with being a 'good' mother. What struck me as I came through that fog of sleeplessness was that the discontent I experienced as a stepmother did

not dissipate when I had my own children, in fact, it got substantially worse. I realised a few years into motherhood that after decades of financial independence by conforming to those often invisible yet powerful hetero-patriarchal social norms that encourage intensive mothering practices, I had unintentionally positioned myself in a financial and socially precarious position which would be very difficult to extract myself from.

Reflecting on my exclusion and a felt sense that the Family Court was not hearing women's experiences, and along with the latter dismissal of my struggles as a new mother, I became aware that no matter how women's stories are told, in different places and spaces - they continue to be misheard. Women are asking for help but are not being listened to. I became curious about processes that silenced women's narratives and how and why this silencing continues to happen. I began to question the gendered reality of parenting embedded within a supposed 'gender-neutral' legal system. My curiosity around the impacts of social power relations led me to question how gender has been left behind by the institutional response to IPV. As I considered the gendered power relations that shape women's experiences of motherhood it led me to question the increased vulnerability of those women living with violence. How do normative gender roles, myths and stereotypes influence how the response system responds to women living with intimate partner violence? How do gendered norms entrap women in IPV relationships and how does the system that was created to support people to navigate separation and family violence attend to men's violence towards women? How can the system response be transformed to prioritise both the goals of women's immediate safety as well as valuing their longer-term autonomy? How can we better account for and therefore transform structural inequality within the institutional response? When thinking about the elusive and blurred boundary between an abusive and a 'normal' relationship, what obligation and responsibility do we all hold as community members to attend to structural inequality? Through this research, I question what we can do

differently to increase women's ability to access safety from men's violence. I question how an analysis of gendered power relations will enable new perspectives on IPV to generate and be heard.

I hope that by attending to these questions, gendered systems that reproduce oppression along racial, gender and class lines are no longer taken-for-granted but recognised, acknowledged and dismantled. I hope that as my daughters grow and find their places in the world, they will not experience the same challenges that generations of women before them have faced. No doubt there will be new challenges of local and global importance, but I want them to feel valued and respected as knowledge holders and community members regardless of their gender, or whether they are in paid or unpaid employment. Their value not measured by what they produce or contribute to the economy.

To understand the issues of IPV and the way it is responded to, *Chapter One* provides a critique of the way that IPV is conceptualised by the response sector. Through a review of the literature, I trouble how dominant systems of knowledge of IPV informs the system response and reproduces social power relations and identity categories of difference in ways which hold men's violence towards women in place. *Chapter Two* sets up the cartographic method of inquiry used to explore the possibilities that exist through advancing approaches that include alternative knowledges. *Chapter Three* entails an examination of The Backbone Collective, an activist organisation that challenges the singular story of violence by making visible Pākehā IPV and institutional indifference to women's stories of pain. *Chapter Four* analyses The Aunties organisation, a grassroots organisation that advocates on behalf of women focusing on issues of precarity and the misrecognition of IPV within Western value systems that normalise and sanction men's domination and use of violence to control women. In *Chapter Five* I bring these discussions together to argue that narratives of IPV must shift to advance ethical relationships and collective responsibility for social problems, to generate a

system of accountability that will provide the foundations for the development of response-able approaches to IPV.

**Intimate partner violence is a wicked problem**

Local estimates suggest that 30% of ever-partnered women between the ages of 18 and 64 years old have reported experiencing an episode of physical violence (Fanslow et al., 2021b). Significant gender differences in the prevalence of sexual, psychological and economic IPV have been found and 45.1% of women responded that they had experienced one or more types of IPV (Fanslow et al., 2021). Fanslow et al. (2021b) found a reduction in reported experience of two or more acts of psychological intimate partner violence in the past 12-months however, the lifetime prevalence of controlling behaviours and economic abuse increased from 2003 to 2019. During the period 2009 to 2018, there were 125 intimate partner deaths locally, 70% of whom were women, 65% of those women killed had been separated or in the process of separating from their partners indicating that the risk of lethality continues post separation (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2021). The Family Violence Death Review Committee was created in response to the very high proportion of homicides in New Zealand being family violence-related, approximately one-third to one-half of annual homicides in New Zealand are perpetrated by a family member or a person with a close personal relationship (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014). The fourth report released in 2016 declared that ‘radical change’ was needed to address IPV in New Zealand effectively and would require a paradigm shift to incorporate multiple and connected interventions not limited to legal approaches (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014). The New Zealand Police recorded over 175,000 family harm investigations in the 12 months to June 2022 (New Zealand Police, 2022) indicating the heavy burden placed on resources which could be directed elsewhere in the community. IPV is not limited to any demographic (King et al., 2012) and occurs across socioeconomic levels

(Bird et al., 2021; Campbell & Mannell, 2016), with reports indicating that 1 in 4 women from high-income households have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (Lambie, 2018) challenging stereotypes that IPV is a problem limited to economically vulnerable groups (Harne & Radford, 2007).

Intimate partner violence has been referred to as a wicked problem locally (Denne, 2019; Gear et al., 2022; Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014; Wilson et al., 2015). Wicked problems are complex and ongoing in nature difficult to address in isolation and are interconnected with other social issues such as poverty, homelessness and suicide (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014; True, 2012). Wicked problems continually emerge from social, cultural, temporal, and political locations and, as such, cannot be resolved finitely. The locations at which they emerge need to be attended to, with no one cause and no singular universal solution that will be able to attend to it meaningfully (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014; Rittel & Webber, 1974). Despite IPV being considered a 'wicked problem', much research and many interventions have approached IPV as if it is a linear issue which can be ameliorated with a one-size-fits-all approach with dominant responses taking on a façade of objectivity that individualise and responsibilise the problem as an issue within a recognisable deviant 'other' rather than acknowledging the diverse and multiple conditions of possibility that enable men's violence towards women. The response system has been criticised as being fragmented (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014) and inadequate to address the systemic and structural violence that entraps women in violence (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016). The neoliberal focus on attending to the individual results in compartmentalised responses and this targeted intervention fails to integrate the wider contributors relevant to experiences and conditions of IPV. The disjointed system is incapable of attending to the wicked problem of IPV because it is unable to account for the

multiple intersecting conditions of power and power relations that are present within specific locations.

**Tracing IPV response in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Violence against women within intimate relationships attracted little institutional attention prior to the 1960s (Morgan & Coombes, 2013). Traditionally, women were culturally and legally silenced by the societal tolerance for men's violence as being a 'normal' aspect of intimate relationships (Harne & Radford, 2007). The perception of the social problem of IPV has transitioned over time from a private matter to a public issue. The campaigning and activism of women's groups made space to listen to women's experiences of violence, offering support to victims and establishing IPV within a framework of gender inequality (Anderson, 2007) which required a social and a political response. The ethical activism of women's groups and advocates resulted in the establishment of shelters and the development of rape crisis centres in the 1970s and 1980s (Hann, 2004). These collective community services, for women by women, were part of a broader community approach seeking to keep women safe and hold men accountable for their violence (Morgan et al., 2019).

Feminist activism created a fundamental shift within dominant institutions (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003; Dobash et al., 1992) and community activism placed pressure on the government to be accountable for keeping women safe through legislative protections for this serious social problem (Morgan & Coombes, 2013; Morgan & Mattson, 2018; Robertson et al., 2007), and the criminal justice system then emerged as the public response (Bumiller, 2008; 2010; Weissman, 2007; Westmarland & Kelly, 2016). Prior to the 1980s, the policing response could be regarded as 'minimalist' with interventions into IPV only occurring when there was clear, tangible evidence of serious physical violence (Busch et al., 1992; Cross &

Newbold, 2010; Grant & Rowe, 2011). However, the introduction of the first piece of legislation specific to domestic violence, the Domestic Protection Act 1982, introduced non-violence and non-molestation orders as a tool to improve women's safety, encouraging a shift in policing policy in the late 1980s towards active intervention in domestic violence. This shift in policing firmly locates the legal and criminal justice systems as the leading community response and indicates the movement away from the dismissal of men's violence as private 'marital conflict' (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016) reflecting the changing social attitudes and perceptions of IPV.

Since its introduction the legislation specific to domestic violence has had several iterations, the Domestic Violence Act (1995) first introduced psychological and sexual violence as well as physical violence leading to the most current – the Family Violence Act 2018 ("Family Violence Act 2018"). There has been movement within this version of the legislation to acknowledge non-physical violence and gendered power relations such as the inclusion of dowry-related violence (Family Violence Act 2018, s 9(4)). Despite this movement, IPV in the absence of physical violence (or physical violence that is visible or meets the evidential threshold) is still not being formally attended to, research and intervention into psychological violence has been limited due to the difficulties in defining and measuring non-physical violence (Fanslow et al., 2021b). The Family Violence Act incorporates a greater understanding and scope of non-physical forms of IPV, yet conviction rates for family violence offences are dropping, and the reasons for this are not well understood (Johnston, 2021). Despite the best intentions of addressing IPV through a formal legal response progress in curbing the high levels of IPV locally has been mitigated by the inability of the criminal justice system to account for non-physical violence and practices of masculine control.

The criminal justice system is unable to fully attend to non-physical violence even when it is allowed for within the Family Violence Act and this inability to acknowledge or act on non-physical violence may influence help-seeking behaviour. Most women in New Zealand do not formally report their experiences of IPV (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Gulliver & Fanslow, 2012; Towns & Adams, 2016). In many cases, women do not report men's use of violence towards them until it escalates to a level that they are unable to manage themselves (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Wilson et al., 2019). The inability of the criminal justice system to act is a symptom of design, tensions exist in the system's ability to action the legislation that informs it in part due to limits around what is recognised as constituting 'evidence' of men's violence. This inability to act is compounded by the normalisation of gendered power relationships (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010), which naturalise men having a disproportionate amount of financial, decision-making, and authoritative power within a relationship (Johnson, 1995; Towns & Adams, 2009) which can complicate the recognition of men's violence by social agencies/institutions and women themselves.

Women can be hesitant to adopt a 'victim' position within formal institutions due to the relationship between deficit assumptions and victimisation (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014; Morgan & Coombes, 2016; Robertson et al., 2007; Wilson & Webber, 2014b). The existence of stereotypes of what violence 'is' intersects with the stigma of who can be a victim, discouraging women from recognising their victimisation as worthy of formal intervention. The hierarchical relationship between women and social agencies and institutions within the neoliberal paradigm can set the conditions for welfare and social agencies to assign responsibility to women for their precarious circumstances and the power dynamic can replicate that of her abusive relationship (Elizabeth, 2003). Where engagement with formal institutions is experienced as coercive, woman can be reluctant to ask for support (Hodgetts et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). Women can be reluctant to report men's violence as they

are disciplined by social expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ wife or mother and stereotypes of how women should behave in relationships minimise women’s experiences and assign blame onto women for men’s violence suggesting her behaviour is complicit or provokes abuse (Flood & Pease, 2009).Women can be reluctant to report or compelled to remain in violent or abusive relationships because of the stigma of victimisation (Murray et al., 2018), coercive control and entrapment (Crossman et al., 2016; Stark, 2007; Tolmie et al., 2018) assumptions that the best interests of children are advanced by remaining in the relationship (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010) and to avoid negative outcomes related to poverty and homelessness that can occur in response to leaving relationships (Campbell & Mannell, 2016). Women report being reluctant to engage with the institutional response due to previous experiences or fears of racist or otherwise negative attitudes (Wilson et al., 2019). This leads to the avoidance of systemic violence through non-reporting, and the lack of formal reporting limits official recognition of the breadth of IPV experiences occurring in our communities. Attending to the multiple and varied relationships that form part of the system response opens space to consider how social and ideological norms discipline women into thinking that violence is ‘normal’ within relationships, that it is their fault (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014), and that silence women from speaking of men’s violence (Towns & Adams, 2009).

**The statistical figure of IPV in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Once IPV became criminalised and formally legitimised as a social issue by hegemonic institutions such as the legal system, efforts were put into recording and measuring the social problem. These attempts at measuring and monitoring IPV levels serve to hold the government accountable for their response. The production of statistics relating to the prevalence and character of IPV is pursued to advance the public good and facilitate a greater understanding of IPV and how to manage it. The statistical ‘snapshot’ of IPV in Aotearoa

relies on data from the New Zealand Police, and criminal justice system along with social science and public health research to examine the prevalence of particular understandings of IPV in the community. From this gathering of 'counts' captured by the dominant and institutional gaze, a statistical figure of violence is produced and reproduced by research into IPV that reflects information gathered on *those* populations. The statistical picture of violence provides a valuable pool of knowledge for developing and scaling interventions into IPV, however, it is partial and limited, generally remaining silent on the social conditions which make IPV possible. The statistical figure attends to some social conditions such as socio-economic status but leaves behind the complexity of violence and the breadth of social conditions which make IPV possible.

**Configuring intimate partner violence**

The criminal justice system collects data concerning discrete events that involve physical violence resulting in visible injury, which satisfies institutional demands for evidence that the event has occurred as well as demographic data relating to the individually identified perpetrators and victims caught within the institutional gaze. This means that the system response relies on prevalence data that fails to account for non-physical violence and coercive control and misses the presence of those who hold the resources to elude the institutional gaze resulting in a heavier focus on some communities leaving them over-represented within the statistical data on IPV. In consequence, knowledge we hold on IPV includes processes of institutional racism.

The production of knowledge within a neoliberal political environment has resulted in a proliferation of knowledges reflecting traditional Western priorities reproducing assumptions of the "superiority of Western knowledge" (Smith, 2012, p. 62). The Western knowledge system individualises the problem through the neoliberal knowledge economy, and thus

categorises and measures acts of physical violence attributing responsibility to individual men. Processes that count and measure individual men's violence to make sense of it within the hierarchical rights-based and evidence-based paradigm of the legal system can obscure the unique nature and relationality of violence within intimate relationships. Decontextualised counts of discrete acts of physical violence that result in visible injury obscures the gendered nature of IPV (Myhill, 2017). The eliding of masculine processes of control and coercion leaves the count or the statistical figure to be inadequate to elucidate the complexities of women's experiences in context and the multiple intersecting systems of oppression that operate in those contexts. Counting individual acts of physical violence in turn advances individualised understandings of IPV that are unable to account for the gendered social power relations that provide the conditions for all forms of men's violence against women. In failing to attend to gendered social power existing forms of power are set to continue. Privileging a 'count' of how visible and severe the problem is obscures the underlying processes and practices that discourages acknowledgement of women's experiences and deters reporting (Mowat et al., 2016), and limits understandings of the totality of how men's violence affects women (Harwin, 2006; Tolmie, 2018b). Privileging a count also limits apprehension of how our systems of service and response are implicated in the production and re-production of the normalisation of IPV within our communities and institutions.

The production of statistics gathered from the legal and criminal justice systems that 'count' prevalence of acts of physical violence advance de-gendered and de-politicised accounts of the wicked social problem. Without attending to social power relations, the potential to advance gendered understandings of IPV that would be able to account for the complexity and diversity in women's experiences, is lost (Bettinson & Bishop, 2015; Elizabeth, 2015a). Criminalising men's use of violence within intimate relationships has had the unintended consequence of reifying physical violence as the most recognisable form of

IPV (Bettinson & Bishop, 2015) delimiting institutional and social accountability for the conditions of possibility that enable men's violence to occur and continue. Non-physical psychological violence is difficult to define and measure (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011) and the response system struggles to recognise and respond to psychological violence (Elizabeth, 2015a). Psychological violence is criminalised under the Family Violence Act, however in practice it can be challenging to secure recognition of gendered abuse without the presence of physical violence because of the difficulties in producing 'legitimate evidence' of its occurrence. Robertson et al. (2007) highlighted how women struggled to secure recognition of protection order breaches where the breach did not also include physical violence. This type of institutional inaction can reduce the likelihood of women reporting or seeking help for non-physical violence even if they recognise it as they believe their experiences may be ignored or dismissed (Elizabeth, 2015a; Morgan & Coombes, 2016; Wilson et al., 2015; Wilson & Webber, 2014b).

Over the past several decades, research and responses have developed to incorporate understandings of both physical violence and the dynamics of psychological and emotional abuse that, when understood as a pattern of violence become 'coercive control' (Elizabeth, 2015a; Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Stark, 2007). Stark's (2007) theory of coercive control acknowledges patterns of abusive behaviour that use intimidation, fear, and threats or use of violence to establish masculine power and control over women in the context of intimate relationships. The developing understandings of the dynamics of IPV have enabled us to attend to gendered social power relationships through recognition of practices of coercive control. IPV is made possible by and perpetuates unequal relationships of power between men and women that exist relationally at both an individual and a societal level (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2002; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). IPV is reinforced by practices of hegemonic masculinity (Connell,

1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Westmarland & Kelly, 2016), underpinned by culturally determined ideals of masculinity where men can exert power and control over women through systems, social structures and practices that normalise men dominating, oppressing, and exploiting women. The meaning and values attributed to gender determine the way behaviours are perceived and responded to by the system response, institutions, and professionals (Hester, 2010).

Stark (2007) suggests that considering IPV as an issue of physical violence or domination is inadequate and argues that IPV should be perceived as a 'liberty crime' to help encapsulate the intentional violation of a person's autonomy leading towards their feelings of entrapment. Understanding IPV to include coercive control enables a recognition of the gendered aspects of violence which are made possible based on the acceptance of socially recognised gender roles and tolerance of men's domination and women's subordination within heterosexual, heteronormative intimate relationships (Postmus et al., 2020; Stark, 2007). Tolmie et al. (2018, p. 181) suggest conceptualising IPV as a form of social entrapment where violence and abuse are found to be performed as a 'gendered pattern of harm', re-territorialising IPV to include physical and non-physical violence that can be cumulative. If professionals understood IPV as Kelly and Westmarland (2016, p. 125) suggest - as women "being controlled, rather than abused" - it would help open spaces to question how gendered power and practices of coercive control are tolerated and sanctioned within various locations, such as the Family Court when approaching post- separation parenting arrangements. Viewing IPV through a social entrapment lens would open space to recognise the gendered power that enables men to use the legal system to exert power over women as an extension of violence that occurred pre-separation (Elizabeth, 2003).

Incorporating coercive control into understandings of IPV enables the acknowledgement that for women living with IPV the most devastating aspect of the abuse is that it is enduring, rather than physical violence itself (Arnold, 2009; Stark, 2007). When IPV is viewed as social entrapment, with gender centralised, discussions of coercive control draw our attention to the multiple intersecting systems of oppression that impact women's experiences of men's violence. Intersectionality makes visible the differing impacts of gender, race, class, (dis)ability, religion, age and how these intersections can texture women's experiences of men's violence (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2020) that exceeds physical violence only. Coercive control makes visible the aspects of IPV which are not necessarily criminalised but which impact significantly on women (Stark, 2007). Understanding IPV as practices of coercive control makes visible the complexity of the wicked problem and how relationships impacted by IPV involve multiple intersecting power relations that emerge from conditions of possibility within specific locations illustrating how a count of discrete acts of physical violence are unable to 'capture' this embedded complexity.

Knowledge of IPV has therefore been constrained by the difficulties of definition and measurement of non-physical violence leading to research into IPV that centres on empirical analyses of the perpetration of physical violence (Bishop, 2016; Postmus et al., 2020), with non-physical violence being perceived as secondary or supplementary to physical violence (Outlaw, 2009). Tolmie et al.'s (2018) suggestion of understanding IPV as a process of social entrapment works to resist the justice system's limited interpretation of what constitutes IPV preventing full appreciation of the impacts on victims. There has been ongoing debate internationally discussing the criminalising of coercive control (Walklate & Fitz-Gibbon, 2021) and whether it would enable a more significant legal response to men's violence. Tolmie (2018a), however, urges caution against the introduction in the New Zealand context.

Currently, the patriarchal justice system is ill-equipped to respond adequately to violence against women and without attention to social power relations, could lead to negative impacts experienced disproportionately by marginalised groups through continuing processes of institutional racism where some populations are more likely to come to the attention of the institutional gaze. When multiple intersecting gendered power relations of domination and oppression are obscured and/or ignored, then risk of harm and violence become internalised and embodied within particular individuals and communities, reifying difference as deficit and providing the conditions of possibility for some people and groups to be deemed 'riskier' than others (Coombes et al., 2016).

***Risky bodies***

The commodification of knowledge, including that produced within psychology, continues to assign categories of sameness and difference. This linearity leads to the social problem of IPV being encapsulated as a singular issue isolated from the everyday social conditions of people's lives, individualising IPV and constructing risky bodies (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2021). Those 'risky bodies' are then intensified and responsibilised for both the perpetration of IPV and to blame for victimisation. Where traditional hegemonic knowledge systems construct social problems as individualised issues located within pathologised 'others' who fail to ascribe to the standards of 'sameness' (Coombes et al., 2016), the unequal social power relations that benefit the dominant group create the conditions for the behaviours of the marginalised to be demonised and the behaviours of the dominant group naturalised - setting the conditions for Pākehā middle-class violence to be invisible and violence within indigenous groups more visible. People who live in financial precarity are more likely to be caught within the institutional gaze as living in cramped housing and prior engagement with social agencies increases the likelihood of police and criminal justice system intervention and therefore an increase likelihood to appear within the statistical figure.

Victims and abusers with financial or social resources can temporarily leave a violent home to stay in a motel or with family to avoid an escalation of violence that could result in the attention of social agencies and institutions. Women without this network or access to resources may need to depend on Women's Refuge or other crisis centres for respite, which captures them within the statistical figure of IPV. Women who lack the resources to flee men's escalating violence become more visible to officials and more likely to be included within the statistical figure, establishing a singular story of violence as an individualised issue within marginalised communities. The production of statistical counts of state intervention in response to physical violence creates narratives of risk that produce 'at risk' communities. These 'at-risk' communities are captured within the institutional gaze due to relationships of precarity (Rua et al., 2021), structural racism and inequality which obscures recognition of how our knowledge of IPV is framed through the perspectives of cis-gendered, white, heterosexual, middle-class men, and how such knowledge marks those who differ from such perspectives as 'risky bodies' (Braidotti, 2013c; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

To understand how the statistical picture of IPV in Aotearoa New Zealand marks those who differ from the Eurocentric 'norm' as 'risky bodies', it is necessary to examine our colonial history to discern how power relations inform the neoliberal knowledge economy. The consequences of colonisation have been regarded as "cataclysmic" for Māori (Durie, 2004, p. 1138), experienced as a traumatic loss of culture, land and voice leading to social inequities of poverty, substance abuse, poor physical and mental health, and suicide (Bramley et al., 2004; Durie, 2004). The forced imposition of patriarchal ideologies disrupted the Māori cultural practice of collaborative (Wilson, 2016) and communal living that operated as a protective measure against IPV and as this style of living diminished so too did opportunities for community intervention into issues of violence (King & Robertson, 2017; Mikaere, 1994; Wilson et al., 2021). The assimilation of the Western nuclear family structure into urban

spaces isolated the extended and collective whānau relationships undermining traditional ways of relating and working together enabling the conditions of possibility for gendered violence to emerge and altering the framework of Māori ways of being with one another intimately, and relationally (Rua et al., 2021). Patriarchy has been considered "to be the most damaging impact of colonisation" (Mikaere, 2019, p. 16) for mana wāhine, as the forced imposition of patriarchal and hierarchical familial and societal structures undermined their traditionally highly regarded social position (Dhunna et al., 2021; Robertson & Oulton, 2008). Women became viewed as the property of men (Pihama et al., 2016), upsetting the reciprocal and harmonious balance that existed in the relationships between genders (Cavino, 2016; Mikaere, 1999; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2010) and establishing a social hierarchy and ways of relating between men, women and children that lay counter to traditional values and practices. The establishment of a social order placed men in positions of dominance over others and provided the conditions of possibility for the introduction of family and sexual violence into Māori communities where previously it was scarcely found (Balzer et al., 1997; Mikaere, 1994; Quince, 2010; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2010).

The imposition of the Pākehā worldview by colonial settlers created norms of behaviour where sameness to Pākehā values and beliefs were privileged, and resistance to conformity was constructed as maladaptive or deficit. Māori resistance to Pākehā domination was framed as violent and aggressive, which contributed to the establishment of behavioural and personality tropes of Māori as naturally violent, savage and 'different' to Pākehā men who expressions of aggression were normalised within dominant social practices (Hokowhitu, 2003). When difference is understood as 'deficit', the ongoing effects of colonisation are held in place by institutional and systemic racism, where Māori experience a level of (targeted) policing which is incommensurate with their level of offending (Stanley & Bradley, 2021; Webb, 2009), resulting in an over-representation at every point of the criminal

justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2009; United Nations, 2014). Over-representation in issues of social disorder and crime facilitated through institutional racism leaves Māori 'othered' (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018) and configured as a 'problem' population needing increased intervention and surveillance. With indigenous IPV being highly visible, this reinforces assumptions that locate Māori men as the predominant perpetrators of violence and being innately violent (Mikaere, 1994; Rua et al., 2017). Despite the recognition that IPV is an issue across society (King et al., 2012) it is possible to recognise disparities within the prevalence statistics that inform the system response with Māori being over-represented (Koziol-McLain et al., 2007) as both victims and offenders (Lievore et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2021). It is estimated that one in two Māori women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetimes (Fanslow et al., 2021a), and Māori women are three times more likely to be victims of family violence-related homicide than non-Māori (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Fanslow et al., 2010). Māori men and women are over-represented in the statistical figure of IPV because of targeted policing practices and the dominance of the criminal justice system as a site of knowledge production. The configuration of processes which count IPV inform who is captured within the statistical figure of IPV, influencing what is and can be known about IPV within dominant channels, obscuring alternative subjectivities for some Māori (Hokowhitu, 2003) and deflecting the violence of middle-class Pākehā men who normalise violence against women (Gavey et al., 2021).

**The Court as a site of reproduction for masculine power and violence**

When IPV is not approached as a wicked problem, and is attended to only within a legal framework, it responds to a partial representation of IPV as an act of physical violence, ignoring the gendered and racialised social power relations that complicate women's experiences of abuse. As a patriarchal system, the hegemony of masculinity operates to

normalise a binary of gendered domination and subordination, men's practices of domination over women, reproducing a singular story (Fine, 2017) of IPV that excludes women's experiences that are not recognised as meeting the threshold of criminal behaviour. The legal system has evolved, over time, to recognise violence against women as an offence category, but without any change to the institution, it operates more as an example of 'add women and stir' (Harding, 1995). Locally, there is a culture of discrimination within the legal system, confirmed by the New Zealand Law Society working group (2018), where the New Zealand legal profession has been afflicted by unchecked sexual violence, sexual harassment, bullying and gender discrimination. The inability or unwillingness to meaningfully address gender discrimination within the legal profession makes any claim of gender neutrality by the legal institution problematic. This inquiry into the behaviour of legal professionals demonstrates the inability of the legal profession to hold itself to account for the ways in which gendered violence is produced and re-produced through the legal system. The rights-based and evidence-based approach of the legal and criminal justice systems, which focus on the individual, can sit in tension with addressing IPV as a relational and a structural issue. The circulation of women's narratives of violence can be hindered by the priority of maintaining and protecting the privacy of individual families. Locally, the Family Violence Death Review Committee conducts reports on family violence homicides to determine what changes could be made to improve the response system (Tolmie et al., 2017). A limitation of these reports is the necessary redaction of personal detail and context in the stories they recount. The circulation of women's narratives of violence provides a powerful method of communication and knowledge of the everyday experiences of violence (Tolmie et al., 2017), however the relationship with the legal institution within the system response privileges privacy, suppressing women's narratives and operating to advance patriarchal interests through the silencing of women.

When women's diverse stories are silenced and removed from the context in which they occur we become unable to hear the importance of that diversity. The legal system has attempted to attend to gender however institutional constraints limit its ability to attend to context and the differences between women, resulting in unintended negative consequences. To demonstrate, changes were made to the Family Proceedings Act 1980 to establish more equitable financial settlement outcomes for women as well as the introduction of the no-fault grounds for the dissolution of a marriage (Henaghan et al., 2013; Taylor, 2006). The introduction of the 'no-fault' provisions into the marriage dissolution process meant a simplified process to separate from husbands for many women, however, for those women who experienced IPV, it eliminated an opportunity to have the court investigate allegations of abuse and establish a paper trail of their abuser's wrongdoing which could then be drawn upon when negotiating child-care and contact. These legislative amendments undertaken to attend to gender within the legal system reproduce assumptions of the de-contextualised and de-gendered neoliberal responsible individual, where leaving violent relationships has been made 'easier' and increase expectations that women will be more able to leave violent relationships without attending to the enduring power relations which make stay/leave decisions complex, such as the fact that leaving a violent relationship is a time of increased risk of serious or fatal violence (Brownridge, 2006; Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Humphreys, 2007) and that women often do not have the resources required to enable leaving.

### *Family Court*

The legal system focuses on individual rights-based conceptualisations that, when applied to the welfare of women and children become problematic when the relational aspect of the mother-child relationship is disregarded. The New Zealand Family Court was first established in 1981 with a strong focus on conciliation with Family Court professionals

(lawyers, judges, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and so on) tasked with assisting participants to 'rebuild' their relationships to the point where 'rational' discussions relating to property, childcare and finances could be undertaken calmly (Boshier et al., 2011). The Family Court offers a less adversarial approach than the general court system and its development reflected a desire to address family issues as a whole (Boshier et al., 2011) to better recognise the unique relationships involved in the parties to proceedings. However, when the Family Court is committed to ideals of gender-neutrality and individual egalitarianism, embedded within an ideology of 'family' underpinned by traditional Western influences that privilege the nuclear, heteronormative family structure (Keil & Elizabeth, 2017), it de-genders parenting and approaches the roles of parents as if the roles were inter-changeable, with equal and shared labour (Rhoades, 2002). Such an approach fails to account for the impact of IPV for women who find themselves within the gaze of the court, or the multiple intersecting gendered social power relations of oppression that provide the conditions for the production and re-production of violence against women in Aotearoa.

Despite claims of neutrality and objectivity, the hegemonic foundations of the Western legal system can and does alienate and harm marginalised communities. Gendered and racial power relations set the conditions for the legal system to be more accessible to Pākehā professional men, based on the normalised allocation of resources within hetero-patriarchal intimate relationships and the compatibility of the legal institution with Western cultural values and worldview (Quince, 2019). For example, the Family Court is involved in determining the care of children and can do so in two distinct ways, where both pathways can be viewed as operating Western gendered power. One pathway is through care and protection proceedings under the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017. Structural inequality, systemic discrimination and institutional racism determine that Māori children are significantly over-represented in care and protection

proceedings under the Oranga Tamariki Act (Keddell & Hyslop, 2019). Māori families live disproportionately in areas with higher deprivation (Keddell et al., 2019), and there is a strong relationship between financial precarity, institutional racism and child protection system intervention (Keddell & Hyslop, 2019; Love, 2017). Criticisms of the Family Court centre on concerns that the system has not been designed with the needs and worldviews of Māori centralised and concerns that proceedings under the Oranga Tamariki Act constrain the voice of Māori to their detriment (Love, 2017). The response system's Western, hegemonic, and individualistic foundations can render marginalised groups' parenting and social decisions to be pathologised and undignified when decontextualised from power relations and social locations (Keddell & Hyslop, 2019; Love, 2017; Maydell, 2018). The authority of 'whiteness' is privileged, and Western knowledge systems locate differences to Pākehā norms of behaviour as deficit based. Social agencies within the response system can operate as capillaries towards the Family Court, where issues of care and protection are heard, leading to a reluctance to engage with the system and a silencing of women's experiences of IPV based on fears of punitive responses.

The second pathway is under the Care of Children Act 2004 [CoCA] which relates to determinations of post-separation care and contact of children. The Family Court relies upon an underlying assumption that normative post-separation parenting is harmonious (Elizabeth et al., 2012b) reflecting the theoretical foundations of the institution as one of conciliation and contextualised within a paradigm shift within family law that privileges fathers' rights post-separation over the safety of children (Flood, 2010; Tolmie et al., 2009). Mackenzie (2016) traced how the father's rights movement influenced the interpretation of the welfare principle under CoCA where the push to include the voices of men as being pertinent to the wellbeing and best interests of children has paved the foundations for the assumptions that shared care best meets the needs of children. The influence of fathers' rights groups resulted

in the development of a pro-contact ideology within the family law system which supports the ideal of a continued relationship with both parents post-separation (Busch et al., 2014). The support for shared care and parenting rights for men, regardless of the quality and level of interest they held in parenting pre-separation and regardless of the opinions and wishes of the mother and child enables the hegemonic Family Court system to advance paternal rights as the priority over women's safety and children's expressed interests (Busch et al., 2014; Elizabeth et al., 2012a, 2012b). Women who engage in protective strategies and resist agreeing to parenting orders 'by consent' can be allocated into the 'high conflict' category, where they can be perceived as uncooperative and resistant to the ideology of the Court (Morgan & Coombes, 2016). For instance, women are believed to be more likely to initiate proceedings in the Family Court, using accusations of men's violence tactically (Flood, 2010) and protection orders as weapons (Doogue, 2004; Pond & Morgan, 2008), despite research that suggests that women rarely make false accusations of violence and that when unfounded accusations of violence and abuse are made, they are made by men (Flood, 2010).

The post-separation mother is "normatively constructed within custody law as facilitators of fathers' relationships with their children" (Elizabeth, 2020, p. 120). Reluctance to facilitate this gendered relationship complicates the experience of protective mothers, often leading to coercion through accusations of being obstructive. Women report being coerced by family law professionals to support 'continued fathering' amid assumptions that men can be abusive partners but 'good' fathers (Lapierre, 2008; Pond & Morgan, 2008; Powell & Murray, 2008), demonstrating the fragmentation of the system response that produces an artificial separation between the spheres of IPV and child abuse (Callaghan et al., 2018; Humphreys et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2013). The emergence of a 'pro-contact' culture (Elizabeth et al., 2010) is having an impact on the way mothers' allegations of abuse are being responded to within the Family Court, enabling the system to be used by men in ways

which operate as violence over women (Elizabeth et al., 2010, 2012a) using provisions of child contact to further abuse mothers (Elizabeth et al., 2012b; Kaye et al., 2003; Tolmie et al., 2010). The hegemony of masculinity reproduced and maintained within patriarchal institutions such as the Family Court complicates interactions with women protecting their children. The site of contest located at the intersections of complex social power relationships continue the singular story of who is and is not both a victim and perpetrator of violence, who should be held to account (and how), and who is worthy, or not, of protection. To disrupt this singular story it is necessary to hear the complex stories of violence in context.

**Neoliberal knowledge economy and cognitive capitalism**

The Glenn Inquiry was an important research endeavour that sought out the voices of those affected by domestic violence and child abuse to guide the system to be more responsive and provided a valuable opportunity to hear those narratives of lived experience in context. The reports produced by this inquiry confirmed the findings of other research that has identified structural violence as holding men's violence in place with the Family Court being identified as a particular site of tension (Elizabeth et al., 2012a, 2012b; Tolmie et al., 2009; Wilson & Webber, 2014b). The reports produced from the inquiry highlighted that the way the system was responding to people, the moralising attitudes and negative judgements (Wilson & Webber, 2014b) was impeding their ability to access support and resources and that this was a barrier to help-seeking, particularly for Māori respondents. The inattention to racial power relations and structural inequality was argued as a form of "institutional abuse" (Wilson & Webber, 2014b, p. 129), undermining efforts to live free from violence (Wilson & Webber, 2014b). Despite the valuable knowledge collected through the respondents' narratives of violence, the research outputs of the Glenn Inquiry failed to centre the need for a gendered analysis as necessary to the system response.

When community responses became institutionalised through the legal system, many research endeavours have been top-down and directed by Government entities discounting the value of lived and situated knowledges of women (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014) and privileging the decontextualised ‘count’ of a complex relational issue. The political, social, and legal recognition of IPV has led to a revolving door of reports, reviews, and initiatives, which argue that IPV needs to be addressed (Elizabeth, 2015b). Still, many initiatives neglect to involve women as holders of situated and specific knowledge of men’s violence. For example, ‘solution-focused’ specialist family violence courts (Mills & Thom, 2018) were established to attend more acutely to IPV and were designed to focus on both the victim and offender, with priorities centring on a prompt resolution to advance women’s safety (Everest, 2020). These specialist courts aim to reduce reoffending by maximising offender accountability and supporting positive cognitive change through offender treatment programs (Wheatley et al., 2021). However, despite the best intentions, it is possible to recognise a continued inattention to the needs and safety of women from these perspectives. Where men are compelled to undertake treatment programs there are concerns that it holds men accountable to the Court rather than their victims and their community (Denne et al., 2013). Early guilty pleas can afford abusers leniency at sentencing (Coombes et al., 2007) and this can include a ‘discharge without conviction’ (Wheatley et al., 2021). Under Section 106(2) of the Sentencing Act 2002 ("Sentencing Act," 2002) this can be deemed to be an acquittal of the charges (Mills & Thom, 2018). The opportunity for a discharge without conviction may discourage intrinsic motivations for positive behavioural change and sits in tension with the need to hold men accountable and push for women’s safety. Encouraging quick resolutions privileges neoliberal priorities of system proficiency or effectiveness and, in doing so, neglects to attend to the need of victims to have a record of the historical pattern of men’s abusive and violent behaviour needed to satisfy institutional demands for ‘evidence’ of the

cumulative harm they experience (Coombes et al., 2007). With no formal evidence of harm, the Family Court are able to deny the presence of abuse and can dismiss women's narratives of violence as being unsubstantiated. The tactics used to manage attrition and promote quick resolutions through the Special Family Violence Court pipeline can leave women feeling invalidated (Wheatley et al., 2021). The failure to account for women's experiences in context enables the denial of violence within the Family Court as Flood (2010) argues women can feel that their experiences of violence are not legitimated within the legal response. Efforts to balance system efficiency goals, offender accountability and women's safety reflect the challenges of IPV as a wicked problem.

**Resisting the singular story of the statistical figure**

The statistical figure of IPV reproduces marginalised populations as being the most at risk of perpetrating and experiencing IPV because of the over-representation within official statistics. The 'marginalised woman' presents as being young, of low socio-economic status, Māori, (Dhunna et al., 2021; Fanslow et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2016) and experiencing physical violence and abuse (Elizabeth, 2015a). Patriarchal and colonial ideologies and conditions of structural inequality capture marginalised communities within the dominant institutional gaze and conceal violence in communities of privilege (Hoeata et al., 2011; King & Robertson, 2017; Wilson et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2021). The social problem of IPV as located within the 'deficit other' is produced and reproduced through the production of statistics which constructs the singular story of violence and this singular story fails to represent the experience of IPV in the community and advances individualising and racialised narratives. Responding to IPV based upon the knowledge gathered through the singular story results in an inadequate system response that struggles to attend to the violence perpetrated in communities unable to evade the dominant gaze, holding implications for the way women experience men's violence and how they are responded to by the system.

The dominance of the statistical figure of IPV, embedded within constraints of neoliberal academic institutions and the rise of cognitive capitalism (Braidotti, 2017a, 2019a, 2020; Braidotti & Regan, 2017; Moulier-Boutang, 2011) goes some way to explain how the repetition of Western hegemony is legitimated through the façade of objectivity. The exclusion of non-dominant knowledges reproduces partial and limited understandings of IPV, and the inability to attend to the complexity and diversity of IPV holds processes of violence in place. The neoliberal political and economic agenda has moved the response system from a community model established through the women's movement towards a service provision model based on the assessment and resourcing of needs-based criteria. This shift towards efficiency was supported by the rise in cognitive capitalism, which "is based on the cooperative labour of human brains joined together in networks by means of computer" (Moulier-Boutang, 2011, p. 57), diminishing the value of human connection and relationship building in the provision of services and resources. A de-personalised evaluation of need does not attend to power relations, it is paternalistic, institutionalised, and limits accountability for women's long-term safety, as it discounts the relational aspects of IPV by individualising the conditions that make IPV possible into fragmented issues resulting in a response system of separate silos that address different, isolated needs with a narrow operational focus (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016; Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014).

**Changing the story**

The singular story of violence reproduces narratives that locates the 'problem' of violence within particular individuals and groups, and responsibilises women for men's violence, privileging the needs of men over women's safety concerns. Ignoring structural contributions, such as the ongoing impacts of colonisation, establishes a social hierarchy that supports men's domination over women within our institutions of response and within our communities. This narrative needs to change if we are to think differently and imagine

responses that work to reduce and eliminate IPV and protect and care for those living with the effects of men's violence daily. What is increasingly being recognised is the need for new narratives and approaches that attend to men's use of gendered violence. After several decades of hearing women's stories of men's violence, national working groups have been created and support placed with the non-profit sector to respond to violence once it has occurred (Fanslow et al., 2021a). These interventions often operate in a 'crisis' response capacity which has limited ability to attend to violence prevention or the longer-term needs of women. As the example of the specialist family violence courts make clear, the system continues to approach IPV from a legal framework that continues to individualise the problem and responsibilise the 'blame' while failing to be guided by women's voices.

To change the narrative of how we think about and respond to IPV, guided by women's voices, the current research asks whether engaging in new methodologies for knowledge and knowledge production can open spaces from which to account for and interrogate the multiple, intersecting gendered and social power relations that constrain our ability to respond meaningfully to IPV in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the same time, this research asks us to imagine ways of thinking and 'doing' differently, the potentials and possibilities of changing the ways in which we can understand how we can respond to, and embody, the protection and care for women and children living with the effects of IPV. As such, this research aims to disrupt the dominance of the statistical figure that marks certain bodies as 'risky' for targeted individualised intervention to examine how structural inequities manifest as privileged or suppressed access to the resources available that respond to IPV, and to imagine a different response that can account for the multiple intersecting power relations women experiencing IPV navigate in their daily lives. Guided by the narratives of women, the current research will engage the embodied and situated experiences of those who have lived experience of men's violence and the system response whilst doing so in a way that

resists the commodification of women's stories within institutional frameworks of intelligibility and response. Answering the call from the Family Violence Death Review Committee for a radical change, I have sought out the perspectives of those non-dominant organisations that value and privilege women's narratives, those alternative knowledge producers who perform acts of ethical activism in opening safe spaces for women's narratives of men's violence to circulate.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

This research project started partly out of frustration at the stubborn hold intimate partner violence has on our communities. The previous chapter discussed the justice system's limited ability to take on more progressive practices, held captive by research and responses to IPV that produce, reproduce, and reify a statistical figure of IPV, providing the conditions for siloed and disjointed approaches that fail to attend to gendered social power relations and coercive control. It is frustrating that the legal system can be used in a way that reproduces violence and abuse rather than as a mechanism to hold men accountable to their families and communities for their abusive behaviours. The neoliberal knowledge economy prevents the opening of spaces where possibilities for 'thinking differently' and changing the narrative of accountability can be engaged. The way that IPV is understood and responded to is captured within dominant institutions that negate voices of how gendered power relations inform experience. This approach is not working to keep women and children safe. New ways of thinking and knowing are needed to reduce the prevalence of this wicked problem.

In this thesis, I take a feminist philosophical approach to examine the possibilities that emerge when we disarticulate the knowledges that limit what can be said and known about IPV. If we continue to be constrained by the limits of dominant knowledges, the development of responsible responses to IPV that can account for the complexities of a wicked social problem and transform political, social, and cultural affect, then women's safety is compromised. This research opens space to listen to alternative knowledges that subvert and resist the dominant narratives that oppress in overt and imperceptible ways. In the act of listening, lines of flight are imagined that move us beyond the captivity of the neoliberal knowledge economy and institutional response towards the potentials and possibilities

emergent from women's narratives that speak of how we can embody a responsible response to IPV.

## Feminist Epistemology

### *Politics of location*

As early as 1980, Rich mobilised the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, which opened space for us to understand the politics of location (Rich, 1980). Heterosexuality was recognised as a form of structural power that disciplines women in multiple and diffuse ways. Rich argued that compulsory heterosexuality was deeply connected to cognitive capitalism through the inequities in the conditions of everyday lives, including labour and our sexualities arguing that the institutionalisation of heterosexuality has resulted in the normalisation of inequality and men's violence towards women. Politics of location engages the recognition and acknowledgement of one's social location. The location being an embodied and embedded memory (Braidotti, 2021), accounting for the multiple power relationships that have shaped and impacted the knowledge generated from locations and enabling the ability to make sense of the differences between and among women (Braidotti, 2010a). Politics of location enables the exploration of the multi-layered and alternative vision of women – as an alternative to the unitary masculine subject that has dominated knowledge production. It is an act of resistance towards Eurocentrism and phallocentric thinking and behaviour, challenging Western knowledge claims by drawing attention to multiple subjectivities and the continuing systemic oppression that impacts more on some than others. Through politics of location, we can begin to question, acknowledge, and resist the production and reproduction of multiple intersecting power relations of domination and oppression from our current social, cultural, and temporal location, acknowledging conditions of possibility that enable violence against women and children, as well as lines of flight that may lead to a more responsible response.

### *Situated Knowledges*

I draw on Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledges to understand how domestic violence is differently understood and responded to locally. Haraway rejects scientific claims of objectivity that artificially separate the person producing knowledge from their location. Alternatively, Haraway argues that a person's social location, which differs according to their race, health, class, age, gender, and other multiplicities, frames how they experience their world and their relationships: objectivity then, can only ever be "embodied objectivity" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). Knowledge comes to be through the interaction of one's location and the interaction with others, it is created relationally and dialogically. This understanding of experience and knowledge as relational offers a counter perspective to the Western philosophical tradition that privileges empirical objectivity and insists on dualisms such as the split between mind and body, nature and culture, and man and woman.

We can challenge such privileging of empirical objectivity in the field of IPV research by acknowledging and subverting the power and legitimacy of knowledge claims made through accounts of the statistical figure and the institutional responses that reify this figure. The knowledge produced through accounts of counts is assumed to be objective, or from a value-neutral position, a "view from above, from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). The presumption of neutrality conceals a position of hegemonic masculinity, a system of power that justifies the social order, institutionalised through gendered power relationships, including men's heterosexual privilege. The continuous obfuscation of gendered power relations that configure women as phallocentric (Grosz, 1987) normalises violence against women. The recognition that knowledge production is not neutral and is embedded in systems of power specific to or situated within specific locations supports the premise that we must disrupt the status quo to better account for social problems. The proliferation of dominant knowledges reproduces unequal power relations, and seeking out alternative

knowledges, particularly those that have been subjugated and oppressed, resists this dominance. By challenging presumptions of objectivity and questioning dominant representations of IPV, this research explores the situated knowledges and alternative perspectives within the silenced and excluded knowledges of women and marginalised 'others' to open discussions of how women can be better supported to safety after experiencing men's violence and abuse. Haraway's theory of situated knowledges enables us to ask: what potentials become possible when we interrogate the intersecting and multiple power relations that are produced and reproduced within and through the Western, neoliberal, capitalist knowledge economy that act upon women and children caught with the institutional gaze of IPV response, and how can we be guided by their situated knowledges to disarticulate dominant knowledge claims from their legitimacy to power and open space for alternative perspectives and response? Therefore, this research seeks to address, from memory and by heart (Braidotti, 2006b), how the recognition of gendered power relations opens the potential for transforming our knowledge claims in ways that activate the potential and possibility to understand difference differently (Braidotti, 2012) to imagine a more responsible response to the care and protection of women living with the effects of IPV.

Guided by a politics of location that acknowledges all knowledge as positionally situated enables me to trouble how dominant institutional responses to IPV are founded on systems and structures to produce a partial representation of humans: the human presented as an objective 'truth', but that instead is a production, reified, through Western, neoliberal, and patriarchal systems and structures. This research seeks to trouble how the system is failing to engage with IPV as a wicked problem by excluding non-dominant perspectives and to examine how engaging with alternative knowledges may assist us in understanding the processes and practices that hold gendered violence in place. Where understandings of situated knowledges and politics of location require 'knowers' to account for their locations,

it entails providing "better accounts of the world" (Haraway, 2016, p. 590), accounts that offer possibilities to engage and respond in response-able ways (Haraway, 2016). According to Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) Braidotti argues that when we become responsible for our relationships with human and non-human others, this sense of connectedness sets up the foundations for ethical relations and accountability, and it is these notions of relational ethics and accountability that I take up in this research as a movement towards advocating for a more responsible response to women living with the effects of IPV.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings – Rosi Braidotti*

Braidotti's location (Braidotti, 2012, 2013a) in posthumanism offers an epistemology that is not anthropocentric or Eurocentric but instead brings in new, alternative modes of thought that celebrate difference as immanent and holding the creative potential required to navigate out of the complex times that we currently find ourselves in. The humanist image of 'man' is not universal: 'man' has been presented as being rational and reasoned, linking masculinity with power, excluding 'others', women, non-European, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, non-able-bodied, the environment, animal others and so on, as 'non-human' (Braidotti, 2010a). This establishes relations of power that operate to oppress those categorised as different from the dominant ideals of 'sameness' (towards the white, masculine universal subject) and push towards assimilation or conformity in ways that limit the potential for imagination and movement. Braidotti encourages us to attend to posthumanism as an opportunity to resist such relationships of power and to engage in new ways of thinking and doing, "an experiment with thinking defined as the invention of new ideas and concepts" (Braidotti & Regan, 2017, p. 185) that includes figurations and cartography as alternative methodological practices. A first step to thinking and doing difference differently lies in recognising and mapping the boundaries and scope of the problem (Braidotti & Regan, 2017), engaging figurations as a conceptual tool to resist

discrete and singular identity categories that operate as mechanisms of capture: a form of political resistance towards hegemonic, hierarchical authority (Braidotti, 2018). From a cartographic engagement and use of figuration, it is possible to imagine lines of flight for thinking and 'being' differently in relation to one another.

### Memory

Memory plays a vital role in Braidotti's conceptual toolkit, as she argues that dominant regimes of intelligibility and accountability have access to a "huge data bank of centralized knowledge" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 31) that enables men's behaviour to be "mournfully consistent, as programmed by phallogocentric culture" (Braidotti, 2010a, p. 416). Having access to this system enables the relegation of the memories and knowledges of marginalised and subjugated populations as inconsequential and silenced, the dominant story becomes taken-for-granted. Braidotti takes up Foucault's use of the concept of 'counter-memories' (Braidotti, 2013a) to describe the social and political aspects of memory, a relational process that involves relearning or recognising the memories, histories, and experiences of those who have been excluded from the dominant story. Marginalised people can use memory to disrupt hegemony and serve as a form of resistance to mainstream accounts of history. Braidotti advocates for the use of memory, or imaginings, to make clear the embodied effects of knowledge, describing it as an 'affective force' (Braidotti, 2012). The act of remembering enables the folding back of time and space given memories are not fixed or tethered leaving them available to be differently interpreted when drawn upon and in stock of new perspectives. Braidotti uses the process of memory as a "time-bomb under the driver's seat of phallocentrism" (Braidotti, 1996, p. 312) and describes memory as an aid to help people understand themselves and their ways of being in the world with others. Therefore, we can trouble and disrupt through our relational research, the dominant memory of the IPV response system to facilitate acknowledgement and attention to non-dominant voices, listening to the

counter-memories to subvert the consistent yet partial messaging of the statistical figure of violence, opening spaces to engage the potentials that emerge when counter-memories are included, and the creative imaginings that become possible when space is made available for multiple perspectives.

### Relational Ethics

Opening spaces to subvert the flows of power, and the way they constrain or enable one's capacity to relate through counter-memory, engages Braidotti's argument that ethics are concerned with "forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of becoming" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 343), conceptualising power as being constituted outside the body (Braidotti, 2006b, 2018) with embodied affect, where ethics is an external force instead of a fixed morality residing within individuals. Braidotti suggests that becoming posthuman is a process of affirmative relations that requires a "process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world" (Braidotti, 2013d, p. 193), and through relational or affirmative ethics, we can further behaviours, thinking, and doing that increases opportunities for communities to relate with one another. Therefore, we can ask: How might this concept of relational ethics enable an engagement with the counter-narratives of response to IPV that operate as sites of alternative knowledge production? How might the system, such as the family court system, respond differently to women and processes and practices through approaching social problems as relational and structural, transformed by potentials for affirmative ethical relations, rather than reproducing the individualised or deficit-based dominant system of response that is unable to attend to the wicked problem of domestic violence?

Rosi Braidotti has been a vital resource for this project, her work speaks to the frustration that I initially felt regarding the seeming intractability of IPV, reflecting the

wicked nature of this social problem where efforts have been directed towards attending to IPV with little progress. This lack of progress can impart a feeling of futility, however, Braidotti offers a way out of the felt hopelessness by reminding us that "negativity is what diminishes you, what belittles you…" (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 474). Braidotti argues that this pain and frustration, this negativity, can be harnessed into movement towards a more positive, affirmative future. There is a lack of space within the system response to listen to alternative knowledges as the dominance of the Western neoliberal economy, embedded within and guided by cognitive capitalism, resists the incorporation of different voices and responses, and therein holds potential for transformation. Taking up Braidotti's encouragement that an alternative approach was possible enabled me to move with the frustration to engage with the present, interrogate the memory of the past, and examine the possibilities that exist to reimagine the way that we respond to social problems in ways that privilege social justice (Braidotti, 2013d). As Braidotti herself argues "…philosophers can make thinkable concepts that did not exist before" (Braidotti, 2014, p. 172).

Braidotti (2003), like many feminist theorist scholars, argues that the perspective of women must be sought when evaluating the status of women, also recognising that 'woman' is not a homogenous group with multiple systems of oppression (race, class, age, able-bodiedness, religion, immigration status and so on) intersecting in different ways. Braidotti extends understandings of knowledges as partial and situated to include knowledge as "relational and outside-directed" (Braidotti, 2010a, p. 410) and embodied, meaning it is the interaction and connection with multiple knowledges and perspectives that brings to light the limited perspective of our locations. Taking up this understanding of the partiality of knowledges, I have sought out alternative knowledge and insights from women who have experienced men's violence and the system's ability to respond (or ignore) these experiences,

acknowledging and addressing a current limitation of the domestic violence sector, where a gendered analysis and focus on women is limited.

### Alternative knowledges

This research aims to disrupt the dominance and legitimacy of understandings of, and responses to, IPV produced through the Western, neoliberal knowledge economy that ignores or obscures the multiple, situated intersecting power relations that mark certain bodies as 'risky', whilst closing down spaces for thinking differently about how we protect and care for women living with the effects of IPV. Through taking up a politics of location, opening spaces to listen (from memory and by heart) to alternative and situated knowledges, I engage a movement towards relational ethics and accountability: a counter-space where we can change the narrative of how we understand and respond to the wicked problem of IPV, guided by women's voices of experience. To do so, I sought to examine how the formal and informal community response system (consisting of social agencies, community organisations, family law, criminal justice, and mental health systems) responds to women who have experienced violence and abuse and to map the power relations that enable or constrain the ability of women to access safety and recover from violence.

To attend to alternative knowledges, I have engaged with close textual readings of two activist organisations speaking from the margins, to vitalise marginalised narratives, which act as 'counter-memories' (Braidotti, 2013a) to disrupt the dominant narrative. The voices of The Backbone Collective and The Aunties (represented by Jackie Clark) were chosen for this research because of their locations at the margins of the dominant response. These organisations are alternative voices, a site of 'counter-memories' that resist the dominant narrative and make visible the gendered power relations not always attended to, raising awareness from the perspective of those most affected, of how power and a narrow

conceptualisation of what is included as ‘knowledge’ can be used to oppress women and hold men’s violence in place. These organisations recognise IPV and perform ethical activism in different places and spaces which intersect in varying ways with the dominant system response enabling critical engagement with power relations at multiple points of the system response. The activism of the Backbone Collective and The Aunties, offer forms of alternative textual data that I have closely examined as part of a cartography of the domestic violence sector. Given that I was not required to hold any direct contact with these organisations or any individual research participants, I was not required to submit an ethics application through the university for approval before completing this project.

The Backbone Collective [Backbone] is an organisation created in 2017 that undertakes a watchdog functionality, examining how institutions within the system respond to women and children who have experienced men’s violence. Backbone examines the system through women’s experiences and offers a platform for women to provide feedback to those in authority to make the system safer and more responsive. Backbone critiques the dominant response system, concentrating frequently on the Family Court system, highlighting how the institutionalised response is not working well as determined by those with lived experience of the system. Backbone uses the collective voice of women to inform those in positions of authority about the system’s limitations and failures, and the need to acknowledge and become accountable for how multiple, intersecting gendered power relations impact women differently, observable in the Family Court system where parenting roles are treated as equal and interchangeable which leaves little room to explore the gendered realities of parenting within a social and cultural environment that continues to under-value work performed by women. Backbone provides suggestions and frameworks that offer alternatives to address the hegemony of gendered power relations embedded within the current system and facilitate a collaborative, continually improving and responsive system. Listening to the alternative

knowledge and women's narratives brought into the open through the work of Backbone will enable a disruption of the singular story, interrogating contemporary understandings of, and responses to, IPV within dominant institutions, and engaging counter-memories that speak of the complexity of experience embedded in social, cultural and temporal context and offer ways to imagine how the system can better respond to women living with the effects of IPV.

The Aunties organisation is a grassroots organisation developed to assist women and children affected by IPV. The Aunties organise the collection and distribution of material donations for community groups and individual women who need support often utilising social media to connect to the community to source items or services in need. The Aunties, headed by Jackie Clark, provides pastoral care services for 27 women who make up The Aunties whānau group, a group who receive long-term, extensive, and ongoing support at a level determined by the women themselves. The Aunties embed the system response to IPV within patriarchal and racist oppression and prioritise women's voices to guide where and how support should be provided, advocating for relationships of connectedness and empathy. There is a focus on disrupting the power relations between categories of sameness and difference to disrupt beliefs that frame difference as a failure. Examining the work of The Aunties makes space to examine how power operates between the system response and the women most impacted by men's violence and how inattention to social power relations creates the potential for the system to operate in structurally violent ways. Jackie's activism through the grassroots work of The Aunties can be seen to disrupt normative understandings of knowledge production based on her location as a non-academic community worker. The Aunties organisation sits outside the power relationships that govern the traditional production of knowledge to resist any limitations on the shape and form of knowledge generated. Jackie often uses colloquial language as a form of resistance to (Western) academic and political or social expectations and she reworks what is considered acceptable

knowledge-making practices by subverting the traditional approach. Jackie's work on the ground rejects positivist values of detachment and objectivity in favour of connection, reciprocity, and relationality to destabilise power formations.

Braidotti encourages us to question the structures that hold us rigid, that bind us, to interrogate how power is produced. I interpret both Backbone and The Aunties as "prototypes of collective assemblages" (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 478), who take up the challenge to think and do differently. These activist organisations enable us to acknowledge and question the ways that dominant interventions operate as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and are not meeting the diverse needs of women who have experienced men's violence highlighting how the system continues to privilege patriarchal interests that further reproduces violence against women. Both organisations centre the voices of those women who have experienced violence and abuse, hearing their voices as knowledge producers and using these alternative knowledges to formulate approaches to IPV that attend to the multiple and contradictory locations of the diverse group of women. Moving with Braidotti, I take up the work that Backbone and The Aunties engage in to question how power operates between men and women. I seek to examine how structural and gendered power relations impact women who have experienced violence and abuse at different points of the system response to make visible how the dominant approaches to addressing IPV are holding men's violence in place, and to imagine ways in which we can understand and respond to IPV differently: ways that hold the current system to account and can open spaces for alternative knowledges to guide a responsible response.

**Transpositions as a conceptual method of analysis**

To engage in the analysis of this project I needed to disarticulate from dominant knowledges, as I engaged with the texts that employed discussions of relational ethics, I was

drawn to Braidotti's conceptualisation of 'transpositions' (Braidotti, 2006b), which asks for dis-identification with traditional, Western, and normative approaches to knowledge production toward a reimagination of what can be, what is possible where creative potential is not constrained. Braidotti challenges claims to 'truth' as futile and limiting, arguing that we must always be questioning, considering, and seeking out alternative perspectives, creativity and connection should be drivers of knowledge. Transpositions, as Braidotti argues, is a term employed both in the study of genetics and music that reflects the "variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern" (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 226). It entails the "leap of perspective" (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 225) that offers the potentials and possibility for thinking and doing differently about the social problem of IPV. Thinking with Braidotti makes room for "that roar that lies on the other side of silence" (Braidotti, 2014, p. 170). The method or 'notion' of transpositions entails a challenge against taken-for-granted approaches and structures. It is a "theory that stresses the experience of creative insight in engendering other, alternative ways of knowing" (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 6). As a researcher, engaging the process of transpositions, which is in no way prescribed or explicit, requires the re-examination or the reshaping of understandings of social processes and practices by thinking through the axes of difference such as racialisation and sexualisation (Braidotti, 2012). It is an accountable and situated practice, enabling "unfolding virtual spaces" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 226) that Braidotti offers up to enable us to engage the imaginary: the potentials and possibilities that will provide a way forward when addressing complex problems.

Thinking through Braidotti's processes of transpositions requires 'creative repetitions' entailing the "retelling, reconfiguring, and revisiting the concept, phenomenon, event, or location from different angles" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 225). Braidotti argues that binary categories are not inevitable or intractable but can be considered habits (Braidotti, 2006b) that should be broken to unsettle static and stagnant ways of thinking and being in the world and

how we can relate to each other. Braidotti is critical of traditional thinking, which consists of "repetition of established habits of thought and self-representation" (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 8), arguing that to achieve sustainable change and progress, we must move out of habitual practices and comfort zones that entrap us, regarding habits as "cumulated toxins which by sheer uncreative repetition engender forms of behaviour that can be socially accepted as 'normal' or even 'natural'" (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 9). Through engaging with new ways of thinking about and relating to each other, including dis-articulating identity categories that hold us captive to the repetitions of the neoliberal knowledge economy (such as the statistical figure identified in the literature review), we can re-articulate creative and complex ways to understand, connect and 'do better' in our response to women living with the effects of IPV.

### *Figurations*

Thinking on Braidotti's process of figuration and how it enables us to acknowledge and account for the multiple ways in which we can relate and connect with each other led me to trouble how the system response approaches relational dynamics and the different and multiple locations of women. This led me to question how the focus on binary relationships of victim and offender overshadows a woman's location as a mother, a daughter, a business owner or employee and so on. The relational and communal dimension of processes of becoming moves us outwards, away from individual and individualistic concerns, laying the framework for the ethical responsibility of the posthuman subject. It requires attention to the shared conditions of being in this world, moving from the neoliberal rhetoric of individual responsibility towards collective responsibility and affirmative ethical relations. I began exploring how thinking through figurations could be helpful for IPV research as a way to account for the diversity of women's social locations. Figurations are a fundamental component of the cartographic process that enable a creative expression of alternative subjectivities, "immanent to their specific conditions" (Braidotti, 2019c, p. 34) and serving

"as projective anticipations of what can be done..." (Braidotti, 2022, p. 213), helping to make the complexity of power relations visible. Mapping with figurations makes visible the social power relations exposing the limited and limiting partiality of knowledge claims, being "forms of literal expression that bring into representation that which the system had declared off limits" (Braidotti, 2010a, p. 410), acting as spotlights onto blind spots (Braidotti, 1999, p. 91), and indicating places and spaces with transformative potential that can help us learn to think differently about ourselves (Braidotti, 2019c) and actualise the virtual – what we are becoming.

An analysis of power formations and knowledge claims must be undertaken to ascertain the potential for sites of resistance, this is a vital component of any feminist posthuman project (Braidotti, 2021). Uncovering the often-hidden power relations enables the exploration of places and spaces with potential for imaginative possibilities to emerge and allow movement towards responding to social problems in affirmative and dignifying ways. As a cartographic approach enables the mapping of hidden or unseen power relations it opens space to recognise the diversity in challenges that women face based on their specific locations. Cartography and figuration involve a project of inquiry to expose power relations by tracking knowledge production and subjectivities (Braidotti, 1994, 2011, 2012, 2019c), it involves the mapping of flows and forces of power requiring acknowledgement of political, historical, and social locations (Braidotti, 2006a) and helps to decipher the dominant discourses that underpin knowledge claims (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018). It was hoped that through the analysis of the alternative knowledge produced by Backbone and The Aunties, figurations would emerge to articulate the shared experiences of many (not all) women to signpost how women are being oppressed through the intersections of different and multiple systems. For example: How does the interaction of social norms and values of motherhood discipline women when placed into the rigid legal and criminal justice systems? How then are

women constrained depending on how closely they identify with the dominant narratives? The alternative knowledges of the Backbone and The Aunties enable an examination of the multiple places and spaces where processes and practices of social agencies and institutions intersect, where the production of the statistical figure of gendered violence renders visible the intersection of social and economic precarity with IPV. Through a cartographic examination of other points of the system response it was hoped that additional figurations would emerge that can be taken hold of as sites of potential transformation and change.

### *The Cartographic method*

Drawing on Braidotti's feminist process ontology, I approached this research through a feminist lens, centring women's voices within the research, acknowledging the partiality and situatedness of all knowledge claims. Thinking on Braidotti's cartography encouraged me to undertake less commonplace research, to explore the silence to see what is there. Based on its un-prescribed nature, the cartographic method is challenging as it resists adherence to what has been done before. So, to resist the habitual repetition of dominant knowledges and practices it required a creative, non-traditional approach where I, through figurations that emerged from the cartographic practice, could be involved in creatively engaging with alternative knowledge, listening to different perspectives and voices. The cartographic method engaged in this research enables an analysis of often hidden gendered power relations operating within social systems and institutions to shine a light on the taken-for-granted assumptions which hold the current inadequate response system in place. Cartography requires the examination of existing knowledges and artefacts, which meant that data gathering did not require any commitment of resources from the sector. The cartographic process involves tracing what already is and has been and includes the ability to reimagine a new future with new possibilities. This was an essential consideration as the domestic violence sector was and continues to struggle with a lack of funding and resourcing made

worse due to the increase in family violence throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (The Backbone Collective, 2022a). Utilising the cartographic method enabled me to resist the commodification of individual women's stories of violence through attending to voices already in circulation and to also resist relying upon dominant narratives to map the inter-relating power relations. The cartography directs focus towards structural and systemic level operations of power as opposed to narratives of individual-level violence to resist furthering the individualisation of IPV.

The method of cartography is a form of resistance against dominant representations and normative research practices that entrap us in repeating the same habitual forms of behaviour and thought that restrict transformative progress. Undertaking cartography obligates the researcher to be critical and creative (Braidotti, 2018). Braidotti articulates that cartography can perform as a record of the embodiment of power, how it operates both as entrapment *(potestas)* and empowerment *(potentia)* (Braidotti, 2019c) and the cartographic process offers concrete "discursive objects of exchange" (Braidotti, 2019c, p. 32) that can be examined, critiqued, and built upon. The term *'potentia'* is used to describe power which increases the potential for people to connect and relate with others and the world around them, the "positive face of power" (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p. 221). Comparatively, *potestas* relates to the processes constraining or inhibiting one's ability to connect and relate, the "restrictive face of power" (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p. 221). It is not adequate to critique or limit the mapping to the forces operating as potestas/entrapment, the posthuman subject must also attend to the potential for an affirmative alternative by seeking out the generative opportunities where transformations are possible (Braidotti, 2019a)

The cartographic method involves examining texts, theories, and structures such as institutions and social systems (Braidotti, 2012, 2013a, 2019c, 2021), resulting in a situated, historically and spatially specific analysis that can be comprehensive but never complete.

This research entails the exploration of two organisations, The Backbone Collective and The Aunties, to map the response system using the knowledges of the women whose voices they privilege, and they provide an alternative knowledge, counter-memory to the dominant narratives that shape the system response. The Backbone Collective enable a mapping of the institutional response to women and the impacts of government, legal and economic policy that has been developed without consideration of IPV or gender. Drawing on the work of The Aunties enables a mapping of the response system attending to the relational dynamic of women and the social agencies who gate-keep access to resources, the response of the community to IPV, and bringing recognition to the ways that ongoing processes of colonisation are directly impacting how IPV is responded to. Addressing the wicked problem of IPV requires creative methodologies to transpose what we know of it and how we know it to create movement from the status quo where research and responses fail to attend to social power relations that hold men's violence in place. The cartographic method opens spaces for the transposition of ethical activism into knowledge that is recognised and heard, such as that performed by non-dominant organisations such as Backbone and The Aunties, engaging alternative knowledge created at the margins for imaginative possibilities where safety is privileged.

This cartography is gender-driven (Braidotti, 2021), focusing on documenting marginalised groups' experiences and viewpoints in response to the notable reluctance within the domestic violence sector to commit to gender-based research or responses despite the evidence of IPV being gender-based violence. By levelling out the hierarchy between human and nonhuman others (the racialised, sexualised, and naturalised others) through affirming differences, we can then attend to the taken-for-granted systems that function to empower or repress, such as capitalism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism. When we recognise how this power functions, aided through cartography, we can attend to redistributing power relations. To

satisfy the requirement for affirmative practice, cartography must provide sites of potential, these can be communicated using figurations, given figurations are "material and semiotic signposts for specific geo-political and historical locations" (Braidotti, 2019c, p. 34) and act as a method of resistance against power relations by offering a site of creative potential.

A cartographic approach enables deep engagement but also with a light tread on a burdened sector, enabling the examination of the social problem of IPV without the commodification of any women's stories. Articulating the figurations that emerge through the cartographic process enables the consideration of difference as a site of movement towards appreciation for the complexity and multiplicity within a subject, moving away from the fixed, static, and repressive dominant representations. Figurations provide creative prompts that open space to turn our engagement with the system towards alternative approaches to aid recognition of how and why the system performs as it does. Through the creative formation of figurations, it is possible to see glimpses of alternative possibilities or imaginings for doing things differently, where women's protective strategies are engaged with and dignified. The use of figurations enables the visualisation and critique of existing power relations that flow through identity categories of gender, race, and class. Engaging with Braidotti's theory of transpositions opens our understandings of alternative possibilities where the figuration of the 'Pathologised Woman' identified in the Backbone analysis chapter, as an example, can be reworked from a site of deficit and obstruction to become understood as a woman with relational attachments, who engages in protective strategies to support the wellbeing and safety of her child. It is also possible to recognise the impacts of mothering through IPV and how if women are left unsupported their mothering capabilities can be negatively impacted.

To generate movement, we need to locate and listen to those voices that tell a different story, through different approaches, engaging with alternative research practices that attend to gender and power to learn from them and connect with new forms of knowledge

production. Strict binary ideas hold us captive to repetition and sameness because the "binary machine" (Braidotti, 2015, p. 689) prevents us from knowing the full potential of what our bodies can do, as Braidotti argues this type of capture "literally steals all other possible bodies from us" (Braidotti, 2015, p. 689) which acts as restrictive power or *potestas* over the thinking, doing and connections that are possible.

The social problem of IPV is longstanding, and wicked and we need to find new ways of responding to this old problem, whilst recognising that no one solution will address the needs of all women. We need to find a reflexive and response-able approach that addresses the structural inequality of women while also being open to the specificity of the circumstances of individual women. This movement will require accountable practices from disciplines which inform the response system, and those professionals who interact with women, it entails a transformation in the way that IPV is understood as an individualised family matter to a community-wide and societal issue that we are all complicit in holding in place.

## Chapter Three: Analysis - The Backbone Collective

> Family violence work requires that we hold both victims and people using violence in our purview and that we keep front and centre the safety of those who are most at risk of harm. Victims are the ones who will suffer the greatest consequences if we do not get it right and they are the ones who have paid the price for the knowledge that we have.
>
> (Tolmie, 2020b: para .11)

### Emergence

To gain insight into the processes and gendered power relations that hold violence against women in place and which have necessitated the establishment of The Backbone Collective ["Backbone"] as ethical activism, it is necessary to situate their voice within the wider political agenda and neoliberal knowledge economy. The individualisation of IPV within the neoliberal knowledge economy obscures gendered social power relations and reproduces the singular story (Fine, 2017) of the statistical figure of violence. The singular story cannot recognise, account for, or responsibly respond to the diversity of ways women are experiencing violence and abuse in particular places and spaces. The domestic violence sector continues to resist placing women at the centre of analysis. Where research outputs that focus on women's voices have been undertaken, they rarely hold enough traction to see sustained change. The fifth report of the Family Violence Death Review Committee (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2016) challenged the sector to think differently about family violence highlighting how IPV is a pattern of harm against women, and a broad lens is required to understand the different ways that power relations enable the social entrapment of women. Despite the advances undertaken to change the narrative in this report, the pendulum swung swiftly back with the next iteration of the report released by the Family Violence

Death Review Committee, which focused on the needs of men as users of violence (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2020).

The Backbone Collective has opened spaces to meaningfully engage with the challenge to think differently through a feminist analysis of gendered power relations that speaks to how our very systems of response produce and reproduce misogynistic and patriarchal assumptions, providing the conditions for further violence and harm against women and children at the structural and institutional levels. To hold our systems to account for the justification and continuation of violence against women at sites of response, Backbone listens to women whose stories of violence and abuse are silenced by professionals, women who turn to or who are pulled into institutional sites that should help and protect them, but where they instead experience court-sanctioned coercive control and surveillance by their abuser/(ex)partner and they are unable to extract themselves. Backbone seeks out the situated knowledge of women's lived experience of men's violence within sites of our institutional response, making it possible to rethink the adequacy of the current system to respond responsibly to women's safety. Backbone has located the Family Court as a particular site of ongoing violence, where intersecting oppressions of gender, race and class complicate the recognition of women who experience violence, leaving women and children silenced, unsupported, and less safe (The Backbone Collective, 2021). This is the location that Backbone emerges from, where women are speaking but not being heard by the system and where Backbone invites us to account for the gendered social power relations that hold IPV in place, both in our communities and within our institutions of response.

### *Catalyst for the development of the Backbone Collective*

In 2014, New Zealand's problem with family violence was referred to as a "slow-burning disaster" (Wilson & Webber, 2014a, p. 52) when the People's Report (Wilson &

Webber, 2014b) and the People's Blueprint (Wilson & Webber, 2014a) reports were released as part of the Glenn Inquiry. The People's Report (2014b) identified dissatisfaction with the system response as reported by system users, explicitly noting the deficiencies of the Family Court, describing how it "contributed to the maintenance of child abuse and domestic violence" (p. 36). The Te Whakaruruhau Family Services manager Ruahine Albert stated they were pleased with the Glenn Inquiry's attention to structural issues citing fatigue from nearly 30 years of not being heard (Wilson, 2014). The Glenn Inquiry reflected an attempt to listen and learn from the community most impacted by IPV to ascertain what is most needed to improve the sector, as the quote from Julia Tolmie at the start of this chapter reminds us, it is those with the experience of violence who have paid the price for the knowledge that we hold. Over 500 people with lived experience of IPV or who worked in the frontline response were interviewed as part of the Glenn Inquiry. The reports produced challenged the dominant representation of the statistical figure by acknowledging the presence of 'unrecognisable victims' such as middle and upper-socio-economic status Pākehā women who are entrapped in violent relationships and unable to leave in part because of the esteem their partners hold within the community and unequal access to resources within the relationship (Wilson & Webber, 2014b). The Glenn Inquiry enabled the recognition of women who previously had been uncounted within the dominant neoliberal knowledge economy and, therefore, unaccounted for in the system response. The Glenn Inquiry began to open spaces where we could consider alternative narratives and how the response system is informed by reductionist and empirical knowledges, which are limited and partial, leading to stereotypes and narrow understandings of IPV. The articulation of 'unrecognised violence' made it possible to acknowledge how those who fall outside the statistical figure of violence can struggle to recognise themselves as victims or secure recognition by the system.

Despite acknowledging that child abuse and domestic violence are found across all socio-economic, class, and ethnic demographics, including the Pākehā middle class, the research outputs of the Glenn Inquiry continued to reproduce the singular story of IPV. IPV was still configured within certain communities and families as an issue of risky bodies marked by difference. The People's Report identified issues within Māori, Pasifika and gang-affiliated families and raised the need to attend to the normalised violence within families with intergenerational abuse (Wilson & Webber, 2014b). The report also highlighted the need for increased attention and research within migrant communities, people with disabilities and same-sex relationships (Wilson & Webber, 2014b). As a result, the Glenn Inquiry's work continued to produce and reproduce figurations of 'who' is more likely to be affected by IPV, reinforcing assumptions of IPV being a problem of risky bodies. This left Māori and Pasifika families framed as communities of violence and others being targeted as needing increased surveillance, reproducing the individualised understanding of IPV and reinforcing notions of difference as deficit. In this way, it leaves the underlying gendered social power relations unacknowledged and unaccounted for. The desire to attend to the high levels of IPV recognised in specific communities reproduces the limited and partial singular story, entrenching deficit narratives in the individualised problem 'other' and continuing to overlook the underlying gendered power relationships that create the conditions for violence. The missed opportunity for a gendered analysis within the Glenn Inquiry provided the impetus for developing The Backbone Collective, which was created to listen to excluded voices to open spaces for new and alternative knowledges of IPV. The creation of Backbone reflected a movement to resist the colonising practice of individualising social problems and inviting conversation about the social and gendered conditions that contribute to ongoing processes of domination and oppression. Backbone uses counter-memories to insert a

feminist perspective into understandings of the sector, to decentre dominant representations of IPV, making space for the voices and alternative knowledges at the margins.

'The Way Forward' report published in 2014 as the Impact Collective (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014) was an independent report compiled by the co-founders of Backbone before its establishment and illustrated the need for an integrated system that can account for gendered power relationships to respond effectively to IPV and child abuse and to connect the gaps made by siloed and fragmented services. This report drew on women's stories of violence as told to the Glenn Inquiry to examine gendered power relations in the context of the multiple systems and institutions which respond to domestic violence. 'The Way Forward' located the need for a paradigm shift, moving the system towards attending to relationships of gendered power between people and between systems addressing the complexity of poverty, mental illness, and substance abuse (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014) as conditions and consequences of IPV.

Backbone's location outside the system was intentional to enable the organisation to centre the needs and experiences of women (The Backbone Collective, 2017e) without being governed by political forces. Backbone can 'speak the truth' and move research forward through a gendered analysis partly because they do not have to worry about conforming to mechanisms of neoliberal bureaucracy that could place restrictions on their funding and autonomy (The Backbone Collective, 2017f), Backbone acknowledges that feminist advocacy within community groups can often be suppressed due to the power relationships that construct the sector (Chapman, 2017, 02:30; The Backbone Collective, 2017e). Backbone's independent location is an act of resistance to the institutional silencing of women and enables them to perform a watchdog functionality, to observe and report on issues within the sector to hold our systems of response to account. Backbone works with a diverse audience and seeks relationships with academics (Mackenzie et al., 2020),

community organisations (Violence Free Network Wairarapa, Shine*), social agencies, and government departments, such as the Ministry of Social Development (The Backbone Collective, 2020b) to encourage these relationships to move the system towards one that is integrated and well-supported. Backbone is working to mobilise social relationships within the wider system to create movement and attention on structural issues that resist individualisation.

Backbone seeks to bring into our response to IPV the untold narratives of women to disrupt the singular story of violence that pivots the system around a 'recognisable' victim shaped and reproduced by the statistical figure of violence, disrupting the responsibilisation and subjugation of marginalised communities (risky bodies) for the social problem of IPV. Backbone's attention to the partiality of the singular story makes space to disrupt beliefs of the dangerous 'other' to highlight how violence is a problem of 'normal' men (Flood, 2016), this disruption will offer the potential to attend to normalised power relations that are detrimental to healthy, reciprocal and connected relationships. Backbone responds to the repetition and stasis within the neoliberal proliferation of knowledge production by acknowledging "that roar that lies on the other side of silence" (Braidotti, 2014, p. 170). The stories of women's experiences of violence within systems and structures of response that the sector is not currently taking responsibility for or holding themselves accountable to. It is through Backbone's circulation of knowledge 'from the margins' that it is possible to recognise the partiality of the singular story of violence and make space to consider where alternative knowledges could be located. Backbone prioritises the safety of women and children through their use of a collective voice, the refusal to commodify individual women's stories (Chapman, 2017, 02:28), and the insistence on ethical accountability from the sector. Engaging a cartographic analysis of the Backbone's work enables an argument for sustained attention to power relations across social hierarchies to shed light on the processes at a

systemic and structural level that hold men's violence in place, questioning the taken-for-granted commitment to processes and systems, such as the adequacy of a legal system's response to a social problem of relationships and open spaces to imagine a more responsible response.

### *Politics of location: Holding our systems to account*

Backbone was created in response to the missed opportunities within the sector to take a gendered analysis to IPV research and centre the needs and voices of women. The attainment of formal legal equality within a neoliberal environment has diminished the perceived need for gendered analysis, and false assumptions of gender equality obscure the enduring power relations inherent in hegemonic societies like Aotearoa New Zealand, which has high levels of structural inequality. The relationships of power within systems and institutions and the way they interact and operate to disproportionately impact women is the politics of location from which Backbone emerges. Government agencies have resisted adopting a gendered lens, reflected in the development of gender-neutral legislation, for example, the construction of IPV as an issue of 'family violence'. Whilst the focus on 'family violence' purports to further an agenda of inclusivity through acknowledging how violence extends beyond the victim/offender binary, it can obscure the gendered impacts and nature of IPV (Yates, 2020). IPV, as articulated through gender-neutral policy and practice, is an issue of conflict and family discord rather than gendered violence, providing the conditions for the social entrapment of women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Backbone's gendered analysis brings women's narratives into the centre to shift the dominance of the singular story and speak back to the statistical figure of violence. In this process of speaking back, we can acknowledge the complexity of the multiple intersecting gendered power relations that provide the conditions for men's violence against women in

our communities and within our systems of response, to make space to recognise diverse forms and patterns of gendered violence as opposed to IPV being an individualised binary issue between victim and offender. This awareness has been supported by an emergent literature that frames IPV as a gendered practice of coercive control that operates disciplinary functions over women's bodies by governing their autonomy and liberty (Stark, 2007). In this way, Backbone makes visible the heterogeneity of IPV and the impacts of multiple and intersecting systems of oppression exposing the inadequacy of a response system founded upon and controlled by dominant masculinist knowledges.

Women hold assumptions that the Family Court will protect them and support them to safety because separation from a violent partner is the socially sanctioned response to violence and abuse (Q+A, 2018, 04:10), it is the individualisation of the legal response that holds women responsible for their safety through separation that leads to family court. The Family Court represents a key component of the response system as it holds responsibility for the administration of core aspects of a woman's safety-making, and its intervention can enable or constrain women from achieving safety – the court is responsible for the issuance of protection orders, the distribution of material and financial assets and care and contact of children, all factors relating to women being able to achieve distance from their abuser that women report as necessary to their recovery from violence (The Backbone Collective, 2020b). When institutions, such as the Family Court, are responsive only to dominant exclusionary knowledges that are unable to recognise and account for gendered power relations and complexity and diversity of experience, the singular story is prioritised through fragmented and targeted intervention which are governed by notions of liability and symbolic power rather than the 'humanness' of the people who find themselves within the institutions (Coombes et al., 2016). Therefore, the court holds itself accountable to the singular story of violence and the statistical figure, not the women who find themselves caught within the gaze

of the Court, and therefore alternative knowledges that resist this conceptualisation of accountability are silenced to protect the Court's symbolic power. Since the system does not enable accountability in the presence of women's stories, Backbone examines the consequences of and practices of men's use of violence, which enables engagement with how the social systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and neoliberalism interact to advance patriarchal interests through the response system to hold this system to account.

By locating women's narratives of violence within the Family Court system, Backbone has enabled a figuration of the 'impenetrable court' to emerge. The lack of public access to the Family Court by those outside of proceedings is intended to advance interests of privacy, particularly that of minors, a consequence of this mechanism is that it prevents the circulation of narratives of violence that differ from institutional (exclusionary) regimes of intelligibility and accountability. Limited media access to the system creates a barrier blocking women's stories of violence from being heard and understood by the public. Backbone articulates the Family Court system as insular and impenetrable through acknowledging the lack of access to any independent review of the decisions made within the Family Court. They compile a list of close to 50 different organisations/individuals that extend beyond the Family Court system, including Members of Parliament, the Human Rights Commission, Judges, Office of the Privacy Commissioner and individual social agencies that women reported having complained to about their negative experiences within the Family Court system (The Backbone Collective, 2017b) with most women reporting that they were unsatisfied with the responses they received (The Backbone Collective, 2017b). However, when Backbone has drawn attention to such criticisms, their voice has been dismissed as merely "anecdotal" (New Zealand Bar Association, 2017) and "at best, unhelpful and at worst, misguided" (New Zealand Law Society, 2017, para. 15), demonstrating the disinterest of legal communities to hold themselves accountable to counter-narratives and instead continue the reproduction of

patriarchal control that does not hold spaces for listening to the voices of women and children. The mapping of the circular complaints process conducted by Backbone (The Backbone Collective, 2017b) reinforces that the social problem of IPV is a systemic and structural issue of a patriarchal and hierarchal system that does not hold itself accountable to the public.

The impenetrability of the Family Court demonstrates the lack of accountability of the court to the public, which funds its service and limited ethical responsibility within the sector for promoting interests of safety for women and children. Backbone works to mobilise the collective, anonymous voices of women, circulating counter-memories through academic publication and submissions to the government on strategy and legislation, which activate against the dominant memory of what enables and sustains IPV. In making space for the circulation of counter-memories, those untold stories of violence not normally accessible to the public, the media, academics, politicians, and the government, Backbone enables us to rethink the legitimacy and adequacy of the partial knowledges commanding the response system. The feminist consciousness-raising of The Backbone Collective foregrounds an ethical responsibility to hold decolonising conversations to examine why these missing narratives of gendered violence towards women, produced and reproduced through institutionalised legal and social norms that are tolerant of unequal relationships between men and women, are left untold, shifting responsibility towards the 'system' (Herbert & MacKenzie, 2014) to be accountable for its responses (The Backbone Collective, 2017b). Backbone's interrogation of the Family Court system enables us to question how the inclusion of alternative and feminist perspectives embedded in the situated knowledges of women could enable a shift away from processes which reproduce harm to rearticulate the system into a more responsive service. The Backbone's location of speaking back to gendered power at the institutional level through a space they have opened by sharing

women's narratives provokes an ethical responsibility to act. Backbone's work, as a site of alternative knowledge, mobilises re-articulation of how the system can better respond to women and can be held to account for how socio-legal systems are producing and reproducing harms that oppress along class, racial and gendered lines to advance patriarchal interests within an insular system.

Braidotti's recommendation for defamiliarization from social systems and structures that have become 'taken for granted' enable us to engage with The Backbone Collective's examination of the gendered power relations operating in and through the Family Court to acknowledge and account for the processes and practices that produce and sustain the conditions for IPV, including the responsibilisation of women for men's violence, where women are held accountable for the violence they experience. For instance, women spoke to Backbone of the need to apply through the court for protection orders that require women to be responsible for their own safety-making, and women are responded to punitively where they are considered to have failed in their duty to protect their children from violence (Morgan & Coombes, 2016), exacerbated by the disconnect between understandings of IPV and child abuse/neglect. Women are responsible for the primary emotional, and physical load of parenting and women are also held responsible for facilitating the father-child relationship (Laing, 2017). These caring accountabilities can exist in tension where women are held responsible for protecting children from men's violence whilst having social, cultural, and legal obligations to continue facilitating a child's ongoing relationship with their father, even where there is a history of abuse towards them. Gendered power established through the hierarchal public/private divide creates the conditions for women to be responsibilised for men's violence. The heteronormative expectations of femininity and masculinity reproduce a dichotomous divide between the private realm of women, where she holds the unpaid responsibility for caring for the family and the public realm of men, where they gain

resources that they can use to exploit the inferior position of women (Stark, 2007). The inclusion of women's unmediated experiences of violence at sites of institutional response opens space to articulate and challenge neoliberal processes of individualisation that (mis)recognise women as responsible for men's violence and, therefore, hold women to account for the gendered social power relations that provide the conditions for IPV and the reproduction of gendered violence within institutional settings.

Backbone's attention to the Family Court has created an awareness of how structural gendered power that holds women responsible and accountable for men's violence is institutionalised within the system which professes to support them. Backbone's work to highlight the gendered power that pervades the Family Court system problematises the inadequacy of a system response that has a narrow focus on the violence of individual men and makes space to consider a movement towards addressing the relationship between women and the system to better attend to the power relations which leave them vulnerable to exploitation and harm. Backbone's attention to gender power relations reshapes understandings of IPV as a human rights issue (Stark, 2007), produced and reproduced through an institutionalised social hierarchy that tolerates unequal power distributions to exist within the relationships between men and women. Recognition of the gendered nature of this social problem requires attendance at all points of the system response and increasing the accountability of the government for addressing issues of women's safety in ways that individual criminal matters do not. Backbone argues that gender discrimination within the Family Court represents the most fundamental failing of the system response (The Backbone Collective, 2018e). It is the recognition of this rearticulation of accountability that offers up potentials for doing things differently, acting as *potentia* leading to an ethical responsibility to act on this awareness. Braidotti writes, "I will attempt to de-pathologize and to illuminate in a

positive light some contemporary cultural and social phenomena, trying to emphasize their creative and affirmative potential" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 5).

Backbone's attention to the Family Court makes it possible to hear women's narratives of their experiences within the often inaccessible and private institution, in asking about their experiences in the court, Backbone is able to circulate previously excluded counter-memories where women can articulate how the institution failed to make them safer and ultimately after they enter the court "their situation is far more dangerous as children are ordered to have contact with abusers" (Mackenzie, 2018, para. 5). The Backbone Collective's work problematises assumptions of the Family Court as a site of support through narratives that describe it as a site of tension which is unsafe for women and as an institutional space where violence is reproduced and facilitated through the legal process. Backbone's work to uncover the missing voices of women, collecting up the specificities of women's diverse yet similarly negative experiences, opens the space to think about how gendered violence is enacted structurally and how the inclusion of marginalised and alternative knowledges can transform the system in ways which deliver socially just outcomes for women and children.

### *Disrupting the statistical figure*

The domestic violence sector is informed by dominant Western knowledges as produced and reproduced by the statistical figure of violence, and when the Family Court system centres on knowledges that advance patriarchal interests embedded within Eurocentric foundations, these limited and partial knowledges shape the way that Family Court professionals respond to claims of violence and abuse. These knowledge systems undervalue the situated knowledges of women who have experienced violence and abuse. Backbone has sought out their unheard narratives to present them as a collective counter-memory as a form of ethical activism that serves to dislodge the centring of dominant knowledges, pushing us to

think about how the system could respond differently if it were to break free of the "monological mental habits of phallocentrism" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 2) and be receptive to the inclusion of feminist knowledges. Backbone's attendance to the partiality of the statistical figure of violence problematises the response systems' dependence on limited hegemonic knowledges and opens spaces to consider the potentials that the inclusion of diverse voices would evoke.

***Reconfiguring recognition of gendered violence within the Family Court***

Backbone's work has opened space for women to speak out about how the Family Court is not the source of support for families it was established to provide rather, it can be located as a site of enduring power struggles. When women enter the Family Court system, they should expect to receive support and safety from men's violence but can often find the system unable or unwilling to recognise IPV, particularly when it presents as non-physical violence. It is understood that the presence of IPV is a key factor in the decision to dissolve intimate relationships (Laing, 2017), especially where children are involved (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010), however, the Family Court approaches the separation of families as if IPV is unlikely to be present, even though we have high levels of IPV within families in the community and research which attests to the high level of cases which enter Family Courts (Meier & Dickson, 2017; The Backbone Collective, 2017a). Backbone reported that, while nearly three-quarters of respondents to their initial report identified physical violence, nearly all confirmed psychological violence (The Backbone Collective, 2020b). The Family Court is informed by the statistical narrative of violence that is generated through dominant research methodologies popular within the positivist academic tradition, which does not attend to the situated knowledges of women who articulate that men's violence is more than discrete, quantifiable incidents of physical violence and is very much a present issue in the context of the Family Court.

Backbone brings awareness of the limited and narrow scope of violence that the Family Court recognises, if it is not physical violence (and often even when it is), the court can disregard it as irrelevant, or it did not happen. Backbone reports that 65% of women felt the Family court failed to understand their experiences of violence and abuse (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). If any physical violence was a one-off event or was infrequent, then the abuse could be dismissed as situational, an anomaly or historical (The Backbone Collective, 2017c) discounting other experiences of violence. Women report that for their experiences of violence and abuse to be taken seriously by the court, they require strong evidence of ongoing physical violence, and that psychological violence is often insufficient for Judges to grant protection orders (Shine*, n.d; The Backbone Collective, 2020a). Backbone attributes refusal to administer safety to a lack of understanding within the court of the seriousness of non-physical violence and the rigid parameters of the legal system that responds most readily to defined, discrete, and serious examples of physical violence overlooking the other forms of psychological and economic abuse despite their inclusion in the legislation. Furthermore, the ability to provide evidence of violence can be constrained by issues of precarity and safety. Women report to Backbone that the cost of securing a protection order is prohibitive, and the lack of enforcement can render them worthless (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). Even when protection orders are secured, the judiciary turning without notice applications into on-notice without notifying women has led to the domestic violence agency Shine* warning women of the limited protection they offer (Shine*, n.d), discouraging women from applying and therefore producing a (tentative) record of the threat of harm, to not apply for a protection order leaves them without any ‘evidence’ of the violence to present to the Family Court. Some women report that holding a protection order or their abuser having convictions (sometimes multiple) for violence within the criminal court was still not considered adequate to demonstrate the violence of their (ex)partner or to convince the Family Court that children

were unsafe in their care (The Backbone Collective, 2018b). Backbone highlight that "you don't have to have black eyes to have your life made incredibly small" (Chapman, 2017, 06:48) recognising social entrapment, and the circulation of counter-memories that contradict the singular story of violence and the demand for 'sufficient evidence' of abuse brings recognition to how the Family Court's inability to respond to non-physical gendered violence sets up the conditions for professionals to dismiss or set aside protection orders or minimise women's experiences of violence. The way that Backbone have problematised the Court's tendency to dismiss women's knowledges of IPV highlights that the Court is reliant on limited and exclusionary knowledge, and this opens the potential to incorporate women's experiences of violence to extend the comprehension of IPV within the Family Court.

Backbone's use of counter-memories to describe the violence that women found most harmful acknowledges and accounts for how the system can operate in ways that reproduce gendered violence towards women in mimesis with individual abusers, and tolerance for certain forms of violence is leaving women unsafe and wishing they had never entered the system (The Backbone Collective, 2017b). Ruth Herbert, co-founder of Backbone states that what they hear from many women is that the behaviour of the Family Court "closely parallels the abusive relationship" (Q+A, 2018, 01:27). Backbone incorporates coercive control into understandings of IPV, which acts as a challenge to the centrality of physical violence within the response system and by doing so it enables the appearance of different kinds of victims, to disarticulate the dominant and partial representation of IPV. Once coercive control is accepted as a central component of violence and abuse IPV can be understood as a form of gendered social entrapment, and the importance of a gendered analysis becomes highly visible, along with the complicity of the Family Court.

Where the system relies on limited knowledges it influences the level of engagement that women have with the system, women who do not meet the stereotype produced by the

statistical narrative can find little opportunity to disclose IPV or face limited recognition when they do as they present as less credible victims. As discussed in the literature review, social and racial power relations that inform police policy and practice can divert interception or recognition of Pākehā IPV by social agencies and institutions, where police are looking to attend to IPV within marginalised communities, it may distract attention from signs it is occurring within the dominant group. The lack of recognition of Pākehā IPV can mean that women may enter the Family Court with little or no evidence of men's violence. Furthermore, women may keep the secrets of men's violence to avoid the stigma associated with breaching social expectations of femininity that inform understandings of what it means to be a 'good wife', and this shame acts as *potestas* (Braidotti, 2017a), keeping women from disclosing violence and limits interactions that Pākehā men have with the criminal justice system exacerbating the invisibility of Pākehā IPV. Awareness of the relationship between ideals of femininity and how it intersects with social and racial power relations provides potential spaces to listen and challenge the ways that norms and stereotypes hold men's violence in place. Backbone's attention to gendered power enables responsibility to be cast towards systems that influence the recognition of IPV in some locations and not others.

Backbone's work to reconfigure understandings of gendered violence within the Family Court draws attention to how gendered power relations complicate the recognition of where behaviour transitions from 'normal' into 'abusive', this complexity becomes visible through Backbone's reports on the ways that abusive men manage to manipulate court professionals when they present as reputable, and eloquent middle and upper-class professional men (The Backbone Collective, 2017a) reflective of the neoliberalism, racism, and classism inherent in hierarchal, patriarchal institutions. Unequal power relations continue to render the hegemonic (and Pākehā) institutional system more accessible to men, who hold greater financial resources in which to engage the system to their advantage, with women reporting to

Backbone that they engage in practices of governing themselves, being vigilant to minimise the risk of being pulled into renewed proceedings by (ex)partners. Backbone shows the high financial costs of entering the Family Court, leaving women up to $500,000 in debt (The Backbone Collective, 2017a) and the lack of social and housing support that increases women's precarity, in housing and income post-separation (The Backbone Collective, 2020b). Men can engage legal representation off the backs of women's unpaid labour whilst women are often left in debt or having to dedicate countless hours responding to applications and dedicating resources to fighting the system rather than rebuilding their lives. These unequal power relations mean that women are constrained from action that would advance the wellbeing of their children, and women report they avoid asking for changes to care and contact schedules in fear that it will prompt retaliation from (ex)partners who will launch proceedings to alter parenting orders that would further reduce mother care time. Women reported to Backbone that they often agreed to orders they were dissatisfied with to avoid further litigation or retaliation from their (ex)partner (The Backbone Collective, 2017a), and this renders problematic the assumptions that the Family Court is a resource that supports women. Rather, it demonstrates that women are having to 'manage' the system to achieve the least negative outcome. Consequently, the court fails to appreciate the potential men hold to exploit the inequality for women who reside more precariously on the social hierarchy than their male (ex)partners. Women conforming to social ideals of femininity by carrying the responsibility for the parenting load affords men the privilege to continue their careers uninterrupted and unimpeded, creating unequal power relations as abusive men can use their superior access to financial resources to entrap women in the Family Court system. Masculinity is generally linked with 'being in control', dominance and a sense of entitlement to control women (Heise, 1998; Stark, 2007) therefore, men who exhibit controlling behaviours can be perceived as externalising strong or traditional values where domination

over women becomes normalised even to the point of anger and women's passivity to such traditional masculine domination is expected. Women report to Backbone that the court holds expectations that men's violence will be totalising, which sets the conditions for violence to be minimised when women present as fearful of abuse yet professionally competent and successful, denying the multiplicities of women (The Backbone Collective, 2017a). It is possible to see assumptions of an 'Unworthy Victim' emerge, where the courts knowledge of the diversity in experiences of IPV and their sociocultural expectations of gender roles leads to a discounting of experiences that sit outside their level of recognition, leaving women unrecognised as credible or worthy of support. Backbone's attendance to gender forces recognition of how gendered violence can occur where gendered power reinforces a social hierarchy which opens potential to examine how it is possible to disarticulate what is considered normative gendered behaviour.

Backbone's attention to counter-memories that disrupt the dominance of the singular story and the statistical figure of violence map out conditions of gendered social power relations within Western, heteronormative, patriarchal systems that enable a figuration of the missing Pākehā woman to emerge, locating the presence of women who do not appear within official statistics or within the Family Court. The emergence of this figuration is supported by demographic analysis conducted by the Backbone, where they identified that it was predominantly Pākehā women who responded to their surveys (The Backbone Collective, 2017c, 2017d, 2020b, 2022a), forcing a recognition of the partiality of knowledges that the response system centres on. A significant number of women, particularly Pākehā women who present in the Family Court report the presence of IPV, despite their notable absence from the statistical narrative of violence and lower presence as victims within the criminal justice system. Backbone's identification of counter-memories of Pākehā IPV disrupts assumptions that violence is an issue located within the deviant 'other' rather it is a ubiquitous issue across

demographics. This introduction of counter-memories that produce the figuration of the 'Missing Pākehā woman' serves as a form of *potentia* (Braidotti, 2017a) in problematising the limited perspective of the dominant representation Backbone enables an awareness of the unequal recognition of IPV informed by the hegemonic social hierarchy. Backbone argues that "violence against women is everybody's issue…it impacts heavily on individuals, society and the economy" (The Backbone Collective, 2017e, p. 26), and it is through Backbone's attention to the intersections of multiple and complex gendered social power relationships, produced and reproduced institutionally within the Family Court, that makes space to consider alternative mechanisms to address this social problem.

**'Best Interests of the Child'**

Through Backbone's work, we can also problematise the assumptions of the welfare principle by identifying the consequences of the Courts pursuit of what is in the 'best interests of the child'. The ideology of the Family Court centres on the welfare principle (Elizabeth, 2017) that regarding any decision-making, it places the highest weight on doing what is in the best interests or the welfare of a child. Understandings of 'best interests' are underpinned by patriarchal Western knowledges that value individualism and nuclear family structures. The court relies on the opinions of professional 'experts' (s133 report writers (psychologists), Lawyer for the Child) to make determinations in lieu of being guided by the voices of women/mothers. Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review the Court holds expectations of women to behave in calm and rational ways despite women often being forced into contact with their abuser (The Backbone Collective, 2017a), demonstrating a lack of concern for women's experience as victims.

As part of the welfare principle, the Family Court adheres to an ideology that the best interests of a child are served by shared parenting (Flood, 2010), even in cases with a history

of violence. However, the enactment of certain processes, such as uplifts, which are often made without any follow-up interviews or reviews from the Family Court after orders are made (The Backbone Collective, 2017d, 2022b), can result in harmful consequences for children. Backbone reports that children who are forced into care and contact with fathers when they do not want it, or where they are required to spend time with abusive fathers, can suffer ongoing and detrimental health impacts (The Backbone Collective, 2017d). Women report to Backbone that children can struggle with anxiety, self-harm, and suicidality (The Backbone Collective, 2017d) which confronts the claims of the court to be operating with children's wellbeing at the forefront.

Furthermore, there is a systemic breach of responsibility by those in the Lawyer for the Child role (The Backbone Collective, 2018b), it is reported that the viewpoints of children are frequently ignored or misrepresented (The Backbone Collective, 2018b), and outcomes can be engineered when the Lawyer for the Child fails to present the views of children adequately to the Court which enables the Court to adhere to its ideology of shared parenting care (The Backbone Collective, 2018b, 2022b) as being in the child's best interests. This contributes to the imperceptibility of the effects of gendered violence as experienced by children and reproduces the artificial separation of the abuse of the mother as not being relevant or not impacting the child (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). Women report to Backbone that when they speak of men's violence, Family Court professionals can disbelieve, minimise, or not enter their experiences into evidence, rebuking women's narratives as being historical, inflated or not relevant to the child (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). These processes of silencing and denial compromise the ability of the Court to meaningfully uphold the best interests of the child.

When children are expressing verbally or somatically that they are fearful and hesitant to undergo contact yet are forced to by their mothers who are under threat of punitive

consequences under parenting orders (The Backbone Collective, 2017d), and mothers who are legally prevented from discussing family court proceedings with their child (The Backbone Collective, 2017c) or must only speak 'positively' of the child's father (Elizabeth, 2020), can be damaging to the mother-child relationship. How is this process ever in the best interests of the child?

Backbone note that parenting orders can prevent women from disclosing concerns of child abuse to authorities, having a parenting order in place can prevent women from being able to report alleged child abuse or neglect to the police for intervention as unless there is a critical risk to a child the New Zealand Police are unable to over-ride parenting orders (The Backbone Collective, 2022b), leaving children at risk and women at a loss of where she can go to get help protecting her children. When the court deems abusive partners to be good or good-enough fathers it requires the commitment of emotional labour by mothers who must endure the presence and influence of their abuser in decisions which impact their child, thereby prioritising the needs and wants of fathers over mothers and children. Here we see the burden of responsibility for mothers, the protection of children and the relationship with their fathers, as normalised by Family Court practices, where the reproduction of gendered violence of the system is enacted in the best interests of the child.

The Court's parenting ideology, the reticence of professionals to accurately present the views of children to the Court and the under-valuing of situated knowledges sets up the conditions for the Court to force children into care and contact arrangements that are contrary to their wishes and leave them vulnerable to abuse (The Backbone Collective, 2018b). The figuration of the 'Unheard Child' emerges here, illuminating how the court is operating under patriarchal authority where children are deemed as the 'other' to the adult, the knowledge they possess is deemed inadequate and under-developed, and their interests and welfare are subjugated in favour of paternal rights. The conduct of family law professionals intersects to

reproduce harms towards children who are not perceived to be directly impacted by men's violence and so their stories of violence and perspectives on their future are dismissed.

**The privileging of paternal rights**

By examining the research undertaken by Backbone, where we can see the harmful impacts on children forced into unsafe contact with violent fathers, it is then possible to address how the principles of children's 'best interests' can be conflated with paternal rights. Children can fear spending time alone with their fathers without their mother's presence after experiencing violence and abuse directed towards their mothers or themselves (The Backbone Collective, 2017d). Yet, the Court does not interpret this as sufficient to override patriarchal interests as interpreted under the Care of Children Act 2004, resulting in the Family Court working in the 'bests interests of the father' rather than the child. The 'rights' fathers hold, as determined by the CoCA, to have a relationship with their child are prioritised over a mother's safety fears or the child's fear of unsupervised access with their fathers.

The Court's reliance on sociocultural knowledges without a gender analysis advances patriarchal interests, compromising the safety of women and children. The legal system constructs the process of parenting as egalitarian – consisting of dual roles with equivalency in rights and responsibilities, gender-neutral and interchangeable, and Backbone's counter-memories dislodge assumptions of the neutral objectivity of the court by highlighting the ways professionals hold patriarchal assumptions of the roles of 'mother' and 'father' which are imbued with inequitable expectations to the detriment of women. A 'good mother' is required to facilitate the father-child relationship pre- and post-separation. The court undervalues the unpaid emotional labour and affective burden (Elizabeth, 2020) placed on women having to facilitate contact with an abusive parent. The complexities of an equal

shared care arrangement that prioritises paternal interests as central, fails to consider the financial and emotional cost to women and children forced into an ongoing relationship with an abusive father. Parenting remains largely a gendered practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, with women continuing to hold the primary responsibility for the raising of children in intact families (Elizabeth et al., 2012a). What Backbone makes space to think about through highlighting the practices of domination and subordination that require women and children to acquiesce to father contact time at the point of separation, is that a consideration that often what is deemed to be 'best interests' can work in service of paternal rights and renders children invisible.

Women reported to Backbone that temporal and spatial distance from their abusers assisted their recovery from violence (The Backbone Collective, 2020b). Women may seek to relocate for safety, more affordable accommodation, better employment opportunities or familial support. The Family Courts' use of 'prohibitive' or parenting orders can render mothers unable to enter their child's school to watch their activities, or meet with teachers, they are constrained to rigid timetables that prevent or limit holidays, leisure activities or the pursuit of shared recreational activities (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). Parenting orders can prevent women from relocating to areas that would enable a work-life balance most suited to their and their children's needs. Parenting orders can also prevent women from mothering children in ways consistent with their pre-separation care and how they feel is best suited going forward (The Backbone Collective, 2017c), whilst at the same time requiring ongoing contact with abusive men that can set the conditions to govern gender and provide conditions for ongoing abuse. These constraints are not equally applied to men who can 'opt in' to parenting at the level they can more freely determine. Backbone's research opens space to consider the gendered and disciplining function on women's bodily movements that occurs when the court views parenting as egalitarian and fails to consider how parenting continues to

be a gendered practice, pre- and post-separation. Women continue to hold greater responsibility for childcare and social power relations whilst being afforded fewer resources to manage this responsibility. Where the court supports paternal interests using prohibitive or parenting orders that constrain the movement of women it can be experienced as a simulacrum of their abuser's coercive and controlling behaviour. Backbone opens spaces to think differently about post-separation parenting and how normative expectations of ongoing father contact (Elizabeth et al., 2012a; Tolmie et al., 2009, 2010), open spaces to acknowledge how the Family Court facilitates the social entrapment of women.

***Producing and re-producing the conditions for gendered violence***

Backbone's attendance to the ongoing violence that women face post-separation makes it possible to see how the institutionalisation of paternal rights under the CoCA forges an enduring link between parents providing violent men with an ability to exert power and control over women through exercising their 'rights' to child-care and contact, often without having to provide significantly for the financial, practical, or emotional load of parenting (Radford & Tsutsumi, 2004; Rhoades, 2002). Women report to Backbone that often, their abusers display a history of indifference in caring for children pre-separation only to demand residential care time post-separation (The Backbone Collective, 2017c).

The guardianship provisions under the CoCA dictate the parental right to have input into decisions such as where a child lives, attends school, religious upbringing, and medical/health issues such as consent for medical procedures meaning that women can be forced to endure the presence and involvement of her abuser when undertaking routine parenting tasks. This institutionalising of paternal rights can be exercised as a form of coercive control and surveillance where abusive (ex)partners use guardianship decisions to orchestrate encounters with women. Backbone refers to the Family Courts practice of

preventing no contact between women and their abuser as “legitimised stalking” (The Backbone Collective, 2022b, p. 12).

The process of child uplifts, under sections 72 and 73 of the CoCA ("Care of Children Act 2004,") can demonstrate the way paternal rights can be privileged over the safety fears of women and children in a manner that lays counter to common-sense assumptions of ‘best interests of the child’. Backbone argues that the availability of police-initiated uplifts in situations where there is no imminent threat to the safety or life of a child reflects that the system is attending to the contractual paternal rights that men hold under parenting orders as an issue of paramountcy. In the event of a parenting dispute, when women fear the child is at risk, or the child resists the contact and places the mother in breach of the parenting order, the Family Court can issue without notice orders under section 73(2) of the CoCA for a police officer, social worker or other person as approved by the Court to use reasonable force to uplift a child from a parent and return to the other parent. According to the Ministry of Justice uplifts should be limited to emergencies where there is a risk of serious injury, undue hardship, risk to personal safety or there is a risk that your child may be removed from New Zealand (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Backbone articulates that the availability of uplifts can be used as a tactic of control by abusive men who can threaten to enforce parenting orders via uplift to pressure women into acquiescing to parenting orders they do not agree with or compel resistant (fearful) children to contact. Indeed, forced uplifts under section 78 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 have been described as ‘assault’ (Mason, 2017) and an example of “coercive power” (TVNZ Breakfast, 2020, 03:15). Backbone identifies how the availability of uplifts and the Court’s willingness to apply them can provide the potential for abusers/(ex)partners to use the system in violent ways and is a movement that conflicts with the international trend of advancing the interests of children through recognition of their

voice and viewpoints in matters which impact them ("United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," 1989).

When women's safety concerns leave them reluctant to support father-child contact, even if legally obligated to under parenting orders, they are required to manage their own and their child's affective load to facilitate the contact. Women may need to cajole, force, or pressure her child into contact against their wishes. The court can issue prohibitive orders that prevent her from re-locating with her children away from a violent (ex)partner, legally gag her from speaking of her experiences and forbidding her from seeking mental health support for her distressed child (The Backbone Collective, 2017c). The court is failing to dignify the responses of women who experience violence and preventing women from mothering their children in ways consistent with their pre-separation behaviour and how they feel is best suited going forward (The Backbone Collective, 2017c).

Backbone recently engaged in research on the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in which the intensifying levels of IPV have been labelled the 'shadow pandemic' (UN Women, 2021). In 2020 Principal Family Court Judge Jacquelyn Moran commented that parents should 'put aside their conflict' (The Backbone Collective, 2022c) when making parenting decisions during lockdowns which is demonstrative of the continuing inattention to the emotional burden and physical risk that women carry when they are forced to parent with abusive men. Backbone's attendance to women and their children's experiences of this time raised awareness of how children were prevented from contacting their mothers, neglected and denied medical help and nutrition and were verbally and physically abused (The Backbone Collective, 2022c). Bringing the narratives of women and children into circulation enabled recognition of how women were made responsible for managing the safety of children forced into lockdown conditions with violent and abusive men, amid escalating financial tensions and health stressors during an unprecedented global pandemic. The lack of

clarity and authority provided by the Family Court during this time enabled abusive men to exploit opportunities to further intimidate and abuse women and children through prioritising paternal 'rights' to contact, even if this contradicts the wishes of women and children.

### *Figurations of the hostile, pathologised and protective mother*

Through Backbone's examination of women's narratives of violence and the Court's interpretation of her responses to violence, it is apparent that the Court can hold negative assumptions and stereotypes of women which set the conditions for a mother's resistance to men's continued violence be understood as the behaviour of vindictive and hostile women, with the Court failing to properly recognise her actions as protective (Morgan & Coombes, 2016). When considering the intersection of a mother's protective strategies and the court's pro-contact ideology embedded within a social system where power relations constrain women's abilities to secure financial security it is possible to see the figuration of the 'Hostile Mother' emerge. Women can be infantilised as unknowing subjects who are unable to properly value the need for an ongoing father-child relationship. When the court is not valuing the situated knowledges of women the involvement of professional experts can make women's safety concerns appear illegitimate (The Backbone Collective, 2017d) and undermine their standing in the court (The Backbone Collective, 2018a). These negative assumptions of women are underpinned by the expert knowledges of professionals who continue to engage with tropes that women are unreliable (Pond & Morgan, 2008), that women who seek to limit father contact are 'bad' mothers (Rhoades, 2002), false assumptions that women frequently fabricate abuse claims (Mackenzie et al., 2020; The Backbone Collective, 2017c), and with unfounded assumptions amongst the legal profession that women use protection orders as weapons (Pond & Morgan, 2008).

Backbone makes visible how parental alienation functions as a gendered lever which when pulled, enables the Court to dismiss women and children's experiences of violence and abuse as constructions of a hostile, vindictive or mentally unwell woman and an easily led child. Parental alienation and similar turns of phrase such as 'poisoning' and 'alienating behaviour' (Mackenzie et al., 2020) describe the situation where a child is turned against one parent because of the actions or interference of the other parent. It is believed that where allegations of abuse arise in post-separation negotiations there is potential for those claims to be false and constructed to prevent the other parent access to the child. Given it is mothers who predominantly raise safety concerns and abuse in the Family Court the use of this construct by professionals to dismiss safety concerns is a heavily gendered exercise. The Family Court trivialises men's violence using strategies offered up by the discipline of psychology that pathologise women as damaged, overprotective, mentally ill (The Backbone Collective, 2017c) and to blame for negative behavioural responses in children or when the children refuse contact with their fathers (The Backbone Collective, 2017d). The figuration of a 'Pathologised Woman' emerges from the intersection of the disciplines of law and psychology, both complicit in practices which govern gender through the production and reproduction of knowledges and which define and categorise behaviours against norms which reflect and advance patriarchal interests (Morgan et al., 2019).

Through questioning the Otago Law School's support of a Master of Laws thesis that framed parental alienation as a legitimate concept and the responsibility of media who reproduced this false narrative (The Backbone Collective, 2018c), the Backbone open spaces to interrogate the disciplinary practices of white, Western knowledges that are legitimated within institutions. Women report to Backbone that S133 report writers are still relying on parental alienation (The Backbone Collective, 2017c, 2022c), with over half the women who responded to Backbone communicating that when they raised concerns regarding violence

and abuse of their children they were accused of alienating behaviours by judges, lawyers, lawyer for the child and psychologists (The Backbone Collective, 2017c), and this is despite the New Zealand Psychological Society submitting that "Parental Alienation Syndrome and Situational Violence are not research-validated concepts and are not to be applied by judges, lawyers or others" (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2015, p. 10). The insulated nature of the Family Court means that where professionals use out-dated constructs, they do so with impunity. Through women's counter-memories, Backbone challenges the continued use of this concept within the family law system, opening spaces to problematise the way the Court values different knowledges and how the court is privileging the assumed 'expert' knowledges over the situated knowledges of women which produces the conditions for gendered violence. This challenge calls for greater transparency over the knowledges relied upon by Family Court professionals and greater accountability for those deviating from industry best practice.

Backbone's analysis of the ways that the Family Court responds to women's protective strategies encourages us to think about the knowledges that the legal system validates and the assumptions and stereotypes that inform the interpretation of women's behaviours and the potentials that may exist if the court were to dignify the diversity of women's responses to violence. In resistance to the 'hostile mother' figuration, Backbone's work counters the hostile mother narrative through a figuration of the 'Protective Mother' who resists unsupervised contact, rejects orders by consent, and who challenges the Court's ideology of shared parenting from her experience of safety. The counter-narrative enabled through women's experiences of protecting their children, opens spaces to imagine a dignified response in the best interest of children and challenges the system to become accountable. Through re-articulating assumptions that underpin women's responses to father's care time requests it will be possible to examine why women and children's knowledge is determined

to be less credible than professional ‘experts’. When women’s resistance to shared care is viewed through the lens of the ‘protective mother’ figure it is possible to imagine how such responses can become dignified, working towards the ‘best interests of the child’.

***Holding the court accountable to the ‘best interests of the child’***

Backbone opens space to problematise how the court privileges the father's best interests over the child's interests, providing the conditions for ongoing violence and abuse of women and children, pathologising the behaviour of mothers and failing to hold men accountable for their use of violence. Elizabeth described the situation in the Family Court as “a kind of schizophrenia” (Johnston, 2020, para. 27) where women are required to leave violent relationships to avoid men’s violence but then court-ordered to leave her children alone with that same abusive man, with Ruth Herbert stating “the country wants women to leave abusive relationships but the system is so unsafe” (Q+A, 2018, 04:12).

In clearing the way to hear women and children’s narratives of violence Backbone challenges professional and academic narratives that frame children as passive witnesses to men’s violence and instead position children as active victims (Callaghan et al., 2018). From this understanding, Backbone also makes sense of men’s violence as an active parenting choice (The Backbone Collective, 2017c) that has considerable impacts on children, disrupting assumptions that men can be abusive partners but ‘good’ fathers. Where Backbone articulates the negative consequences on children who have lived with IPV and the large number of children who are ‘forced’ into contact with their fathers (The Backbone Collective, 2017d) it activates a challenge to the Court’s ideology of shared parenting that enacts the ‘best interests’ of the child to be satisfied by an ongoing relationship with both parents, based on the court’s interpretation of the CoCA with an assumption that with the passage of time and separation from their partners men will no longer be violent (Mackenzie as cited in

Johnston, 2020, para. 53) reproducing the idea that women are responsible for men's violence. Such a challenge raises questions about how the Family Court can best hold abusive men, and themselves, accountable for the ongoing violence against women and children enabled through institutional practices and processes.

Backbone's circulation of the harmful consequences of both IPV and then forced contact interrogates the court's interpretation of the 'best interests' of whom and signals potential space for action through questioning how 'the voices of women and children could inform 'best interests'. The conditions that women must navigate when engaged with the Family Court are often kept from view due to the intentional lack of accountability of the Family Court. It is through the reports of Backbone, which bring out the collective voices of women, that attention can be directed to the complexities of trying to balance safety needs with the Courts pro-contact ideology of post-separation parenting despite outcomes being counter to commitments made under international legislation and what could reasonably be considered best practice (Mackenzie et al., 2020, p. 108) in the best interests of women and children.

**Movement Forward**

The Family Court is tasked with important work – which most would agree is protecting the safety of children, yet it is evident given the consistent messaging from women that the court is placing more value on a father's 'right' to access their child than on the wishes and safety of children. The refusal to acknowledge IPV as being a considerable presence in the Family Court and the framing of those who require or seek the intervention of the system as 'acrimonious' or engaging in 'mutual conflict', disguises the gendered power relations of IPV as social entrapment. The singular story of violence silences and excludes

women with its dominance and reproduces identity categories with rigid boundaries which act, as Braidotti writes, as ‘mechanisms of capture’ (Braidotti, 2018, p. 182).

To facilitate the transformative movement in the sector, it is necessary to move away from processes that contribute to deficit constructions of difference, which operate to advance one over the other. This would involve disrupting ideas of a rigid gender binary to resist and subvert gendered power relations that privilege patriarchal interests. Thinking with Braidotti has enabled me to see that Backbone’s approach of using counter-memories to disrupt the singular story of violence has a generative affect, as cultivating movement towards transformation through appreciation of the multiplicity and complexity of women’s lives that encourages relationality (Braidotti, 2006b) and connectedness between all those affected by, and responding to, men’s violence against women and children. Braidotti asks us to question our commitments to processes and systems that are taken-for-granted and naturalised, the idea that violence against women has always occurred, or that the most appropriate response is a legal one have become so entrenched that it is difficult to imagine any other response. Braidotti claims that affirmation resides in creating relations that enable difficult and painful conversations (Andrés, 2019). These conversations require a distancing from Western knowledge systems that silence alternative potentials and coming together to think as a collective where “we are in *this* together but we are not one and the same” (Braidotti, 2017b, p. 26). Backbone uses the collective voice of women to create an affective force that demands social action, by disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about the performance of the Family Court and framing IPV as a human rights violation that has ongoing negative impacts on both women and their children.

The attention that Backbone gives to the silencing of women’s narratives of violence within the Family Court and the processes that enable complaints of unfair or unsafe outcomes in the Court to be dismissed creates the movement needed to address the limited

accountability of the court and its imperviousness to critique from outside forces – such as the New Zealand Psychological Society's rejection of parental alienation and the opinion of the United Nations who have expressed concerns that New Zealand is not doing enough to attend to gendered violence (United Nations, 2018). Backbone has raised awareness of the need for a framework that enables continuous feedback and responsivity of the sector, and until this is actualised, Backbone has committed to performing a watchdog functionality to spotlight issues that require system accountability to encourage a shift in the sector. Backbone's efforts to increase the accountability and transparency of the Family Court is informed by an ethics of responsibility, a feminist motivation for socially just outcomes. This encourages a shift in thinking which transforms the issues of the Court into one of community responsibility that requires action.

The politics of location that informs Backbone is founded on an awareness of gendered power and how the practices and processes of the Family Court operate in ways which are detrimental to the physical, emotional, and financial safety of women. Backbone disrupts the dominant narrative through attending to the power relations that underpin the Family Court system to make space to consider the possibilities for transformation towards a system, that is more attentive to social context and operates in a more socially just way, privileging safety and wellbeing over contractual rights and obligations. Backbone acknowledges how integral attention to context and influence of social power relations is when it offers a solution to the gendered discrimination that women face as being with a new court model that replaces the "current adversarial model with one that is more investigative and specialist" (Mackenzie, 2022, para. 25): a system that is inclusive of alternative situated knowledges as well as the professional 'expert' knowledges in order to bring a fuller understanding of the structural inequities that compound impacts of IPV for women and children and provide perspective into how the court operates in ways which disproportionately and negatively affect women.

Where Backbone has centred the voices of women, they have enabled recognition of the limited perspective of 'safety' that the current system operates with, women communicate that from their perspective safety from violence is not limited to the physical separation from an abuser, it requires financial security, space to heal and autonomy to make decisions for themselves (The Backbone Collective, 2020b) and this knowledge, if taken up, provides avenues to pursue a transformation in the ways women are responded to when they experience violence, dignifying the difference and diversity of experiences. If we had a system that responded to men's use of violence that was not bedded to assumptions of gender-neutrality whilst at the same time tolerating and perpetuating masculine patriarchal control, it would be able to consider the multiple and intersecting conditions of women's lives, including the complexities and challenges of the concomitant roles of mother, employee, mortgage-holder, daughter, victim, survivor and so on and their locations in a gendered social hierarchy, able to account (and be accountable) for the presence of unequal power relations.

When it is understood that the social hierarchy authorises men to exert power and control over women that limits women's autonomy and freedoms are practices of violence it enables questions of accountability to be asked. We have significant issues in this country with IPV and child abuse and a burgeoning mental health crisis among young people, so it seems contrary to common-sense that these issues and responses to them are not integrated and addressed together. Backbone's work to draw attention to these issues and forge connections between multiple social issues that relate to family violence including the problematic levels of youth mental health distress and suicide (The Backbone Collective, 2018d) can be seen as activating a potential opening to approach IPV differently. Backbone is identifying the pervasive impacts of the continued failure to hold men accountable for their violence and Backbone's activism is motivated by the knowledge that the more that those

outside the system are aware of the disconnected and disjointed system and the cumulative negative consequences for women and young people, the increased potential there is for transformative social action. How might the mental health of young people, the high suicide rate in this country, the number of children living in financial precarity be alleviated if children were not unheard but held up as knowledgeable and autonomous beings? What if the court no longer understood women as hostile and alienating but rather valued their protective strategies as advocacy? What if the court valued the non-abusive parental relationship as pivotal to a child's wellbeing and focused on providing adequate support for this relationship to thrive? Backbone is opening these discussions to provide opportunity for new knowledges to inform our responses to IPV.

It was through engaging with Braidotti's critique of social systems and viewing IPV through the force of Backbone's activist work that counter-memories became integral to me as the key to transforming the sector, potentials exist in the move away from the toxic habits (Braidotti, 2006b) of individualism towards attending to the structural contributors that hold violence against women in place. Thinking with Braidotti enables us to consider responding to IPV as an ethical question of how we relate to one another within the complexities of modern life. Backbone problematises the exclusion of women and children's missing voices by making space to include those previously unheard, facilitating a connectedness using counter-memories, producing a growing movement to disrupt the conditions and processes that operate unequal gendered power that hold men's violence in place. Through Backbone's work it became possible to problematise the enduring construction of IPV as a non-gendered individual-level issue located within pathological individuals and instead, direct focus on how power relations shape institutional responses that emerge through the practices of the Family Court. Backbone's examination of the limitations of the current approaches to differently address violence against women and children problematises the taken-for-granted assumption

of the appropriateness of the legal system as the dominant response to IPV and draws attention to the ethical responsibility that we all hold, as citizens, towards eliminating the use of and tolerance of gendered violence within society, not in terms of the neoliberal tendency to place the onus on individuals but rather that we are all implicated in this process and so are obligated to seek out the missing voices to listen, raise awareness and make connections.

# Chapter Four: Analysis - The Aunties

## Emergence

Listening to, and moving with, the voice of The Backbone Collective, we are mobilised by women's stories of how the neoliberal and patriarchal foundations of dominant social institutions such as the policing, legal and criminal justice systems are based upon the dominant cultural worldview of Pākehā, privileging ways of being in the world that fit with hegemonic Western beliefs and values. Those who differ from Eurocentric normalising subjectivities are rendered as 'other' and inferior through processes of individualisation that obscure complex and intersecting gendered power relations of domination and oppression that provide the conditions for violence against women and children, both in the community and in the very institutions tasked with responding to gendered violence. The presence of institutional racism within the patriarchal criminal justice system reflects colonial practices that frame marginalised groups as deviant 'others' - statistical, hostile and pathological figures – subjecting marginalised communities to higher surveillance, targeted intervention and further violence from government and social agencies. By producing and re-producing the recognition of IPV as a problem of the 'other', it obscures the ways in which we can imagine holding our institutions and communities to account for the shared conditions of possibility that enable gendered violence.

The work of Backbone encourages us to recognise the 'Missing Pākehā Woman', where we can acknowledge how reduced access to material resources impacting on lower socio-economic groups diminish opportunities to avoid the escalation of violence that are available to those who hold greater financial resources, making IPV more visible within marginalised populations. Where women avoid being captured in official statistics by drawing on private resources or because authorities are looking 'elsewhere' for deviancy, the

existence of IPV in these populations becomes invisible to the dominant gaze. The invisibility of Pākehā IPV from the dominant representation of IPV becomes problematic as it can limit recognition of experiences of violence that do not meet the social perceptions of what IPV 'is', limiting IPV to discrete acts of physical violence. This reproduces the dominant narrative that IPV is not a widespread issue relating to the distribution of power between men and women, instead localising the issue as a problem of specific communities.

Backbone challenges the institutional response to become accountable for the way it responds to women and children, working to shift policy and practices to advance ethical relationships and to humanise the social problem of IPV as something that can be transformed, no longer taken-for-granted as immutable within society. I became drawn to the work of The Aunties as Jackie asks us to work within readily accessible places and spaces within the community. She asks us all on the ground to participate, to be accountable. The Aunties is a grassroots feminist organisation that offers practical solutions to social problems, by engaging in on-the-ground assistance that taps into the resources of the community to source the support that women require and are deserving of. Jackie is making recognisable the need for community accountability for IPV by bringing into view the multiple connections of colonisation, patriarchy, and neoliberal power relations holding men's violence in place. In other words, Jackie invites us to ask how we can think about holding men, our systems, and our communities to account and to move towards transformation.

Jackie became involved with sourcing material resources for women living with IPV through a local refuge and, over time she recognised her natural affinity for sourcing what women needed and began to organise the collection of resources on behalf of several community organisations and charities. The responsibility of this work grew and eventually developed into the charitable organisation now known as The Aunties. The Aunties continue to source material resources and provide support for hundreds of women, but the core work

revolves around a network of 27 women and their children with whom Jackie walks alongside in and through the intensive flows of recovery. The Aunties do not approach the wicked problem of IPV as intractable but as an issue of accountability that we are *all* responsible for and that we *all* can and should, proactively address. Using counter-memories to defamiliarise taken-for-granted assumptions of women who live with violence, The Aunties confront society to challenge stories which normalise gendered power. The Aunties offer a different form of alternative knowledge and approach to IPV than Backbone, working in the in-between spaces of the hierarchal and bureaucratic institutional system response 'to get on with' the practical 'doing' of women's safety and the holding of men to account for their violence. Key to the work of Jackie and The Aunties is recognition of privilege and making it tangible for us all to reflect on and become accountable for our contributions and complicity in structures and processes that hold singular stories in place. My interest in The Aunties was sparked as the work of the organisation reflects the affirmation of the positivity of difference and the practical finding of resources in the in-between spaces of the institutional response aligns with Braidotti's requirement for generative possibilities to be pursued alongside any critique of social problems.

**Recognition**

Jackie Clark has lived experience of IPV through her marriage to her husband Ian and articulates her experiences of IPV through processes of re-membering to engage counter-memories that acknowledge the social and structural conditions of possibility that enable the statistical and missing Pākehā woman figurations to emerge to problematise, re-articulate and reimagine the recognition of IPV in our communities and institutions of response. Jackie raises awareness of the difficulty she had in recognising her experiences as abuse, her knowledge of IPV connected with the dominant representations and the stereotypes that construct it as a problem of the 'other', of physical violence occurring within minority

groups. Her ‘whiteness’ obscured her ability to perceive dominant gendered power and the psychological violence from her Pākehā husband, as abuse. Jackie re-members that she knew that something was ‘not right’ with the way she and her husband interacted, but she took on responsibility for the issues believing her husband’s argument that she was the problem, if she were a better wife, he would not have to treat her the way he did. As Jackie expressed, “I spent my entire 28-year marriage believing that I had been the problem” (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 05:06).

Through re-membering feelings of shame and inadequacy, and the performance of gendered acts such as cooking him elegant meals, from her contemporary location of ethical activism, Jackie’s counter-memories speak to how the coercive force of embodied gendered power relations, embedded within assumptions of the neoliberal ‘responsible individual’, enable the figuration of the ‘Unknowing Victim’ to emerge. The ‘Unknowing Victim’ emerges from the obfuscation of non-physical violence through gender and social norms that normalise men’s positions of dominance and sense of entitlement to control others, particularly within the home, coercing women into altering the way they go about their lives. Jackie resisted her husband’s violence by disciplining herself to conform to her understandings of what it means to be a ‘good’ wife: Through processes of self-discipline, she embodied the very gendered power relations that responsibilise women for men’s violence and act as a force of coercion. Listening to Jackie’s counter-memories we can understand this process of social coercion – and coercive control - as violence, as opposed to just interactions where one party behaves unpleasantly.

***By memory and by heart***

The Aunties advocate for a move away from paternalistic approaches to gendered violence that place expectations on women to respond in prescribed ways, pivoting on

physical separation from a violent partner. The system carries these expectations with inadequate acknowledgement of gendered power relations, which mean women are not guaranteed safety. Jackie articulates the complexities of the recognition of violence from within an abusive relationship to highlight that women must be enabled to make decisions in their own time, and to be provided with unwavering and intensive support when they do reach the point of recognition that enables them to move away from violence. As a process of disidentification, recognition cannot be forced upon women externally. Regarding her relationship with her abuser Jackie remembers her entangled emotions "…I loved him, as much laughter as we had, physical affection we shared, as much as all that it is true, so is this: He was abusive. Cruel. Used mechanisms of coercive control until the day he died…" (Clark, 2020).

Jackie uses memories of her abusive relationship to bring attention to the complex dynamics of IPV and to challenge the authority of the dominant response to determine the way women respond to violence. Using her memories of her abusive relationship she shares how there was love along with violence, referring to her abuser as her "beloved" (Clark, 2018d) offers insight into the complexities of IPV and human relationships and resists the social mandate that women must want to separate from their abuser immediately, if at all. It is a complex word choice, with dense and multiple meanings. Jackie has reflected that during her relationship she felt loved and laughed and enjoyed times with her husband. There is a taken-for-granted assumption that physical separation from an abuser is the singular response for women's safety, and this underpins the Western hegemonic response system where interventions are directed towards 'helping' women achieve physical separation from their abusers regardless of whether the woman desires this outcome or if it is culturally or financially appropriate. Jackie shares her memory of staying in the relationship, even after she knew his behaviour to be abusive, as a counter-memory to the dominant expectations

placed on women to leave. In doing so she is advocating that we dignify the diversity of responses to men's use of violence, the complex reality of everyday life and the displays of agency that women do employ whether they stay or leave.

With the sharing of her counter-memories Jackie normalises the heterogenous ways that women respond to men's violence acknowledging that some responses that people have to trauma can seem counter-productive to those on the outside such as using drugs or alcohol as coping mechanisms (Passmore, 2018, 30:50). When women are approached with empathy and through a strength-based lens this diversity can be received as agentic practice, coping mechanisms can be seen as displays of resistance to both violence and social injustice and should be appreciated as something more complex than signs of deviance or deficit. These coping mechanisms can be taken as resistance to oppression and trauma, and when dignified, provide the opportunity for affirmative connection. Jackie demands that women be respected as knowers and holders of specialised knowledges, encouraging empathy and respect towards those who may be subverting social norms of behaviour or who may otherwise be configured as unworthy victims, connecting with the work of the Backbone who work to dismantle myths that IPV is an issue for particular communities. Jackie's use of affectionate language when describing her relationship with her late husband acts as purposeful resistance to the paternalistic and hegemonic authority of social agencies to accept only totalising violence and frame women as shameful or unworthy for not responding in expected ways to men's violence. Jackie demands that women be able to determine the most appropriate response for themselves, in their own time, as the social and structural power relations that pressure women to fall in line with the expectations of the dominant response is a form of violence that violates a woman's autonomy and self-determination, and which for Māori women can be experienced as an extension of the traumas of ongoing colonisation.

Referring to her abusive husband as her ‘beloved’ can also represent the embodiment of trauma, signalling how memories of violence can be cloying, and complex and refuse to stay buried. The term links with Toni Morrison’s novel “Beloved”. In the novel, the purging of institutionalised silence, trauma and embodied memory is made possible through the connections with the community and the stitching together of narratives. Here the work of re-membering is to bring together what is known and unknown about one’s individual experience into a collective experience that is embedded within patriarchal and racial oppression.

***Possibilities of re-membering***

Jackie’s re-membering of her personal, lived experiences of abuse and resistance opens spaces to consider the importance of listening for stories that normalise gendered power as it is through these stories that it is possible to problematise the narrow conceptualisation of IPV as an issue within a deviant ‘other’: As a statistical figure who visibly manifests the evidence of discrete acts of violence that meet the threshold for recognition. The unknowing extended into and through Jackie’s social relationships where the absence of evidence of physical violence, and her husband’s display of white masculinity, meant that her abuse was not recognisable. While Jackie’s friends may have had suspicions that abuse was occurring, the lack of evidence led to inaction - they thought they were “imagining things” (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 08:23). For Jackie, her ‘whiteness’ and the absence of physical violence meant a misrecognition of her experience of violence as she was unable to connect them with the dominant statistical narrative, that holds women responsible for gendered violence. Unable to recognise her own victimisation diverted her attention to her failure to achieving normalised standards of femininity. Jackie makes visible how the oppressive patriarchal and capitalist system that we reside in entraps women within abusive relationships as it becomes dangerous for women to breach the social order by disclosing men’s violence, particularly Pākehā men’s

violence. The rigid expectations of heteronormativity obscure men's violence because a certain level of dominance over women is normalised and encouraged. This can obscure how and where behaviour meets the threshold to be considered abusive and violent.

Through Jackie's counter-memories, we can acknowledge how the singular story of violence, produced through the statistical narrative, obscures the forms and tactics of IPV that are less visible, and Jackie's memories speak to the difficulties women face to recognise their experiences as abusive, particularly within Western knowledge systems that normalise men's domination over women within the hierarchal structure of normative heterosexual intimate relationships. When women disclose men's violence they are often faced with processes of 'unknowing' where professionals within the legal and response systems minimise, dismiss, and disbelieve women's experience. Without recognising IPV as a complex inter-relationship with gendered power relations, practices of coercive control that entrap women remain hidden in plain sight leaving the system of 'unknowing' entrenched within Western knowledge claims.

The proliferation of neoliberal Western knowledges that 'count' discrete acts of physical violence frame the social problem as an individualised issue and responsibility. For Jackie, the recognition that her 'whiteness' obscured her own recognition of violence and abuse and her memory of unknowing encouraged her activism to disrupt the dominant representations of IPV that construct marginalised populations as the 'other', associating 'difference' with 'deficit'. For Jackie, there was an awareness that things were not quite right but the operation of gendered power intersecting with her location as a heterosexual, middle-class, white woman in the social hierarchy left her struggling to situate her experiences within the dominant narrative. Jackie's memories challenge the dominant narrative of IPV by attending to processes of recognition and non-recognition.

***Resisting singular stories***

Jackie can resist the dominant representation that portrays IPV as being predominantly an issue within marginalised families by sharing the connections she has made with hundreds of Pākehā women who reach out to her each year thanking her for enabling them to recognise the violence and abuse they experience. This recognition of violence enables *potentia,* empowerment through connection. Jackie insists that we will not be able to reduce and/or eliminate the levels of and impacts of IPV in Aotearoa until we address the foundational issues of structural inequality: "until we actually look at the power structure and the people who commit the most violence in this country towards women and gender minorities, which are cis white men. And they built and uphold the power structure… " (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 03:08). As such, Jackie directly challenges the myth of the "Violent Māori Male": A trope of Māori as violent and aggressive, obscuring the entrenched institutional racism that means Māori communities are observed and treated more harshly than Pākehā populations by the criminal justice and legal systems. This othering of violence as an issue of Māori deficit can be seen immortalised on screen in New Zealand's 1994 critically acclaimed film 'Once were Warriors' adapted from the novel written by Alan Duff. Jackie suggests that the image of the lead protagonist 'Jake the Muss' (played by Temuera Morrison) misrepresents what IPV looks like and who perpetrates it (Casey, 2018): A representation so enduring that two decades after the film's initial release, the Women's Refuge asked Temuera Morrison back to discuss the impact the role of 'Jake' had on him as part of their Annual Appeal (Women's Refuge, 2016). Jackie challenges this "fallacious" representation (Casey, 2017) as the reduction of a broad social problem to a very narrow singular story, doing little to attend to the politics and systems that hold men's violence in place, and reproduces the invisibility of Pākehā IPV. Jackie acknowledges that violence exists in Māori communities but rejects the premise that this is the prevailing issue to attend to. The focus on the singular story of

violence operates as *potestas,* placing negative and rigid stereotypes onto Māori men limiting recognition of the structural inequalities that operate as stressors underpinning the perpetration of IPV as well as refusing to account for the gendered violence enacted by Pākehā men. Jackie's activism and that of The Aunties organisation acknowledge that recognising the history of colonisation is powerfully necessary to take accountability for the patriarchal structural and institutional gendered power relations developed within Aotearoa New Zealand and established the foundations for enduring structural inequities that remain today.

***Connectedness as a counter narrative***

Braidotti (2014, 2019c) helps us to recognise the importance of disarticulating dominant knowledges to expose power relations that produce oppression and discrimination, and through re-articulating a recognition of how power and knowledges influence relationships it is possible to imagine alternative approaches and possibilities. Jackie's counter-memories interrogate how narrow understandings of IPV work to deny the recognition of particular experiences and knowledges of IPV, rendered 'unknown' through gendered power relations, complicating the potential for recognising women's stories of abuse as entrapment. Jackie's process of re-membering mobilises an acknowledgement of how communities can facilitate the perpetration of IPV by providing excuses for the behaviour of abusive 'respectable' professionally successful men who privately inflict violence and abuse onto their partners. The Aunties encourage recognition of the diversity of IPV and the limited and partiality of the statistical narrative, as the dominant knowledge underpinning the system response. IPV does happen in Pākehā communities, and it is not always recognisable as violence. By disarticulating notions that frame victims as the 'other' it is possible to open spaces to think differently about how communities can work to address

the power relations that continue the sense of ‘unknowing’ as it is with this knowledge that the potential for accountability for men’s violence becomes possible.

Jackie’s counter-memories of violence and abuse generate an affective flow that connects women who can locate their experiences as gendered violence through relating to Jackie’s story. For Jackie, it was the support and connection with the Māori women’s refuge that enabled her recognition of the relational flows in the meaning-making of her experience. In 2021, The Aunties released a book ‘Her Say’ that follows the narratives of 16 women, Jackie included, who form part of the core circle of 27 women that The Aunties’ support. The book is not a commodification of their stories, but rather a collection of memories which speak to the heterogeneity of violence and the precarity and complexities of some women’s lives, enabling recognition of the limitations of the current approach to and conceptualisation of IPV. The narratives contained within the book contributing to generating affective flows between women that opens spaces for embodied responses and ethical relations in ways that the statistical narrative of violence cannot. These stories are told to move people to challenge their own assumptions, and now, Jackie shares that she is contacted by hundreds of Pākehā women annually (Eaton, n.d) who thank her for sharing and enabling them to know that their experiences were abusive, this process of connection and connectedness are the affective flows that enable new stories to be told.

***Relational ethics***

Jackie’s activism centres on the importance of connection and relational ethics, where her stories are an articulated counter-memory to the dominant representation, producing a powerful force of recognition that mobilises many women to re-member and redefine their experiences. Where women can move with the knowledge that their experiences were violent and abusive it shifts the burden of responsibility towards abusive men for their behaviour.

This opens the space to retell our stories through connections and affective flows with the potential for imagining differently, together. The Aunties advocate for human connection and developing relationships locating these processes as key aspects to creating the conditions for people to speak and be heard. The increased connectedness between women creates potentials for sparks of recognition, for the mobilisation of action to disrupt processes that oppress and make visible that which is hidden.

The Aunties prioritise relationships and connectedness, and work to create conditions where women feel safe to speak their knowledge and are open to receive and listen to the knowledges of other women as well. The Aunties source material items that women need to get them to a position where they can step away from their trauma and connect with other women on multiple levels, as mothers, friends, embracing the multiple subjectivities of women. It is this connectedness that leads to collaborative action that is key to transformative change. In recognising the multiple subjectivities of women and enabling them to articulate what their needs are whether it be access to reliable transport, particular material items or mental or financial support she creates the conditions necessary for ethical relationships. Jackie articulates that it is her 'middle-class white' privilege that enables her voice to be heard and to work the way that she does, intensively and long term. After the sale of her home, she was able to leave her job as a teacher and concentrate full-time on the work of The Aunties. She acknowledges this privilege, and she holds herself accountable for it, using her connections and relationships with others to generate resources for those women who are inadequately resourced. When speaking about the freedom the sale of her house afforded her, she recognises the boundary crossing that her experiences have afford her "the thing that has given me this life is the same thing that makes it fucking hard for my girls to get out" (Strongman, 2017).

Social power relations and neoliberal dominant narratives ascribe attribution of deficit to difference and mean that some voices, the voices of the marginalised through gender, race, class, age, (dis)ability can be disregarded. Jackie undertakes processes of relational ethics by using her privilege to make room for the subjugated and silenced knowledges of the marginalised, holding open and protecting spaces to support people to make connections between IPV, coercive control and structural violence. Jackie and The Aunties open spaces to engage with the multiple intersections of gendered social power relations and how vulnerability to IPV is embedded and embodied and specific to one's social location. Braidotti describes this as "We-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-*not*-one-and-the-same" (Braidotti, 2019b, pp. 157, emphasis in original). She takes care to attribute responsibility for the breakdown of social relationships as being related to intentional practices of colonisation, including the imposition of patriarchy. The Aunties disrupt 'unknowing' and processes of unrecognition through raising awareness among women who have experienced violence and those who have not, of the interconnectedness of contemporary social issues, such as poverty, youth crime and disenfranchisement, with the structural process of colonisation, dis-articulating the deficit narrative that subjugates Māori women. She recognises where these structural power relations become embodied and leave women vulnerable to men's violence. As Jackie notes, "the entire system, particularly if you're young and poor and brown, is racist and it's classist, and it's sure as shit sexist" (Momoisea, 2017, para. 25). Speaking out advances decolonising conversations and forces awareness within groups who only hold partial understandings of multiple and complex intersecting power relations of oppression and domination some women experience, and through these narratives she asks us to hold a mirror to our own location in such power relations and confront our complicity.

***Narratives move people***

An important component of Jackie's advocacy is the use of narratives to evoke empathy within audiences because she recognises that stories move people. The affective force that shared narratives generate builds empathy where it may otherwise be lacking given the partial and limited perspective we have into the complexities of each other's lives. She reminded us recently that "particular people in particular areas of New Zealand don't have any power…It's too easy to make assumptions, oh that person's a fuckwit because they didn't listen. They didn't do as they were told…" (Clark, 2021, para. 9). Jackie has a strong affinity with South Auckland after moving there once her marital home in Mt Eden (a more affluent location within the Auckland region) was sold and she challenged the negative way that communities in South Auckland were responded to during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jackie argues that South Auckland as a location is 'deliberately under-resourced' (Passmore, 2018, 27:46) lacking investment in playgrounds, and other important infrastructure. Jackie extends understandings of the complexity of poverty by articulating that the current low wages, high cost of food, high rents, and low welfare provisions complicate financial stability (Clark, 2018a). She also draws our attention that the lack of investment is not inevitable but the policy and practice of government. Jackie dismisses neoliberal arguments that people become vulnerable because they do not make 'good choices' by articulating the fallacy of choice within an environment which is stacked against you through processes of colonisation and then neoliberal economic policy. Jackie celebrates the strength and generosity of South Auckland by highlighting the network of support that runs through the community and rejects myths of those on social welfare as lazy or undeserving claiming "nobody wants to live on a benefit…it's humiliating, the state is all up in your business…" (Clark, 2018b, para. 6). As Braidotti writes: "these are strange times, and strange things are happening" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 1) but what remains consistently apparent is that during

periods of heightened stress and collective social anxiety the dominant majority, the holders of unacknowledged privilege tend to lash out and blame marginalised communities for their precarity rather than using the opportunity to foster ways to increase empathy and connection.

The Aunties' location outside the dominant response system enables Jackie to resist the hierarchal power that can be attached to funding relationships thus she can continue to speak freely on the complexities of response, in an unmediated manner. Her approach moves people, the way she speaks confronts and challenges people, calling us in and forcing engagement which ultimately leads to intention and participation. Her unconventional approach, the frequent use of colloquial language and expletives, can disarm some listeners, while challenging and confronting others. Speaking the unspeakable with force and energy, challenging our communities to respond ethically and emotionally, with accountability, to women's experiences of living with the effects of IPV in our communities. We are issued a direct challenge, through Jackie's forceful speech, to consider our contributions to holding violence in place, forcing us to examine if we are genuinely relating ethically within our community or if our inattention to the actual needs of women who have experienced abuse is contributing to their social entrapment. Jackie is directly addressing us, you and me, opening spaces where we can question our own complicity, accountability, but also our collective transformational potential, when she asks us to "think about power, how it looks in your home. Discuss and explain, SHOW your kids ab[ou]t feelings. What's healthy, what's not" (Clark, 2022a). Jackie can speak the unspeakable, to use her voice with force, because her privileged social location, as not brown, not young, not poor, enables her to be heard and to challenge the dominant narratives of violence. In this way, we are invited to resist stereotypes that diminish knowledges of those of us who are framed as different from the knowing, unitary subject (heterosexual, white, property-owning, middle-class men) that speak through dominant knowledge systems. Thinking with Braidotti has helped me to make sense of what

this forceful recognition of the lived experience of violence does, how it provokes movement, speaking with force, making the listener take hold of the issues for real creates "empowering modes of becoming" (Braidotti, 2010b, p. 45) that will open spaces of imaginative possibilities that will hold the potential to shift the processes that hold men's violence in place.

Jackie takes care to generate recognition of gendered violence among Pākehā women by attending to the ways through which we are complicit with normalising men's violence. Jackie argues "there's white women, who excuse, defend and protect those same men" (Wright, 2021, para. 28), inviting us to consider the ways that women participate in the maintenance of gendered social hierarchies, the individualisation of the problem and its solutions. In this way she attends to the potential in the circulation of situated knowledges in all their partiality, to open the potential for new or counter knowledges. It is the 'unknowing' legitimated through our knowledge systems that is retold through counter-narratives that trouble Pākehā normalisation of violence. Jackie's voice is a powerful call to acknowledge the 'unknowable', and her activism is a process of generosity and empathy, because she understands (by memory and by heart) that she is doing what she is calling for others to do, and she knows of the possibilities for transformation that becoming 'knowing', and empathetic, and accountable can enable. Through opening spaces for connection, a decolonisation movement is made possible through increasing awareness of the diversity of violence and how it is not an individual issue of pathologised minorities, disrupting the deficit narrative and re-articulating blame and judgement towards empathy and compassion so that we can think differently about IPV and our responses to it. The work of The Aunties issues a call of accountability: to notice the lack of heart and compassion that frequently exists when addressing social issues. Where empathy underpins the relationship, it invites connection and a motivation to act.

There are multiple organisations that provide support to women who have experienced violence and abuse, but often, these organisations reproduce understandings of IPV as a problem of individual deficit, or the neoliberal environment they are embedded in confine their function to short term or crisis responses. Jackie and The Aunties challenge processes that individualise social problems through recognition of the ongoing nature of IPV, and therefore our ongoing accountability that extends beyond women physically separating from abusive men and that demands a sustained empathic and ethical response. The stories shared by The Aunties and the ongoing requests for material goods force recognition of women's continued need for support for protection against the harms of institutional racism and systemic and structural disadvantage, inviting us into ongoing, genuine relationships of empathy and accountability. We must stay, acknowledge, empathise and continue to hold ourselves and others to account. The Aunties do not approach IPV as being the use of violence by individual men, we are all implicated, and this acknowledgement of our complicity in the societal tolerance for discrimination against people because they are constructed as inferior opens potentials to rethink the foundations of the response system and the adequacy of current individualised interventions.

### *Family Court*

The Family Court, Jackie argues, is a site where gendered, classed, and racialised powers intersect, being built by the dominant majority based upon the dominant cultural worldview, and it excuses, protects, and defends Pākehā men's violence (Hirschfeld, 2021, 48:07) and this is where the figuration of the 'Protected Pākehā Male' emerges. Jackie determines that the most insidious aspect of the domestic violence problem in New Zealand is the invisibility of Pākehā men's violence as it is this demographic that causes the most harm (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2020; Wright, 2021) principally through the maintenance of power structures which reproduce and facilitate the systems that oppress

women and reproduce negative stereotypes of marginalised communities. Jackie acknowledges the challenges that Pākehā women face when navigating the Family Court system and negotiating post-separation arrangements where men are likely to have "legally gagged you" (Casey, 2018, para. 15) protecting Pākehā men from being accountable for their violence. She argues that "white middle-class men exact more violence using the courts than anything I've ever seen" (Casey, 2018, para. 15). The silencing of women within the system restricts the potential for social and collaborative activism as women are constrained from telling their stories and building connections with others.

Jackie articulates that there are systemic issues within the Family Court system, and in her view, it is members of the judiciary who enable Pākehā men to use the legal system in violent ways (Hill, 2021, 14:12). Jackie refers to men who exploit power imbalances and use violent or abusive tactics within the family court system as "cunts in cardigans" (Hirschfeld, 2021, 47:12). Jackie suggests that Judges are receptive to men who appear rational, calm, and professional compared with women who can be traumatised and emotive and they "don't really fucking care" about domestic violence (Wright, 2021, para. 27). The Family Court adjusts its ideology to best advance the rights of Pākehā men and their continued domination, as Jackie argues, they are obsessed with Pākehā children having a relationship with their fathers (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 09:34; Hirschfeld, 2021, 45:35) in a way that is not replicated in Māori families. This demonstrates the intersecting systems of oppression and the entrenched tolerance of discriminatory practice at a systemic level which governs gender, Pākehā women face losing their children to the father, and Māori women face losing them to the state.

A central component of the advocacy of The Aunties centres around acknowledging the genuine fears of Māori women, the fears of institutional systems that surveil, interfere and oppress in ways that are not experienced to the same degree in Pākehā families. Māori women may be hesitant to engage with social agencies for support with men's violence

because of fear of repercussions within a response system that operates racial power through care and protection proceedings. The Backbone Collective make visible the ways that women discipline their actions and behaviour under the gaze of the Family Court that operates as a site of disciplinary power through the ever-present threat of CoCA proceedings. Having recognised the disciplinary power of the Family Court Jackie attends to how Māori women fear the dominant gaze because of its history of care and protection proceedings under the Oranga Tamariki Act. Jackie reports that the Family Court and other social agencies frequently disbelieve women's narratives of violence, or they approach their experiences with a reductive lens. When women access the system, it says to them "I believe him, you can fuck off, you're a bad mother, you're a bad wife…" (Hirschfeld, 2021, 48:52).

Jackie's location on the ground walking along side Māori women provides her with insight into the ways institutions and social agencies gatekeep the provisions needed for safety-making – New Zealand Police, Work and Income (WINZ) and Oranga Tamariki among others. The Aunties attention to the ways that Māori women are labelled as deficit others helps to rethink how racial power relations impact on engagement with the system and creating missed opportunities for intervention in escalating violence. Social agencies exert pressure on them to leave violent relationships or risk losing access to their children under care and protection orders instigated by Oranga Tamariki and administered by the Family Court. As Jackie states "CYFS (child protection agency) do it, police do it, social workers do it, agencies do it all the fuckin' time; they walk into Māori and indigenous women's relationships and go 'this is terrible, you must leave'" (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 07:30). It is possible to see a figure emerge of the 'Fearful Mother', where there is a power imbalance between Māori mothers and the authorities who are failing to account for the provisions that women are putting in place to keep their children safe, showing little attention to the lived realities of women who can be placed in untenable positions having to balance the threats of

men's violence with the precarity that comes with leaving a relationship and losing financial and social supports (Wilson et al., 2019). Women may be hesitant to reach out for official support that is available to them due to fears that their situation will be decontextualised and their parenting judged and found lacking (McFall, 2018) leaving them vulnerable to losing their children.

Braidotti speaks of those who 'forget to forget' (Griffin & Braidotti, 2002, p. 232) , and thinking through this has helped me to understand the potency of the recognition that Jackie's activism enables, bringing into contemporary discussion the historical and ongoing injustices and wounds that have not been attended to and which are causing continued harm through neoliberal economic and social policy overlooking the needs of Māori women and resulting in social entrapment in and through structural violence. The Māori women that Jackie supports are unable and unwilling to forget the injustices of the enduring effects of colonisation that entrench structural oppressions, as these injustices continue with no abatement and no attempts to resolve. There must be a foundation of trust and connection developed into the relationship between the system response and Māori, where Māori voices are centred and listened to.

It can seem like an insurmountable problem, accounting for the past to attend to the present issue of IPV to move forward affirmatively to imagine a different future, and certainly, the complexity of colonisation far surpasses the influence of individuals or individual communities to address it. When considering the obstacles in place for women who have experienced violence and abuse any straightforward solution seems unlikely and overwhelming. However, thinking with Braidotti offers some comfort through her suggestion that we must account for the present to be worthy of it (Braidotti, 2019a) and this also means by engaging with the negativity and taking active measures to transform it. Jackie and The Aunties' grassroots relational movement, in activating community responsibility, provides

practical steps to move away from this sense of overwhelm and offers transformative possibilities that are attainable. Jackie exposes the dominant response to IPV as being inadequate by forcing us to acknowledge how privilege and multiple systems of oppression operate, by making visible the lived reality of IPV she engenders empathy and connectedness and an alternative way to approach social problems.

The Aunties along with the Backbone Collective resist the overly simplistic and individualistic victim and offender binary that underpins the legal response, this opens the space to consider whether the dominance of the legal system should continue being so prevalent, as Tolmie (2020a) argues the legal system is not a 'safety' system, it represents the relationship between men and accountability, but it is not designed or adequate to attend to women's safety. This is where the work of the Backbone Collective brings a useful perspective in calling for women to guide the system to connect it to women's safety needs as determined by those who use the system. Jackie also attends to the ill-fit of the system and the need to disrupt notions of deficit by highlighting how women who experience violence and abuse can have negative interactions with multiple social actors which contributes to ongoing violence and feelings of (un)safety, including the criminal justice system, social agencies such as WINZ and Oranga Tamariki, the police, medical system, peers and family members, and our wider communities. Jackie centres on structural inequality and the inequitable conditions of everyday life as being foundational to addressing the social problem of IPV as having access to resources provides opportunities to move away from escalating violence and alleviates pressures on women having to navigate violence along with food and housing insecurity. Through discussions of how negative interactions with social agencies and the community can socially entrap women in violence she attends to how feelings of shame can prevent women from accessing the services they need (Wilson et al., 2019) and this is where the transformation potential lies – in giving women space and respect to

exercise their autonomy. Jackie uses the intersecting power relations of gender, race, and class as a navigational tool to illuminate how structural violence means IPV must be understood as broader than the oppositional binary of victim and offender, and the focus must at all times be increasing the *potentia* of women through disrupting social systems and processes which constrain their choices and access to resources.

**Affirmative ethics, and movement**

The grassroots activism of Jackie Clark whilst not identified specifically as posthumanist nonetheless reflects the desired movement that Braidotti speaks of, a feminist ethic "does not aim at mastery, but at the transformation of negative into positive passions" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 134). So, Braidotti urges people to take hold of negativity and pain to extract knowledge from it, using this to shape tangible and explicit movements that disrupt the system, that shift the status quo (Dernikos et al., 2020). My interest in The Aunties as an organisation was triggered by the open and direct way that they sourced resources, whilst protecting the privacy of individual women, they make specific requests for items such as sanitary products, nappies, and women's underwear. They do not sanitise their requests to appease the sensibilities of readers who may prefer ignorance of the mundaneness of poverty, rather they make tangible the messiness of life for women who suffer violence in an environment of indifference and call the community to account for this indifference. They force the reader to grasp that the ordinariness of life continues, dispensing with any illusions that assistance is available, 'out there' ready for women to access. Assistance for women, if available, is passive, fraught with social power relations that leave women exhausted and ultimately unsupported. The Aunties make connections with people to source resources and through doing so enable a relationship of genuine empathy and accountability between women living with the effects of violence and the reader, to make recognisable the complexity of violence and poverty, in a way that privileges humanness without

commodifying stories of violence to 'shock', as often is the case in media representations of IPV. Rather than being motivated to provoke the readers embodied knowledge of shame, guilt, or sadness, The Aunties mobilise an active process of accountability, encouraging a questioning of our 'taken-for-granted' assumptions that normalise inequalities, such as deficit narratives that stereotype women as making bad choices, lazy or 'dole-bludging', and calling us to action together to think differently. As Braidotti argues, it is through opening opportunities to relate and connect with others that movement is created to shift towards joyful affirmation of becoming-other or becoming-woman (Braidotti, 2008b).

***Collective responsibility (we-are-in-this-together)***

The Aunties take active steps to challenge the barriers to women's physical and emotional recovery from men's violence, and alleviate obstacles in place due to structural inequality, through beginning conversations that consider how, in times of great stress and upheaval such as arriving at refuge, women should be able to focus on their recovery without having to worry about sourcing food and clothing for their families. Jackie establishes what the women need materially, as led by each woman without assumption, or judgment and then uses the non-human other, the wide-reaching medium of social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter) to engage with her network to source the items and services required, weaving together communities of people who care with those women who, as Jackie forcefully advocates, are deserving of care. The grassroots action within the community that The Aunties engage with has enabled me to make sense of the everyday 'othering' of victims and offenders of violence but also the othering of responsibility for addressing the issues. Understanding IPV as an issue of criminal justice - a relationship between a victim and offender binary - individualises responsibility, and framing IPV as gendered violence on a human rights level places accountability with the government and does not draw a direct link between gendered violence and structural disparities in poverty, housing, and education. The

Aunties engages movement with the relational, the affective flow between individual and structural violence, through attention to inequitable conditions of everyday life. We are all accountable for challenging these frameworks and cannot divest responsibility. As Braidotti suggests, anger and discontentment at the status quo are not sufficient for change, this negativity must be harnessed into action to become a "constitutive force" (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 36) and this is what underpins the ethos of The Aunties' work, forcing recognition of our complicity in systems which oppress.

Jackie steps away from the structural power relationships that prevail in official channels where projects to address social problems are negotiated and prioritised according to political or economic priorities. Rather, Jackie, unrestricted by these constraints, focuses on 'actualising the virtual' - the process of what we are becoming (Braidotti, 2017b) - through action: A process that Braidotti imagines would result in a community that is resistant to oppositional binaries that support hierarchical relationships, where the processes of domination and oppression operate as mechanisms of capture that diminish opportunities for affirmative interaction and transformative change (Davis & Braidotti, 2016). Braidotti advocates for the celebration of difference as *potentia*, and the importance of affirmative relations between the community of human and non-human others, emphasising not principles of profit but always the collective (Braidotti, 2016). Jackie actualises the virtual through active participation within the community, on the ground, with a decolonising approach illustrated by the intensive work with the core group of 27 women where there is no hierarchal structure or external 'expert' who treats knowledge as a commodity imparted from the dominant majority to those inferior. Structurally, philosophically, and practically, The Aunties recognise that strength, healing, and knowledge are generated collaboratively through ethical relations with the other.

***"No tinned tomatoes ever", the transaction of giving***

The approach of The Aunties problematises the short-term transactional model of support reflected by the dominant system response and, like The Backbone Collective, The Aunties, have established themselves outside of structural power relationships that could influence their independence. The Aunties reject prioritising economically 'responsible' interventions that fall in line with institutionalised capitalist goals of economic growth that can be measured by metrics such as recidivism and system-user headcount. The intensive wrap-around support that The Aunties provide and advocate for is relational, long term and more than just the de-personalised fulfilment of material need, and this is imperative as the women, who become like whānau (McFall, 2018) deserve the effort, they are worthy of the investment. The intensive support is only possible because of the small group size, it would not be replicable by those working within social agencies who have heavy workloads (McFall, 2018), constrained by the neoliberal policy which seeks to minimise public expenditure on what is configured as the problems of individuals. Braidotti (2008a) argues intensively that imaginative potential resides in ethical relations, and so The Aunties intensive focus on relationships, the closeness and connection between women and their communities holds transformative potential. Thinking with Braidotti mobilises a shift in the currency we can use to measure the 'success' of the system response: the intensive, longer-term focus may not be the most cost effective approach when 'value' is tied up with economics and fiscal spend however, when value is viewed through a lens of increasing the capacity of people to relate, to actualise their potential, to feel and connect then this is where focus and attention needs to be.

In 2017, on behalf of the Te Whare Aio Māori Women's refuge, Jackie used social media to request food donations for their annual Christmas food drive, asking people to refrain from donating tinned tomatoes given these were rarely utilised by women in the

refuge and articulating that women would rather have comfort foods that are easier to prepare. Jackie explained that “food is incredibly personal” (Mulligan, 2017, 04:55) and when women are traumatised, fleeing violence, and caring for upset children they want and deserve comforting and recognisable food that is easy to prepare. Jackie subsequently further extended her tinned tomato ban to include chickpeas and white trousers arguing that women in crisis want the comfort of leggings and asked people to consider "are they going to be making hummus in the safe house?" (Allen, 2017, para. 13). In the ensuing discussions, there was a flurry of responses debating whether such requests reflected ungratefulness, exposing assumptions that link deficit with poverty, where the adage ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ was used it, reflecting entrenched victim-blaming stereotypes and assumptions towards women who use refuge, that women are complicit in their predicaments and make ‘bad choices’. Having raised this conversation about tinned tomatoes Jackie laid bare the neoliberal narrative which renders women responsible for men’s violence. The moral power of the gendered, racial hierarchy creates the conditions for women to be responded to punitively, where the material inequality makes it possible for groups to be looked down upon based on their social location.

The reaction to Jackie’s ‘no more tinned tomatoes’ often failed to recognise the specificity of the original request, with some commentators assuming that Jackie was suggesting that no charitable organisation wanted tinned goods and some took it as an opening to criticise the removal of cooking classes from the education curriculum (Smith, 2017, 00:31) contributing to the narrative that women in refuges are lacking both the skills and motivation to provide for their families. The accusations of ‘ungratefulness’ prompted some charities to distance themselves from Jackie’s comments, to stay in their funders ‘good graces’. Ang Jury of the Women’s Refuge commented that “we don’t want people getting the message that we are ungrateful and entitled” (Eade, 2017, para. 4) demonstrating the fragility

of the dominant charity model set within a neoliberal agenda. Organisations are inadequately resourced by the government and reliant on the whims of the public who hold limited appetites to provide support to those who are perceived as having contributed to their predicaments. However, Jackie, from her position of independent ethical activism is unequivocal "…if somebody's not going to suit you, you just tell them to fuck off. They're not going to give you money, don't worry about it, somebody else will" (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 19:05).

As the response to the request for 'no more tinned tomatoes' unfolded it exposed how the process of charity is embedded with social power relations that reinforce a transactional process where the 'gift' of goods expects a return of gratitude. Rather than an outpouring of empathy and dissatisfaction at the evidence of how women are insufficiently supported when fleeing men's violence, or anger at the lack of accountability of men who use violence the responses to Jackie's request often centred on the perceived lack of gratitude indicating a lack of ethical relation. Where it is expressed, that women should be grateful for donations, even when they are unsuitable, it presumes that the women should feel indebted to the community for any assistance provided to them inferring that their own knowledge of their situation is unimportant, and they are flawed members of the community. Having seen this conversation over tinned tomatoes unfold it is possible to see that where gratitude is the currency of exchange rather than empathy and compassion it invites the reproduction of deficit narratives and embodied responses which hold us static.

Jackie responded to the conversation by drawing attention to the power relations inherent in the way charity, or 'helping' is conducted in New Zealand, problematising how charitable organisations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year disposing of inappropriate donations, that they are afraid to reject through fear that they will lose donors (Clark, 2018c; Passmore, 2018, 21:55). Jackie argues that this individualising and hierarchal

model, where the giver is imbued with authority and the receiver is bound by expectations of gratitude does not serve the community. Jackie's resistance to the traditional model of charity alerts us to the figuration of the "Omniscient Donor", the all-knowing giver who assumes to know best what a person needs and in exchange for their goods they seek a return, an expectation of gratitude, which operates as *potestas* leaving the recipient steeped in negativity instead of affirmation and dignity. Jackie challenges the figuration of the 'Omniscient Donor' through troubling assumptions of charity and how donations are not a means to an end but rather a mode of relation that have an affective impact on the recipient.

Jackie's pushback against tinned tomatoes resulted in the swift engagement of the media and the public and she responded to the social commentary by reiterating the consistent message that women in flight mode, women on the run – do not cook (Allen, 2017). The concrete image of a tin of tomatoes served as a provocation towards embedded assumptions of the dominant narrative that women who engage in the services of refuge are complicit in their precarity for making poor choices that have led them to being unable to live without the resources of the community, alongside assumptions that the facilities and resources available to women who are fleeing violence are available or abundant. It is possible to see a figuration emerge of another kind of unworthy victim than the figure that emerged through the Backbones activism, one who is considered to be an "Ungrateful Victim'. The 'Ungrateful Victim' is marked by deficit and framed as lazy, taking advantage of the generosity of the community by choosing not to utilise tinned tomatoes to make a home-cooked meal. Braidotti argues that to deal with the current complexities of our times we must create some distance from the habitual thinking that comes with Western knowledge systems which are predicated on hierarchal domination and binary oppositions. The negativity that resulted from Jackie's tinned tomatoes request can be understood when the intersecting ideologies of neoliberalism and meritocracy are considered, the assumption that

people have equal access to resources and opportunities can frame any failure to be independent social actors or to achieve self-sufficiency as being due to poor choice or personal deficit rather than due to structural inequalities that constrain choice and opportunities for action. Women living in poverty and/or fleeing men's violence can be seen to have breached the social order and it is their failure to 'cook' (the breach of femininity) that is configured as ungrateful.

Jackie interrogates the figure of the 'Ungrateful Victim' by exposing the lived realities of life in the refuge and problematising the unrealistic expectations of women dealing with trauma, injury, stress, poverty, and institutional racism from the institutions created to support them. Where Jackie focuses on the lived reality of the women as being in fraught circumstances, doing their best for distressed children with very limited resources it makes clear how presumptuous the suggestions that women should be cooking meals 'from scratch' are. It supposes that there are pots, pans, and other equipment available in which to do so, it assumes that there is space in the refuge kitchen for her to work, that there is a kitchen, that she is not required to soothe distressed children, it assumes that the other ingredients needed are also plentiful (A'Court & Brislen, 2019; Clark, 2022c) and it fails to consider the overwhelm and exhaustion that the women will be experiencing. Jackie's attention on the pantry shelves demonstrates her motivation to educate and raise awareness of the lack that these women face, they are under-resourced and struggling to source basic needs during a time of significant emotional upheaval. Jackie reminds the public that women are arriving at refuge often with no possessions, no identification, no driver's license and no money, the obstacles that women face are substantial, and these barriers can be dismantled with the right kind of community support.

Jackie challenges assumptions that frame women as 'ungrateful' arguing instead, that they must be adequately resourced, and then trusted to make the best decisions for their

families as they hold the lived experience and situated knowledges of what they need, articulating an alternative vision of the woman that recognises the humanness of those receiving the donated goods. The challenge is against perceptions that women 'owe' gratitude to those who hold power (and privilege) by locating the women as deserving, and distressed, juggling their anxiety and that of their children while negotiating an indifferent and complicit system. She refutes myths of deficit by articulating how the women she encounters are wonderful mothers and countering negativity with images of strength that become perceptible when inequities are made visible "My 'girls' [the women Jackie supports] do extraordinary things for their children. They're incredible parents and extraordinary cooks and budgeters" (Ralph, 2019). Social media is used to provide updates and make visible the strength and development of the women in the group by circulating positive stories of the sporting, academic and cultural accomplishments of the women and their children (The Aunties, 2022). Jackie articulates that therein lies the value in engaging in small-scale relational work, the possibility to see the growth and positive change that occurs when women are adequately resourced and supported. Through making this known to the community she forces recognition of the humanness of these women, enabling connections through empathy, and repositions the community as owing a debt to the women who have experienced violence and abuse. The Aunties, like the Backbone Collective, have an approach which centres the voices and perspectives of women who have lived experience of men's violence. Jackie argues for a strength-based approach to women and others living with vulnerabilities and precarity and a recognition of the structural contributions that create the conditions of possibility for women to be vulnerable to violence and abuse.

***Becoming response-able with empathy***

The consequence of only holding partial and situated knowledges means that many people cannot fathom the totalising trauma that comes with relationship violence, and living

with social, cultural, and financial precarity and it is this lack of empathy that occurs in consequence to the lack of understanding of some women's lived reality that contributes to the figure of women as 'ungrateful'. Jackie recognises how people can be divorced from the material realities of what it means to live with and leave violence and so she raises awareness and visibility of the practical issues that women face to increase empathy and understanding and to force people to feel, to relate and to participate. Jackie does not ask for comprehension of domestic violence as this knowledge is not readily accessible depending on one's social location and privilege however, she can bridge this issue of partial and situated knowledge through the shared understanding of grief and loss which for most adults is an accessible experience. Jackie creates an alternative story to disrupt the figuration of the 'ungrateful victim' and to generate empathy within those with no accessible lived knowledge of men's violence or the consequences of structural inequality by pulling on the notion of grief as a unifying affective force, asking people to remember the embodiment of loss and calamity they experienced after losing a loved one and how comforting a cup of tea and a familiar meal can be. Jackie articulates that when women are fleeing violence and enter a refuge homeless, hurting and often accompanied by traumatised children they are struggling with incredible trauma and complex internal conflicts that can be likened to grief. Jackie explains that despite the shelves of the refuge often being filled with tins of chickpeas and tomatoes most of the women were not habituated to cooking with them, and learning new skills is not what they need in those initial stages of recovering or rebuilding their lives, even the best cook in the world would not be inclined nor should they be expected to cook when in the throes of grief and loss.

***What the world needs now***

Jackie's advocacy, and her relational ethic provide the 'counter negativity' that Braidotti argues is "what the world needs *now*" (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 464, emphasis in

original). The embodied affective flow that empathetic connection brings can be transformed into action and movement towards flows of becoming (Braidotti, 2011) and understanding this is what drives The Aunties to continue to raise awareness of the precarity that women face when living with violence alongside institutional indifference. The forceful rejection of deficit assumptions of women, as demonstrated by the strength of the resistance against accusations of 'ungratefulness' that marked the 'tinned tomatoes' conversations opens space to take a different, strength-based and affirmative approach, Braidotti articulates this as a "subject-in-becoming – you reinvent yourself on the basis on what you hope you could become with a little help from your friends" (Braidotti, 2014, p. 173). The flow of becoming offers potential to restructure the relations between men and women, Pākehā and Māori away from the rigid binaries which insist on hierarchy where difference becomes less than, inviting oppression and indifference to shape relations.

Restructuring relations will require addressing the practice of reproducing hierarchically organised needs which are determined by an outside 'authority' who do not hold the situated knowledge of the woman. This type of model embodies the policy and practice of social agencies and institutions which regard women who have experienced violence and abuse as risks that need to be managed (Morgan et al., 2019). Jackie's resistance to the normalised model of 'charity' (Clark, 2018a) relates to it being built upon neoliberal, capitalist and meritocratic narratives that position those who have resources as more 'successful'. The higher position in the social hierarchy that this affords lends a sense of entitlement to 'know best' what those in need require to remedy their situations, and in doing so creates possibilities for those located lower in the hierarchy to be framed as unworthy or ungrateful, if they respond in ways contrary to social expectation, such as by failing to demonstrate expected levels of gratitude for tinned tomatoes. This perceived 'knowledge' of what those in need require neglects to attend to the structural challenges that exist in the

women's situations nor recognition of the situatedness of one's knowledge which means that the privileged position of the giver limits access to the situated knowledge of the receiver. The power relations that exist between the oppositional category of giver and receiver do not affirm either party, the receiver is diminished by not having their voice heard and the giver misses the opportunity to listen, connect and engage that transformative potential that resides within the in-between spaces that occur through encounters with others. As Jackie argues, "Don't project what you think other ppl [people] need to do in their lives if you don't know what their life looks like. Acknowledge you live in another world. Acknowledge that's unfair. Do something to address that" (Clark, 2022b).

Jackie offers a potential challenge to the hierarchal and paternalistic model of giving towards a non-hierarchal model of 'sharing resources', where the dichotomous binary of giver and receiver is disestablished and replaced with a model that reinforces the value and interconnectedness of community, and the importance of ethical relationships. The Aunties' approach could be considered a pursuit of a historical memory of relation that was naturalised within Māoridom, interconnectedness being highly valued within Māori communities (King et al., 2017) but is often not recognised as a priority within Western dominant knowledge systems and structures. The Western model is shaped by priorities that privilege acquiring capital and so meeting need can be limited to the shifting of goods or resource from a place of excess to a place of need/want. It is de-personalised and does not invite or require reciprocity, interconnectedness or the establishment of a respectful relationship.

Reading Braidotti enables me to recognise that the possibility for transforming negativity into potential resides in the forging of ethical relationships and I see opportunity existing in the building of strength-based relationships where women are trusted as holding expert knowledge of their own needs. The Aunties open space to recognise that these women know their own risks, particularly when they reside within a community of relationships who

help them to recognise the issues. Jackie calls the women in her circle "shiny motherfuckers" (Hirschfeld, 2021, 1:03:33) who have endured long histories of having things taken from them such as cultural supports eroded through colonisation, or feelings of self-worth and safety taken by individual abusers as well as through the well-meaning but ill-executed actions of community members whose unsuitable donations become embodied within the recipients as shame and exclusion. Jackie encourages the women to recognise their own strength and the community to recognise their responsibility towards each other by working to dislodge negative assumptions and stereotypes about women who experience violence. The centring of women's voices disrupts the normalised paternalistic practice of 'doing for' rather than 'doing with'. Jackie uses the memory of a bare refuge pantry shelf save for copious tins of unused and unwanted tinned tomatoes to convey to the public how to be better allies to those in need, encouraging the elicitation of empathy for women fleeing violence and a recognition of the structural inequalities that complicate their lives. Jackie herself is cognizant of her own partial and situated knowledge of other women's experiences and so walks beside women as a support and not an authority, to aid women to make decisions most suitable for their unique situations. Jackie vehemently rejects claims her activism empowers women, The Aunties movement is about facilitating recognition and memory "… pls don't ever describe me or anyone else as empowering, or restoring, or…any of those words. For those ppl [people] I work with it's entirely about REMINDING them how powerful they are and them REMEMBERING" (Clark, 2022d).

***"What do you need?"***

The practice of social agencies and our communities failing to respond to women with empathy and compassion contributes to the social entrapment that women experience (Tolmie et al., 2018), with the difficulty in securing resources reproducing the structural inequalities that have been entrenched since the process of colonisation began. Having a

response system that does not dignify women's responses to violence or that reacts punitively towards women indicates the inadequacy of these systems to engage with relational ethics of care. The conversation over tinned tomatoes became an opportunity to turn focus towards structural inequity and the lived reality of men's violence. Jackie argues "privilege is an amazing thing, it's a wonderful thing because then you can fuckin' use it!" (Ashimbayeva, 2020, 01:24) and as I reflected on the 'tinned tomato' debate, which is still in circulation five years later (Clark, 2022c), I think about the ways Jackie calls on the community to take hold of their privilege, to be accountable for it and to use it for good, arguing that those who hold a position of privilege also hold an ethical responsibility to act.

Privilege imbues responsibility and Jackie has challenged us to think about our own complicity with structural power making us accountable for our efforts to dismantle oppressions, and advances recognition of this obligation through conversations of charity. For Braidotti accountability consists of responsibility for the knowledge that you put into the world as well as ensuring that it is ethical, and that it encourages affirmative practices (Braidotti, 2017b). Jackie embodies this by disrupting stereotypes and defamiliarizing myths and assumptions about women through practices which dignify the women and the choices they make as knowing subjects. Jackie normalises asking the question "What do you need?", (Clark, 2018h) arguing that people must "either give from the heart or don't give at all" (Fallon, 2021, para. 27), displacing the authority of a donor as omniscient and acknowledging the limited and partial understandings of the complexities of another person's life. As Jackie once tweeted "I remember someone had a fit bc [because] we bought the women chocolate. As if you know what's best for them. Get fucked. Ppl [people] deserve to be spoiled" (Clark, 2017). An approach to sharing resources that is driven by a feeling of shared accountability for those around us reflects that each party to the relationship has value and meaning to offer. Braidotti argues that processes of becoming require the dis-identification with individualism

and the seeking of opportunities for encounters with those around us (Braidotti, 2006b), these affirmative relations increase *potentia,* through self-awareness and joyful effect that benefits all the community.

When we view 'charity' as an opportunity to listen to the needs of others, to actively recognise the experiences of those to which we do not have access and affirm the value of the 'other' we enable opportunities to connect with difference and give from the heart, to generate empathy for what is unknown. This affirmative and ethical mode of relation enables new and imaginative knowledges. This may be what will help us break through the stasis the consistently high levels of IPV in this country. In recognition of the power relations that undergird charity Jackie is motivated to see New Zealand shift from a community of "givers and receivers to a community of people who are looking after one another" (Passmore, 2018,31:59). For Jackie, the action of getting the material items that the women need is a process of affirmative ethics, by taking steps to level structural inequality she increases the ability for us all to relate and engage with multiple others. For example, Jackie opens spaces to consider how providing women with workplace-appropriate clothing and means of transport is to enable these women to socialise and participate in society: As Braidotti advocates "creating a community that actualizes this ethical propensity" (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 166).

Jackie and The Aunties engage in an emerging set of practices that ask that people "gift with love" (Clark, 2018a) to only donate clean, working, and functional items, to donate as a means of communication with those in need to facilitate "affective connections" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 203), to transform the vulnerability that comes with asking for help into *potentia,* where women feel valued. Jackie articulates that items given to those in need can be imbued with a dynamic agency or an affective force which transmits the sentiments of the giver to the receiver "if you're given shit, you're going to feel like shit" (Eaton, n.d, para. 5). Jackie's

philosophy with any type of giving whether it is material, or financial is that people should give with love because in doing so, people will know that people care for them and this provides hope which "…can spark something in them that's like 'yup I can do this'" (Clark, 2018f, 01:57). This is the movement Braidotti alerts us to - the relational interaction that transforms negativity into affirmation (Braidotti, 2008a). Jackie challenges the stigma and shame that so often accompanies the need to reach out for help by reminding us that "all of us need our fellow human beings in times of need" (Clark, 2018g) and when women receive material goods which are of decent quality, suitable for their social situation and that smell nice it reinforces the message that they are worthy and deserving.

As Jackie acknowledges the movement of resources between people as facilitating an embodied response that marks the relationship between the giver and receiver, she is decolonising the traditional paternalistic approach of 'helping' and advocating instead for an alternative mode of relation. A defining aspect of the activism that The Aunties movement engages in is the distancing from individualised understandings and responses to IPV, the focus on building connections and accessing resources within the community as a reflection of the responsibility and obligation that society holds to each other, as Braidotti argues we are all in this together after all.

**Looking back to move forward**

The Aunties demand change in the way that victims are viewed, to transform the way that they are responded to, and ultimately towards addressing structural inequities that hold violence in place. Jackie reminds the community that when you are under-resourced "any little problem becomes a huge one" (Clark, 2019) and so pushes for empathy and non-judgement when considering the position of those in need which always requires the reflexive examination of privilege and prejudice because partial and situated knowledges create blind

spots that mean we can never really know the full extent of another's hardship. Jackie seeks to centre the voice and needs of women who have experienced violence and abuse to help them step into their own power, as knowing subjects, and as people who are deserving of kindness, dignity, and respect. Jackie's often passionate approach forces 'givers' to take hold of their own complicity for engaging in processes without the deserved level of empathy, this embodied affective flow remembers the importance of ethical relation. The simple question of "What do you need?" reminds us that women, those with lived experience, are best placed to tell us what they need to recover from their trauma.

Jackie and The Aunties challenge assumptions of neoliberal blame that hold individual women accountable for community-wide social problems that are produced and reproduced through structural and systemic policy and practice. Having done this research it is clear that by working to increase recognition of the precarity and social vulnerability of women who have experienced men's violence, Jackie and The Aunties are forcing others to confront their own privilege, to become accountable for this privilege in ways that increase the potentials for a response-able response. Braidotti asks us to disidentify with naturalised ideas that limit our ability to relate, such as the traditional hierarchal relationship between giver and receiver. The Aunties attend to this by making visible that it is the community together who owe a debt to those living with structural inequality and structural violence and men's violence. With the generation of affective flow that is facilitated through the sharing of narratives a process of disidentification occurs and though painful memories provides the lines of flight towards relationships of connectedness and empathy, where we are motivated to question our own complicity in systems and practices that sanction and tolerate men's violence towards women. To transform the system response The Aunties holds all of us to account - because it is the right thing to do.

# Chapter Five: Discussion

> It is not that we do not have enough data… The problem is that our policies do not reflect the extraordinary amount of information already in our possession.
>
> (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2008, p. 179)

## Stories that move us

We have had decades of listening to women's stories of pain, women are called on to narrate their stories of pain to a system that is disjointed, fragmented and siloed to meet institutional thresholds of who is worthy of help and of what type. Women seeking support are asked to share their experiences to satisfy bureaucratic priorities which may not include women's safety. The requirement for women to meet institutional thresholds of what constitutes a 'worthy victim' contributes to women's stories becoming commodified within neoliberal processes that seek to put measurable solutions and treatment interventions in place. When women's narratives of pain are used as 'data' rather than opportunities to connect, and feel and be moved, this contributes to the production of figurations, which produce and reproduce the same assumptions that hold violence in place. In response to these figurations and stories of pain, there have been generations of research and practice, government responses and academic theorising dedicated to resolving the social problem of intimate partner violence. Yet despite the multi-disciplinary efforts and the dedicated work of many professional, academic and community groups, the current responses to IPV in Aotearoa New Zealand are failing to meaningfully address men's use of violence towards women. When we treat women's narratives of pain as 'data' to drive the system response rather than stories that move us the system will continue to fail to account for the gendered power relations that permeate the system and constrain the potential for response-able approaches. Women's stories are a gift, which when taken hold of and listened to for real, can

move us, and disrupt the singular story enabling accountability. Having engaged with alternative knowledges that seek to disrupt the singular story, I question what potentials unfold when we listen to the stories of pain for real, not to pathologise individual women but to reach out and grasp hold of the affective flows to be moved and guided by women's stories to transform the narrative of IPV. What happens if we start to make sense of the stories that we already have, by treating narratives as an opportunity to feel and connect with others, to listen for and feel the impacts of gendered power, what becomes possible when this is the lens through which women's responses are viewed?

**Affective flow in action**

Embarking on this research journey has made visible the need for conversations that challenge gendered power and has reinforced the need for intentional efforts to seek out and listen to women's narratives. When we are open to listening, and hearing another's experience with empathy, then the connections made establish the foundations needed for a response-able response. As we are all in this world together it is time for recognition that the women who are bearing the brunt of men's violence do not have the time to wait for society to align semantic or theoretical arguments about what IPV 'is', we must listen not to judge or to advise but to feel, and let this affective force move us towards transformation as guided by those with lived and situated experience.

There are common threads through the work of both activist movements The Backbone Collective and The Aunties, and that is a focus on compassion, empathy and the importance of connectedness and community for responding to IPV as a social problem that we are all accountable for. The Aunties and Backbone produce what Hodgetts et al. (2022) would refer to as actionable knowledge to challenge and contest the dominant narratives that frame IPV as a singular story. Backbone utilises the legitimacy of 'data' to tell different stories of IPV

and with The Aunties challenge the narratives that privilege physical violence and make Pākehā IPV visible and by doing so disrupt processes which block people from knowing when behaviours become violence or abuse. The activism of these organisations works to increase opportunities for connectedness, activating flows of compassion and empathy by increasing opportunities for people to recognise IPV, in shifting our attention towards how IPV is embedded within wide social processes it makes it visible that IPV cannot be ringfenced from the conditions of everyday life. Accordingly, increasing the ability of people to apprehend that gendered power is key to addressing IPV, it is through recognising gendered violence and our complicity with systems which sanction it that we can become accountable for it, and accountability foregrounds response-able responses.

Braidotti discusses the non-linearity of time (Braidotti, 2019b) and thinking of time as folding, and made flat was helpful to me to understand the need to take hold of our complicity in policy and practices which enable or tolerate gendered violence. To actualise the future where IPV is not a wicked and consistently enduring social problem, we need to take hold of the past. As Braidotti writes, "saying 'no' to the unacceptable aspects of present conditions cuts both ways: it means both 'I do not want this' and 'I desire otherwise'" (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 166). I began this research wondering about gendered power relations based upon my experiences on the periphery of the Family Court, initially, feeling like it was 'stepmothers' specifically, who were under-valued by society. However, as I became more engaged with a cartography of the sector, I became aware of how gender is implicated in relationships with institutions and social agencies throughout everyday life. Gendered power operates to disadvantage all women, some more than others, in multiple and varied ways, and women are silenced and disregarded as knowledge holders. Now, having done this research, it is clear how the dichotomous thinking that underpins social systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonisation reaches through traditional Western knowledge and belief

systems. Braidotti argues for decolonisation and defamiliarisation from dominant knowledges and approaches that have become naturalised and taken for granted, arguing that by looking back, it is possible to take stock of where we are in the present. Then it will be possible to move forward in different and affirmative ways.

The cartographic approach made it possible to locate a chasm between the intentions of policy and the assumptions and outcomes that exist in practice which operate to disadvantage women. As the quote at the start of this chapter reflects, the issues within the sector are not due to a lack of information, we have had decades of women sharing their stories of pain. But when these stories are processed through the machinations of a patriarchal and neoliberal system the affective force that they generate fails to be acted upon. Backbone has opened space to interrogate the gendered narrative of the response system which is outwardly gender-neutral but in practice, it operates to advance patriarchal interests as made visible by the investigations into the Family Court. Social power relations are consistently overlooked by neoliberal legal discourse, which assumes the legal system is equally accessible, gender-neutral and that the judiciary is unaffected by gender, racial or cultural bias. Jackie's work on the ground challenges the neoliberal assumption of responsible individuals to re-articulate IPV as a wicked problem that we hold a collective responsibility to address, The Aunties helps to shift perspectives to encourage the acknowledgement of privilege, as once this privilege is recognised, we can be accountable for it.

What happens when the system response stops and listens to stories for real? As Braidotti argues we must take hold of negativity to mobilise a transformation, to actualise our vision of the future, and we must find new ways of thinking and utilise new methods of knowing (Braidotti, 2019b). We must all challenge the mechanisms that support unequal power relations as well as the social norms tolerant of men's violence, precisely because, as Braidotti reminds us, 'We' are all in this together, but we are not all the same (Braidotti,

2019b). Backbone and The Aunties challenge the community and the system response to be accountable for the relationship with structural and social systems to enable a more ethical and 'response-able' (Haraway, 2016) response.

Engaging with the alternative knowledges made visible how the long history of processes and systems of neoliberalism, colonisation and individualism permeate current social issues and must be recognised to attend to contemporary issues fully. It is necessary that we acknowledge how IPV is embedded and normalised within everyday life because until we confront the normalisation of men's violence it will not be possible to move away from it. Conceptualising time as non-linear makes clear how IPV is a wicked problem with multiple conditions of possibility and requiring varied interventions, as such it encourages collective responsibility for social problems as it dissuades those who try to elude responsibility for social problems as being 'not their issue'. The silencing of IPV is not simply a case of people turning a blind eye to physical violence, it extends to the inattention to processes such as structural inequity and institutional racism which can hold men's violence towards women in place. If we are all in this together it makes clear the collective obligation and responsibility that communities, institutions and social agencies hold towards marginalised groups. These activist organisations attend to the unknowing by circulating narratives which force us to hear and feel the pain that women are experiencing and to apprehend how it is exacerbated through community and institutional responses or indifference. By embedding IPV within normalised operations of gendered and social power these organisations make IPV and the conditions which make it possible as relevant and applicable to us all, and given we are all in this together we become accountable and required to participate. Thinking about the need for collective responsibility led me to consider Braidotti and the monistic ontology of posthumanism, which moves beyond binary oppositions (Braidotti, 2011) and disrupts thinking through hierarchies. Where we allow

ourselves to listen and be moved by narratives these affective flows forge connections with those we share this world with, increasing opportunities for ethical relationships and reinforcing a sense of accountability to dismantle barriers that block this kind of affirmative connection.

**Cunts in Cardigans**

A pivotal stage in this research project was when I listened to Jackie speak of ‘cunts in cardigans’, referring to those men, who because of the privilege of their gendered power, can exploit the system response in ways which oppress women. Jackie often uses provocative language to draw our attention, and it is through listening to the ordinary stories of Pākehā violence that it becomes possible to recognise the insidiousness of the ‘cunts in cardigans’ and how the response system with the collaboration and sanctioning of institutions such as the Family Court, provide the conditions of possibility for their continued violence over women and children. This enables a detachment from assumptions of the ‘dangerous other’ and forces a call for accountability for those who are complicit with the power structures that hold these practices and processes in place.

The Backbone Collective takes up the challenge to tackle problematic and gendered behaviour by institutions, holding them to account for their responses and outcomes and the relationships with the everyday conditions of violence to interrogate those assumptions that suggest that the system responds adequately to women. By drawing our attention to the ways that the Family Court is not accessible or accountable to women who have experienced violence and abuse the Backbone is able to shift the narrative around the legal system and its position as being gender-neutral. Through cartography, I recognised that access to and treatment within the legal system is not balanced or straightforward, people who use violence and experience violence are treated differently depending on their social locations. Backbone

defamiliarises the ‘dangerous other’ by locating within the Family Court how respectable men, the middle-class professional Pākehā male, a cunt in a cardigan, can manipulate Family Court professionals to advance their own interests.

Through listening to the stories and experiences circulated by Backbone and The Aunties we are able to recognise how the system response places demands on women to behave in particular ways and that this pressure to conform or co-operate does not advance the safety or wellbeing of women and children. The legal system expects women to behave in calm and rational ways and can dismiss women who display strong emotions as irrational or unreliable. Hearing Jackie re-member the ways she self-discipled herself to behave as a ‘good wife’ made me question how women are called upon by their abusers and then by the response system to be calm, rational and to ‘co-operate’. The expectation of co-operation is gendered and advances patriarchal interests, the processes which operate to silence and coerce women are rarely challenged given the insular nature of the system and principles of ‘privacy’ which normalise the lack of accountability of the hegemonic legal system. The activism of Backbone and The Aunties works together to make visible that the dominance of the legal response to men’s violence is inadequate as the hegemonic system protects those who exploit the system to dominate others and it is this protection of gendered power which prevents accountability for men’s violence. The circulation of narratives which highlight the ordinariness of men’s violence prompts interrogation of the murky boundary between ‘normal’ gendered behaviours and abusive ones, and it was feeling a sense of the mundaneness attached to those who are able to exert force over women, with the collaboration of formal institutions such as the Family Court, which identified to me the need for the system response to be accountable to those who enter and use the system. It is inattention to the outcomes of the system response that contributes to the social entrapment of

women and this reflects the importance of gendered analysis to challenge the system to be accountable and to drive a change of narrative within communities and institutional settings.

**Activating the potentials**

The Aunties and The Backbone Collective are what Braidotti would describe as "prototypes of collective assemblages, moving in the direction of the actualisation of the virtual" (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 478). These organisations are approaching knowledge production on IPV through a gendered frame, prioritising women's voices and situating IPV within relationships of power. By engaging with Braidotti and the process of cartography I have been able explore how necessary it is that we attend to the affective flows to really engage with the voices of women to shift the narratives of IPV. The Backbone Collective and The Aunties are guided by women holding them as 'experts' in possession of valuable knowledge that we must be open to be moved by, to make sense of the narratives not as 'data' but as sites of potential ethical exchange. Thinking with Braidotti highlighted that we need to find new and creative ways of attending to this wicked problem and the methodological approach of cartography allowed me to question how different processes and systems inter-relate to contribute to the social entrapment that women experience. It is an attunement to women's narratives which enable the recognition of social entrapment and women's responses to it which will enable the development of interventions that can lead pathways out of entrapment. Progressing through this research project, it became clear that extending recognition of IPV is a potential line of flight towards transformational change, understandings of IPV that privilege physical violence limit our ability to provide response-able approaches by contributing to the unknowing that women, institutions and our communities experience. We need to apprehend social entrapment and this awareness needs to be engaged by social agencies so they can discern where women are being entrapped in violence and also to be accountable when their own institutional practice enacts social

entrapment over women. If the response system approached IPV with a social entrapment lens how differently could women's requests for housing, financial and employment assistance be viewed? If IPV was apprehended as the wicked problem that it is, how can the institutional and community response actually become accountable? If we can shift the narrative so women no longer carry the burden of responsibility for men's violence how does this enable ethical and accountable responses? This research journey, and this methodological approach has made it possible to notice the possibilities that exist within a change of narrative and the potential lines of flight that open up through challenging gendered power. Starting the conversation with gendered power increases the relationship of collective responsibility towards social problems and through listening to women's stories of pain for real, it is possible to recognise how the system response continues to invisibilise practices of heteronormative violence. By listening and taking hold of these stories as sites of resistance we can hold the system to account and challenge gendered power as it operates in the institutional response. Now that we hear, see and feel the violence, in different places and spaces we must act, resist and challenge because that is the right thing to do. Currently, there is a lack of accountability for the power relations that complicate a woman's ability to secure an appropriate response and this is an institutional and community responsibility to provide. I imagine institutional accountability to become long-term and to remain in place extended beyond any individual touchpoint with the system, this would require the Family Court as an example, to track the outcome of their decisions to increase awareness of the consequences or constraints that arise when privileging a shared parenting ideology in circumstances which include IPV. I imagine an increased requirement for professional development and an openness to alternative knowledges to open spaces for new ways of thinking and doing in institutional spaces. Where help that is offered to women who experience men's violence is time limited and offered only in times of crisis it does not alleviate the social entrapment but

can be experienced as further pressure or coercion, to avoid reproducing oppressive practices over women the system and the community must activate and sit with women in their distress available to be called upon and assist based on her readiness. Braidotti asks us to be “worthy” of the present (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 464) and by incorporating the voices from the margins we can apprehend that society is enriched through inclusion. When the focus is on compassion, empathy and relationships we may resist gendered social power relations of oppression and harm. The work that Jackie and Backbone engage in moves us to act as communities who care, to foster genuine human connection through processes of recognition and relational ethics.

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