

INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATIONS OF BIRTHING AND MOTHERING IN
*THE PAINTED DRUM, FACES IN THE MOON, THE WAY WE MAKE SENSE, THE
MARRIAGE OF SAINTS, AND ONCE WERE WARRIORS*

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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DEDICATION

*To our mothers,
in all their forms.*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the traditional views surrounding Indigenous birthing and mothering, as well as the mother-child relationship cycle in contemporary Indigenous literature, and compares the traditional past to the contemporary present. Five contemporary Indigenous novels from four different American Indian and Indigenous Nations are included: Louise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* (Ojibwe), Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (Cherokee), Dawn Karima Pettigrew's *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* (Creek), and Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (Maori). Themes in the novels are studied individually and collectively, through the frameworks for literary analysis that Arnold Krupat terms nationalism, indigenism, and cosmopolitanism. Each novel will be analyzed first using Arnold Krupat's theory of literary nationalism, which suggests that in order to fully comprehend an Indigenous text, it must be explored using only a culturally-specific framework that focuses specifically on the Nation depicted within the novel. However, on a broader scope Krupat's literary theory of indigenism will be addressed throughout this study, examining ways in which similar parallels within each selected text and Nation overlap to create common areas of study. Lastly, aspects of the mother-child relationship will be assessed using Krupat's theory of literary cosmopolitanism, which suggests that even though there are very unique aspects of Indigenous literature that must be viewed from a tribally-specific vantage point, there are also cosmopolitan, or common, elements within the human experience that link all individuals together like the act of birthing and mothering.

INTRODUCTION

Most works authored by American Indian and Indigenous¹ authors include examples and representations of birthing, motherhood, and the mother-child relationship. To date, however, almost no scholarship analyzes this content. There are numerous avenues that may be explored within these themes, but this study focuses on the following four questions to help fill the current void of scholarship in this area: How are birthing, motherhood, and the mother-child relationship depicted in Indigenous literature? How do contemporary literary representations of these life events compare to traditional, tribally specific concepts, knowledge, and practices? How is the mother-child relationship established in Indigenous contemporary literature? And, finally, what impact do these literary representations of birthing and motherhood hold for contemporary readers and scholars of Indigenous literature? In order to address these questions, this study focuses on five selected texts that represent four different Indigenous communities: Louise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* (Ojibwe), Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* (Cherokee), Dawn Karima Pettigrew's *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* (Creek), and Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (Maori). Krupat's concepts of literary nationalism, indigenism, and cosmopolitanism serve as the framework for analyzing the texts both individually and collectively. This study first analyzes each text using a nationalist approach, specifically looking at each novel within the context of the Native Nation

¹ The term "American Indian" alone is insufficient because the Maori novel *Once Were Warriors* is set in New Zealand. Throughout the thesis I will use the broader term "Indigenous" because it includes American Indian people as well as Indigenous peoples from other Nations.

the novel focuses upon. Collectively, these examples of Indigenous literature are also well suited for indigenist analysis, which compares and contrasts similar experiences shared by many Indigenous peoples, regardless of specific cultural affiliation. This second form of analysis provides insight to similarities shared by and represented in four different Indigenous communities. However, because birthing and mothering are experiences shared by all cultures, Krupat's theory of cosmopolitanism, which suggests all communities share similar life experiences, is also an effective form of analysis. By analyzing Indigenous texts using Krupat's three literary theories of nationalism, indigenism, and cosmopolitanism, a broad interpretation of the representation of birthing and motherhood will become apparent alongside culturally-specific readings of each novel.

Selection of Novels for this Study

The novels in this study reflect different geographic locations, cultures, male/female Indigenous authors from the U.S. and beyond, as well as lesser-known and well-known authors and texts. The first novel *The Painted Drum* by Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) takes place in a fictitious Ojibwe community. While Erdrich is a well-known author, *The Painted Drum* is one of her less-discussed novels within the academic community. Betty Louise Bell's (Cherokee) novel *Faces in the Moon* follows Lucie Evers, who recalls her childhood in Oklahoma. *Faces in the Moon* is a well-known novel. The novels *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints*, by Dawn Karima Pettigrew (Creek/Cherokee), however, are lesser-known works of Native American literature and, to date, they have not been the subject of other analyses. Geographically, the territory and some of the traditions of the Creek and

Cherokee overlap, which helps to facilitate an Indigenist analysis of these novels. Duff's novel *Once Were Warriors* (Maori) has been widely analyzed among academics and Duff's work is well-known, although more so in New Zealand than in the United States. Although the authors of the novels selected for this thesis are diverse, include American Indian and Maori authors, and are set during the twentieth century, they also include references to the traditional past. When evaluated separately and together, these novels offer multiple examples of pregnancy, birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship.

The Painted Drum is one of several novels by Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich that revolves around the same fictitious Ojibwe community and its inhabitants. The novel focuses on two narrators, Faye Travers and Bernard Shawaano. Faye Travers is an estate agent who encounters a sacred Ojibwe drum in the collection of a man known for his dishonorable methods for gaining American Indian artifacts. Faye takes the drum in order to repatriate it back to the Ojibwe community and on this journey she discovers more about her own Ojibwe identity. Part of Faye's journey to self-discovery places emphasis on her relationship with her mother. Faye "is afraid, it would seem, that she does not deserve to love and be loved because she believes she is responsible for his sister's death many years earlier" and she seeks the forgiveness and understanding of her mother (Washburn 89). The second narrator, Bernard Shawaano, is an ancestor of the man who made the drum Faye has stolen and plans to bring back to its rightful Ojibwe owners. Bernard is also partially removed from his Ojibwe culture, and through the repatriation of the drum and learning from a community elder, becomes more aware of his tribal identity.

Thus far, the only scholarship on the novel focuses on tribalism and identity, but does not comment on any specific aspects of birthing, motherhood, or the other-child relationship (Rickard 2007). Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* is also of particular interest because it was, perhaps, written in response to Erdrich's own concern about her role as a mother. In 1996, shortly after her divorce from husband Michael Dorris, one of daughters accused Dorris of "touching her in ways that made her uncomfortable" (Washburn 55). All four of the daughters raised in the home, including an adopted daughter, eventually accused Dorris of "both sexual molestation and violent physical abuse" (Washburn 55). Even though Erdrich confessed to knowledge of Dorris' physical abuse, it remains uncertain if Dorris sexually molested any of the children (Washburn 55). While the extent to which Dorris abused his children may never be publically known, it is certain that Erdrich's personal world was shaken and there was a falling out with Erdrich and her daughters. With *The Painted Drum* being so fixated on the importance of the mother-child relationship, it is possible that some of the content within the novel is Erdrich's way of examining her own role as a mother, and the relationship she shares with her children.

Betty Louise Bell's novel *Faces in the Moon* does not share the autobiographical aspects of Louise Erdrich's work, but is heavily influenced by Cherokee tradition and focuses on three generations of Cherokee women. Lucie Evers, the protagonist, reflects on her past as she returns home to see her mother, Gracie, on her deathbed. Lucie's past is full of pain and despair and it is clear that Gracie never filled the role of a mother-figure to her daughter. However, tales of the past also reveal that Gracie's own mother, Helen, lacked motherly affection for her

daughter, which perhaps contributes to some of Gracie's inability to be an effective mother. Other studies on *Faces in the Moon* address the novel in the context of homing stories, issues of audience for American Indian authors, magic realism, and trauma/healing narratives, but do not address specific aspects of birthing and motherhood raised in the story (Benavidez 2009, Furlan 2000, and Roberts 2007). *Faces in the Moon's* representations of severed mother-daughter relationships, mothers unable to protect their daughters from rape, and the loss of Cherokee female identity suggest that, for some mother-child pairings, there is no way to forgive and rebuild the relationship destroyed by bad decisions made by the mother figure.

Similarly to *Faces in the Moon*, Dawn Karima Pettigrew's work depicts the ways in which mother-daughter relationships change over time. Many of the characters reflect mixed-ancestry, much like Pettigrew's Creek/Cherokee ancestry. Krupat's nationalist approach to the novels is complex because each novel could be analyzed through a Creek lens, a Cherokee lens, or even a combination of the two. Here, *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* are specifically analyzed through a Creek lens but the details on Cherokee birthing and motherhood presented in the previous chapter also offer opportunities for a multicultural approach to the novels. Pettigrew's female characters can be read as ambiguous and as having mixed ancestry. Both *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* are interwoven and include many of the same characters, including Oklahoma Redpaint and her daughters, Indiana, Georgia, Carolina, and Tennessee Jane. *The Way We Make Sense* explores the events that helped to separate the family, but then shifts its focus to the story of Manna, the daughter of Indiana, as she hitchhikes across the country. The

novels are rife with examples of birthing, motherhood, and multiple mother-child relationships that offer insight into Creek and Cherokee culture. The diverse representations of mother-child relationships, including generational traumas that alter the way in which later generations of StandsStraight women parent their own daughters, shows the way in which post-contact influence has significantly altered Creek birthing and mothering patterns.

Much as American Indian communities changed after contact, Indigenous communities in Australia and New Zealand also faced assimilation policies that altered traditional birthing and mothering practices. *Once Were Warriors*, by Maori author Alan Duff, represents the global struggle of Indigenous communities to connect with the traditional past while living in the contemporary present. Steeped with contemporary representations of Maori culture in New Zealand, the story centers around protagonist Beth Heke, a Maori who must cope with the suicide of her daughter, Grace. Beth must reassess her role as a mother, the ways in which her mother-child relationship with Grace was imperfect, and then decide how to redefine her role within her home and within her community after Grace's death. *Once Were Warriors* is a dark, often painful novel, but its representations of birthing, motherhood, and the mother-child relationship offer both Maori-specific and broader Indigenous concepts that shed light on the power of womanhood and relationships. Previous analyses have included discussions on child narrative patterns, sacrificial children, homing novels, postcolonial otherness, public violence, and identity, but discussions of birthing, motherhood, and a specific focus on the mother-child

relationship have not yet been addressed (Andersson 2008, Drichel 2004, Fleury n.d., Holbaek 1995, King n.d., Slater 2008, Starchurski 2001, and Young 1996).

Krupat's Literary Nationalism, Indigenism, and Cosmopolitanism

Studies of Indigenous literature should always include a discussion on the growing tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous frameworks for analysis. One way to define this literary tension is to examine scholar Arnold Krupat's three frameworks for analyzing on American Indian literatures described in *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002): nationalism, indigenism, and cosmopolitanism.

Krupat suggests that all three approaches to Native literature are useful, but the three "positions also need other positions ... for their anticolonial projects to succeed" (7).

Krupat's first approach to Native literature, literary nationalism, revolves around the concept that Indigenous authors have the right to determine what is seen, heard, and taken away from stories about their own Native Nations (Krupat 6). Thus, issues of sovereignty are inherent in their work: "For Native American nationalist *criticism*, the attempt to extend the political meanings of sovereignty to the realm of culture—to Native literary expression—has also occasionally meant the assertion of a 'sovereign' critical stance in the sense of an exclusivist or separatist stance" (Krupat 5). Within this framework, nationalists prefer that a text be analyzed through a narrow, specific lens; for American Indian communities, analysis on a tribally specific level would be appropriate (Krupat 8). For many nationalists, "the most important thing in any approach to Native literatures 'should be a study of the primary culture that produces them'" (Krupat 10). This concept is, indeed, important when examining Indigenous literature. The culturally-specific knowledge found in

The Painted Drum, for example, does not lend itself to the same analysis if it were analyzed with a Cherokee framework instead of an Ojibwe framework. For example, the significance of the tribal drum beating could be lost upon readers who are unfamiliar with the importance of the drum in Ojibwe ceremony. Likewise, the information presented on Selu in relation to *Faces in the Moon* is critical to fully understanding the mother-child relationships in the novel. From this standpoint, examining each text on a tribally specific level is beneficial to understanding the specific tribe and its presence within the novel.

Yet Krupat also comments that “Separatism, for literary studies as for all else, is hardly possible in the world today; were it possible, moreover, it would deprive itself of important opportunities” (7). Literary indigenism posits that Indigenous authors, having similar shared experiences as a broad group of individuals, produce work that can be assessed in unison (Krupat 11). With this in mind, examining the five novels within culturally-specific frameworks reveals the culturally-specific elements of birthing and mothering within each separate Indigenous community, and examining them collectively reveals similarities that can be found across multiple Indigenous cultures.

Many Indigenous cultures, for example, suggest that motherhood is a sacred obligation in which mothers are tasked with passing specific cultural and tribal knowledge to their children (Anderson 4, 7). Similarly, in numerous American Indian communities pregnant women were honored “as a conduit between spirit life and life on earth” (Anderson 43). While this may not be a universal truth, it is certainly present in the novels selected for this analysis and supports Krupat’s assertion that

interweaving a nationalist and an indigenist perspective can be beneficial to a literary analysis. The Indigenous communities discussed within this study also share the historical experiences of removal and assimilation policies, which offer insights to understanding some shifts in Indigenous mothering during the past several generations.

Birthing, motherhood, and womanhood in general were negatively impacted in Indigenous communities throughout the colonial period when “colonizers attempted not only to defeat Indian people but also to eradicate their very identity and humanity” (Andrea Smith 65). Since women were inherent in the process of raising future generations of American Indian children, passing cultural knowledge and language to these children in the process, colonizers often made attempts to undermine womanhood in Indigenous communities. Indigenous women in North America, Australia, and New Zealand share similar assimilation experiences because, in each region, women were removed from their traditional agricultural roles and were taught new domestic positions that did not adhere to their traditional culture. Whereas European women were often unharmed in violent raids and attacks, American Indian women and children were indiscriminately attacked and massacred (Mihsuah 56-57). Analyses of the novels show that the influence of colonizing forces includes violence against women, which all Indigenous women are affected by in contemporary society.

One result of colonial interference in Indigenous communities was “a steady erosion of status and rights and, at times, an overt attack on womanhood and motherhood” (Bomberry 22). In the United States, women who were meant to give

birth to the next generation of American Indian children were sterilized without their permission. In cultures where women were traditionally in charge of agriculture and farming, men were forced to take over these roles while women were expected to attend to domestic household duties. Eurocentric definitions of women's roles suggested that American Indian women were subservient to their husbands. However, in many communities American Indian women were traditionally thought of as "outspoken advocates for the men" in their communities (Bomberry 35). Moreover, not all shared indigenist experiences are negative. Women in most Indigenous communities are traditionally known for their intricate arts and crafts skills, their ability to raise and educate children, and their traditional ecological knowledge. Thus, most Indigenous women were respected in their communities. As the roles women held in their communities shifted and changed during the era of colonization, dominant Eurocentric culture began to portray American Indian mothers in a negative light.

During the Allotment Era, boarding schools encouraged the shift in gender roles and in some instances reshaped the way in which young American Indian girls viewed their mothers and their culture as a whole. This form of assimilation worked on two levels. First, young girls were separated from their mothers so that they would be unable to receive a tribal education. As scholar Carol Devens summarizes, "Mission school education, with its wrenching separation from family, had a profound impact on Native American girls and their female kin" (219). While living at a boarding school, a young girl was unable to learn the teachings of her mother and her grandmothers. In missionary boarding schools, any activities that a young woman

traditionally learned from watching her mother or helping the women in her community were replaced with Christian teachings, whereas Allotment Era boarding schools focused on preparing girls for menial labor positions in the work force. This first-generation assimilation insured that young American Indian girls were familiarized with Christianity and “proper etiquette” but next to nothing about their own Indigenous culture. On a secondary level, when these young girls later had their own children they would be unable to take on the responsibility of “instructing the child in both the practical and ritual activities” that would link them to their tribal communities because these mothers had not gained this knowledge themselves (Devens 232). This strategic interruption to traditional tribal education significantly altered the way in which American Indian mothers taught their children, and through this assimilation attempt a wealth of knowledge was often denied to young girls that were sent to boarding schools.

Removing young girls from their mothers was often effective and similar techniques were used on a much larger scale. Assimilation campaigns falling between 1880-1920 saw alienating Native people from their traditional land base as a way to separate American Indian communities from their traditional ways of life. Separating extended families, and even entire communities, through allotment became a popular policy of the United States Congress (Hoxie 157). Lands were sectioned and divided and were deeded to American Indian individuals without consideration as to where each family’s new homestead was located. In many cases, if the owner of the deed died, their heirs were skipped over and denied property if they could not be immediately located and white individuals became owners of the land (Hoxie 159).

Allotment was particularly hard on American Indian women. In many communities, women raised children cooperatively with the support of extended family members. However, the implementation of the Dawes Act divided families, distancing women from their network of female relatives.

The Relocation Era of the 1950s and 1960s altered the lifestyles of American Indian families yet again when the Federal government urged Native families to relocate to designated urban communities. Relocation separated Native communities, severing traditional kinship practices that would allow for Native women to rely upon others in their community to help raise their children. Like all Federal policies that sought to separate Native people from their homeland, Relocation also disrupted birthing rituals, which further impacted peoplehood and identity in broader ways. As Marueen Trudelle Schwarz notes, “Disruption of the vital associations people have with their matrilineal homes—sometimes their places of birth, often the locations where their umbilical cords are buried—can have grave effects” (44). The umbilical cord rituals of different American Indian communities vary, but the direct association to motherhood is important: “Burial of the cord in the earth anchors the child to the ‘belly button’ of Mother Earth and establishes a lifelong connection between a person and a place, just as the cord anchors a child to its mother while in the womb and establishes a lifelong connection between mother and child” (Schwarz 48). For families uprooted during the Relocation Era, both family networking systems and matrilineal connections could potentially be, and often were, lost.

Colonization and assimilation efforts also resulted in sexual assaults against American Indian women, a problem still prevalent in some Indigenous communities.

Harming the body of Indigenous women became a tactic because, as scholar Andrea Smith explains, “the bodies of Native women have been particularly targeted for abuse because of their capacity to give birth” and destroying that capacity threatened Indigenous communities (67). American Indian women were sexually assaulted and raped in order to assure that they would not give birth to a new generation of their people (Smith 67, Mihesuah 56-57). Issues of sexual crimes being committed against Indigenous women without consequence for the attacker are still being documented. If American Indian women were impure, then certainly they could not be good mothers. This resulted in casting American Indian mothers “in the role of the bad woman/mother who could not care for her children properly” (Bomberry 36). Hence, religious organizations stripped Indigenous women of their right to mother, removing American Indian children from their homes and placing them in orphanages, foster homes, or even adopting them to more suitable white families.

Contemporary American Indian literature does not forsake this historical context. It is too simple to conclude that “Politically, Indian groups lost local autonomy, many were confined to reservations, and all were increasingly incorporated into the larger nation-states of the United States and Canada” (Maltz and Archambault 240). This summarization of the effects of colonization is accurate, but suggests that colonization should be discussed only in the past tense, and that specific cultures were permanently lost. For American Indian peoples, especially mothers that were affected by policies forced upon them that eroded their traditional roles within their community, the effects of colonization are often ongoing. Acknowledging the historical context that pervades contemporary literature leads to a more rounded,

more culturally specific and accurate assessment of the roles of women within American Indian literature. Also, Native cultures were not, in fact, entirely lost despite many hardships.

Confining American Indian and Indigenous novels to either a nationalist or indigenist reading precludes a wider discussion on the representations of birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship in all literature. A cosmopolitan perspective suggests that individuals are citizens of the world, and similarly all literature exists as one large collection and thus can be viewed and analyzed in relation to itself (Krupat 14). It is important to note that a cosmopolitan reading of a novel does not undermine the significance of tribally specific readings, or of the issue of sovereignty: “Critics, both Native and non-Native, who work from the cosmopolitan perspective can, like the nationalists, fully acknowledge the importance of the issue of sovereignty in the political struggle of colonized peoples all over the world and at home” (Krupat 22). Hence, using multiple approaches in analyzing Indigenous literature offers differing perspectives, but Krupat suggests that each approach aligns in further exploring aspects of ongoing colonization and reveals cultural resilience.

Because the topics of birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship in relation to each of the novels have not been widely analyzed, it is occasionally necessary to include Western theories as a starting point within this project to offer a broader context for certain aspects of analysis. For example, Indigenous theories about the mother-child relationship as it relates to psychology are not yet abundant. Using Nancy Chodrow’s evaluations of the mother-child relationship and child

psychology is necessary to initiate a discussion on how the mother-child relationship is unveiled in Indigenous literature. Western theories provide a helpful starting point of analysis for discussion on the cycle of the mother-child relationship, but are by no means exhaustive when it comes to Indigenous literature.

A nationalist approach to analyzing Indigenous literature reveals culturally-specific information about each Nation/novel, allowing scholars to address issues presented in a detailed, focused manner. Meanwhile, an indigenist analysis explains why multiple Nations share similar experiences regardless of geographic location. Together, and with the incorporation of a cosmopolitan approach, Krupat's literary approaches reveal the importance of pregnancy in Indigenous society, the dualistic nature of the mother-child relationship, and the cycle of repairing communities without a connection to the traditional past through networks of mothers who still retain culturally-specific knowledge. These key issues are present individually in the novels, across novels, and are often presented in examples of literature across cultures.

Chapter Outline

This study has been divided into five chapters. The four chapters which examine birthing and motherhood in a culturally specific context reflect what Krupat would describe as a "nationalist" approach to the literature. Chapter 1 focuses on the strained relationship between Faye Travers and her mother, Elsie, in Louise Erdrich's Ojibwe novel *The Painted Drum*. The community within the novel cannot begin to heal or appropriate new Indigenous knowledge until the mother-daughter pairing of Elsie and Faye do the same. Chapter 2 examines Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the*

Moon, in a Cherokee context, and the generational struggles of several mother-daughter pairings. Wrought with grief, anger, and hatred of her mother, Lucie must return to her mother, Gracie's, deathbed in order to finally assess the ways in which her relationship with Gracie has failed. Chapter 3 is a Creek-centered analysis of Pettgrew's novels *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints*. Another example of generational struggles between mothers and their daughters, both novels suggest that each generation of Creek mothers in the text get better at protecting their daughters, even though this often leads to problems within the mother-child relationship. Chapter 4 examines Maori novel *Once Were Warriors* by Alan Duff and shows the impact of community mothering when Beth Heke, a Maori woman confronted with traditional and contemporary issues of identity and motherhood, decides to take charge of a community in desperate need of a mother figure.

While each chapter explores the novel primarily from a nationalist perspective, occasionally an indigenist or cosmopolitan perspective will add to the discussion of the work to show trends or shared experiences in Indigenous literature and communities. Chapter 5, the conclusion, will further explore the benefits of using indigenist and cosmopolitan literary approaches in analyzing the texts in this study. The conclusion attempts to answer the following question: What does this research on birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship cycle reveal to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers? There are some notable similarities within many of the novels that could broaden the discussion on Indigenous literature as a genre. However, all cultures have mothers, and issues of birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship could be expounded upon in a universal discussion. It is the

hope of the author that this study inspires further research on issues of birthing, mothering, and the mother-child relationship in Indigenous literature.

CHAPTER 1: OJIBWE BIRTHING AND MOTHERHOOD IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE PAINTED DRUM*

The representations of birthing and motherhood within the Ojibwe community of Louise Erdrich's interwoven novels depict significant culturally specific knowledge, including deep connections between sacred Ojibwe drums of the past and contemporary disconnected Ojibwe communities. *The Painted Drum* (2005) offers insights into the contemporary Ojibwe and mainstream views surrounding pregnancy, birthing, the impact of abandoning children, and the ever-changing mother-child relationship. The mother-child relationship is at the heart of Erdrich's community; it is through tradition and kinship relationships that the characters of her novels are connected. While the story in *The Painted Drum* seemingly revolves around Faye finding a tribal drum, and her journey toward finding a resolution with her mother Elsie, the painted drum itself is symbolic because it speaks only to children at odds with their mothers. The sacred drum does not beat for every Ojibwe individual, but it is heard by Shawnee after she and her siblings have been abandoned by their mother, Ira. Representations of mothering within *The Painted Drum* complicate contemporary readings of Ojibwe family relationships because of the way in which generational love and conflict hamper the mother-child relationship and the ways in which these personal traumas branch out and affect foundations of the fictitious Ojibwe community Erdrich creates in her novel.

Ojibwe (also known as Ojibwa, Chippewa, Anishinaabe, or Anishnabeg) views on birthing and motherhood are strongly rooted in traditional creation stories. Notably, Ojibwe creation stories posit that the first humans were brought into existence by a female figure named Sky-Woman (Child 28-29). The twins born to

Sky-Woman were then responsible for procreating and furthering humanity through their exploits. Ojibwe women, like Sky-Woman, have the power to give life to individuals and are responsible for the care of the world around them. Because the earth herself is perceived as a woman, Aki, the ways in which Ojibwe women are expected to behave as women are directly linked to the existence of the Ojibwe society (Child 29). As Cree-Métis scholar Kim Anderson notes, creation stories are filtered through Ojibwe storytelling and “provide a code by which one could live a good life” (19). Sky-Woman is representative of the strength and responsibility that Ojibwe women inherently have. Ojibwe communities are strengthened by the immediate connection women have to Sky-Woman.

Traditionally, the makeup of Ojibwe communities revolves around the ways in which power is distributed between the genders. The roles of both women and men are respected in Ojibwe culture, and tasks that might be gender specific in mainstream society are not necessarily so for Ojibwe people. It should be noted that the meaning of “power” is strikingly different in Ojibwe culture in comparison to EuroWestern models; in Ojibwe tradition, power is distributed across gender roles in order to establish balance and is used to build up a community rather than oppress certain members (Sattler 225, 228). Much of the power that women hold is linked through matrilineal kinship patterns; women are powerful because of their connections to their children and extended families (Anderson 125). Children are considered gifts to both parents and the community and women gain more respect through their ability to mother and add more Ojibwe children to their clan. Hence, “motherlove” itself is a form of power (Hansen 137). The mothers within a clan are best able to prepare their

children to enter the Ojibwe community. Mothers are so powerful in their roles that if they failed to rear children properly the child's identity could be impacted. Women, including grandmothers, are the conveyors of an "identity and order that is so fragile they may perish in a single generation if unarticulated" (Hansen 128).

Knowledge is a form of power in Ojibwe culture and Ojibwe women gain knowledge during different stages in their lives. Learning through life stages, "the roles of daughter, sister, mother, and aunt were important mantles of responsibility" (Child 15). Traditionally, womanhood was a process during which women emulated the behavior found in oral traditions, often using Sky-Woman as the preeminent example of strength and womanhood. Women grew stronger in their authoritative positions as they grew older because of the information and knowledge that they had gained through their life experience (Child xxvi). During colonization, the power structure of Ojibwe society shifted. EuroWestern hierarchies began placing men in positions of power that altered the ways in which women and men interacted within Ojibwe society. While in traditional Ojibwe society, "women were often positioned as political, social, and economic intermediaries," after the initial wave of European colonization, Ojibwe women's traditional roles of power within their communities were significantly lessened (Child xv). This did not, however, mean that Ojibwe culture was entirely obliterated by EuroWestern ideology.

Ojibwe women maintained a fair amount of independence from men, and even after women were married they did not become subjects of their husbands, but maintained their own agency and could move about freely in the community (Child 15). Women were not beholden to their husbands, but they were expected to care for

the children of their union. As an Elder figure in *The Painted Drum* states, there were times “when the entire force of a woman’s existence was focused on keeping her children alive” (136). Traditional views on pregnancy and birthing in Ojibwe culture contrasted with Christian principles that early missionaries brought into Ojibwe communities. Missionaries expected young women to remain chaste until marriage; Ojibwe culture traditionally thought of abstinence as a negative characteristic. As noted by Ruth Landes in the 1930s, Ojibwe women often taught their daughters that to reject the advances of men was to be disrespectful to the natural order of procreation and “Abstinence is considered a negative attitude of insulting indifference” (62). Most Ojibwe women were free to choose their own sexual partners and sex itself was not a taboo subject. Once pregnant, Ojibwe women then typically engaged in a system of specific practices as they carried their children to term. These practices ranged from dietary changes such as avoiding, eating, and handling meat (because meat and blood are associated with death), to planting crops because her own fertility would pass to the seeds she planted. Women are considered extremely powerful during their pregnancies because they are, like Sky-Woman, apparently creating life from nothing.

Contemporary Ojibwe womanhood and motherhood patterns are diverse due to the influences of colonization. Some Ojibwe women still live their lives using a traditional framework while others have limited connections to their Ojibwe culture. In still other cases, Ojibwe women have no connection to the traditional Ojibwe framework of womanhood and mothering. Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe readers alike will find examples of Ojibwe community values, identity, and culture in Louise Erdrich’s

novels. Regardless of a reader's background, some information on Ojibwe culture will enhance the reading of the novel.

The mother-daughter relationship between Elsie and Faye within *The Painted Drum* changes, showing the ways in which children can love and resent their mothers depending on external circumstances. Erdrich's fictitious community is home to characters who follow traditional Ojibwe teachings, characters that incorporate Ojibwe and mainstream teachings, and some characters who are completely removed from Ojibwe culture. Despite which setting the children of *The Painted Drum* are raised in, most of the children initially look up to their mothers and feel safe and protected by them. However, when mothers must choose between their daughter or their male lover, the mothers within Erdrich's novels inevitably turn to the lover instead of safeguarding their relationship with their daughter. The result often ends with the child being harmed, either emotionally or physically, or in some instances both, by the mother and her lover. One example of this type of harm comes from the story of Anaquot.

Throughout the novel, community members discuss the story of a woman named Anaquot who abandons her husband and children to rear a new child with one of her lovers. The events discussed in the story took place several generations before, showing the importance of intergenerational oral tradition. Anaquot's story is more than a communal warning about proper wifely conduct. Nanapush adopts Anaquot's abandoned daughter and, at the time that *The Painted Drum* takes place, Anaquot's grandson Bernard has grown up without traditional Ojibwe teachings. Without a strong mother figure to pass on cultural and sacred knowledge to Bernard, he is

unaware of his traditional responsibilities as an Ojibwe man and community member. The story of Anaquot reinforces the values and responsibilities of contemporary Ojibwe women, while also using Anaquot's failures as a cautionary tale.

When Anaquot gives birth the pain that she felt strengthens her, even though "she'd been near death when she'd bled after the birth" (Erdrich 124). Anaquot, like many historic Ojibwe mothers, delivers her child without the help of others. Anaquot represents a "conduit" of life and has, in rearing her child with her partner, succeeded in providing the world with another Ojibwe individual (Anderson 43). This representation of birthing is somewhat ominous because of the risks Anaquot associates with her own experience. But the experiences of other Ojibwe women in the novel are similar, so much so that the character Faye Travers suggests mothers do not tell their children about the pain of childbirth because mothers "try to protect us, even when we're middle-aged" (Erdrich 273-274). In *The Painted Drum*, the pain of giving birth is also associated with strength.

The aftermath of birthing is of note in Ojibwe culture, yet is seemingly absent in *The Painted Drum*. In mainstream cultures, placenta, umbilical cords, and afterbirth are often taboo subjects not openly discussed: these items themselves are marked as bio-hazardous waste in a majority of hospitals and are disposed of accordingly. Indigenous cultures, though, often have post-birth rituals and ceremonies that must be completed to properly care for the infant. Placentas are considered by many Ojibwe communities to be remnants of a powerful life force, and as such must be "disposed of properly" in order to ensure that babies have "long, healthy, and productive lives" (Anderson 50). Rituals include the burying of placentas and

umbilical cords on sacred land or in special areas that would tie the child to its land and people (Anderson 50-51). While there are variations from community to community involving these rituals and what is done with post-birth body products, treating these as objects of power and discussing them does not appear to be taboo in Ojibwe contexts. Erdrich's characters do not participate in any post-partum rituals for the disposal of body parts within *The Painted Drum*, yet Erdrich does touch upon post-birthing rituals in other novels.

While giving birth is an act of mothering, the act of giving birth does not in itself make a woman a mother. To be considered a mother, Ojibwe mothers must then take part in the physical duties of raising a young infant. As Nancy Chodrow notes, "Being a mother... is not only bearing a child—it is being a person who socializes and nurtures" (11). Physical acts of caring for an infant include breastfeeding, which both nourishes the child and connects the mother to her newborn physically and spiritually, creating a unique mother-child bond. In *The Painted Drum*, Ira's idealization of mother figures is reflected through his assertion that, "Kids, they don't care. They think you're beautiful anyway, no matter what" (Erdrich 199). In Ira's idealization of the mother figure, the unique bond between mother-child is one in which the child, like Ira, idolizes the mother and looks to her for support.

Part of a mother's support is helping frame a child's identity. Faye is often proud that others view her mother as beautiful because she associates her own identity with her mother's identity. She reflects upon her own relationship with her mother and comes to the following understanding: "All I have is other people's lives. What I do belongs to them and to my mother—her business, her legacy, her blood"

(Erdrich 44). This understanding is one based in part on historical family structures in Ojibwe communities. Mothers often had children so that their daughters could help them with daily chores, and in this way children offered a form of assistance to mothers (Landes 17). Faye demonstrates this principle in that she has taken on a position within her mother's business.

The way in which individuals outside of the mother-child relationship view a mother is also very telling. Chook is an ambiguous mother-figure because there are polarized viewpoints depicting her mothering. While her own children have one view of the way in which she mothers, her neighbor Bernard's account of Chook's mothering is strikingly different. Bernard is not mothered by Chook, and therefore may not have the same first-hand experience her children do of her abilities as a mother, but Erdrich's depiction shows that the mother can be easily compartmentalized by people who are either insiders or outsiders in a relationship. Bernard suggests:

. . . in spite of everything . . . Chook is a good mother. Her irritating requests and desperations end up benefiting her children and the grandchildren she is raising –the oldest two grown sons, Morris and John, and the two much younger, a boy and a girl, who, unlike Chook, are always well dressed and with whom she is strict. From being around them I know they get good grades, and are not allowed to drink soda pop or watch too much television or ride around on other kids' ATVs without a helmet. Plus she is kind of hysterical about seat belts, which, really, a mother should be. (Erdrich 98)

Bernard does more than merely state that Chook is a good mother. He provides several examples of ways in which Chook cares for and protects her children. Her concerns are for the daily safety of her children. Chook's concerns for physical safety are based on a mother's fear of unforeseen accidents. Through being "hysterical about seat belts" Chook is protecting her children from the unknown (Erdrich 98).

Bernard's views of Chook as a mother are notable because of Bernard's own lack of motherly attention within his own life, which is later reflected through his connection to the Ojibwe drum. The story of Anaquot is told throughout the community because Anaquot is used as an example of an adulterous wife and neglectful mother. Anaquot's children suffer from her decisions and, because she does not seem to take them into account when making her familial decisions, are both literally and metaphorically abandoned by her. The lack of "ideal" mothers in Bernard's family is depicted through Bernard's lack of knowledge about tribal traditions, traditions that Chook will later convey when the community gathers to discuss the sacred painted drum. In some sense, Bernard has no positive mother figures for comparison, but his reflection suggests that even without other examples he is still able to articulate the positive aspects of mothering responsibilities that Chook has accepted. For the community, both Chook and the Ojibwe drum are a physical representation of cultural conveyance because both bring sacred knowledge to individuals without connections to their Ojibwe identity. Individuals without a strong connection to their mothers are able to hear the drum, even if they don't understand what to do after hearing the rhythms. It is through Chook that Bernard and

other community members learn traditional sacred knowledge because Chook's relationship with her mother has allowed her to retain these historic connections.

Chook is also concerned for the health of the children she is raising. By keeping the children away from soda pop she protects them from diabetes, obesity, dental decay, and other illnesses, contemporary concerns that affect American Indian populations as well as the general population. Chook's attention to these practical concerns reveals her to be a mother who is able to care for her children on more than one level of parenting. Not only does the mother need to give birth to the child, but she must also protect them mentally as well as physically. Chook's strictness and attention to her children's academic endeavors encourages them to earn good grades because she keeps them on task. Chook is not only responsible for her children, but also for her grandchildren. Chook carries out her responsibilities of being a mother to her children but is aware that her grandchildren do not have strong, maternal or paternal role models in their lives. Thus, Chook decides to take on a second role as mother and care for her grandchildren. Chook is willing to put the lives of her children and grandchildren before her own. Bernard's character informs the reader that the children Chook cares for are always dressed better than Chook herself because she makes those sacrifices for the children (Erdrich 98).

Within *The Painted Drum*, Anquot's story provides an example of a woman who gives birth to a child, but fails as a mother. Even though Anquot loves the baby that she bears, she neglects to care for the child. Instead, her young daughter must wake "in the night to clean the baby and nudge it to her mother's breast" (Erdrich 108). Anquot's young daughter takes on the role of nurturer and places herself in a

situation similar to Chook's position. Anaquot's daughter has become a surrogate mother, forsaking her own childhood.

The inclusion of breastfeeding in *The Painted Drum* is another example of how motherhood is represented in Louise Erdrich's novels. Breastfeeding is a form of physical mothering in which a mother is expected to do more than provide her child with nourishment. As shown through Anaquot's daughter, *The Painted Drum* suggests that mothers are expected to bond with their child through many acts of physical mothering, including breastfeeding. Because Anaquot's daughter cares for the infant she is more connected to the child and pays attention to its needs and wants. This makes Anaquot's daughter more of a mother than Anaquot herself. Anaquot's example negates the misconception that "physiology explains women's child-care responsibilities" (Chodrow 88). Physiological theories support the belief that a woman must physically mother because it is part of their natural function—that since she has given birth to the infant she must then be the one responsible for caring for the babe (Chodrow 89). Chodrow herself argues against the rational that physiology is responsible for "women's current mothering role and capacities" (89). Indigenous novels similarly tend to negate this assumption. In Anaquot's case, for example, physiology does not impart upon her the desire to breastfeed her child, suggesting that mothering is more than a biological imperative, but involves an emotional aspect that can vary widely among women.

The mother-child relationship is one experienced by most people, despite variances within individual family units. However, psychologists suggest that there is a universal similarity for most mother-child pairs, likening to what Krupat would

define as “cosmopolitanism.” The cosmopolitan theory suggests that, from the beginning of the relationship, the child looks up to and relies upon the mother. As Nancy Chodrow elaborates:

The infant’s mental and physical existence depends on its mother and the infant comes to feel that is does. It experiences a sense of oneness with her and develops a self only by convincing itself that it is in fact a separate being from her. She is the person whom it loves with egoistic primary love and to whom it becomes attached. She is the person who first imposes on it the demands of reality. Internally she is also important. The infant comes to define itself as a person through its relationship to her, by internalizing the most important aspects of their relationship. Its stance toward itself and the world—its emotions, its quality of self-love (narcissism), or self-hate (depression)—all derive in the first instance from this earliest relationship. (78)

However, the child itself grows into a separate entity and this creates a tension on the mother-child relationship. Even though the child has come to depend upon the mother, in later years the child requires independence. At this point, “Children wish to remain one with their mother, and expect that she will never have different interests from them; yet they define development in terms of growing away from her” (Chodrow 82). The mother-daughter bond is not guaranteed to unfold the same way in each familial pairing, but it is not uncommon for the tension between a mother and her daughter to divide them, thus severing the mother-child bond. In Chodrow’s discussion of the mother-child relationship, she suggests:

Mothers feel ambivalent towards their daughters, and react to their daughters' ambivalence toward them. They desire both to keep their daughters close and to push them into adulthood. This ambivalence in turn creates more anxiety in their daughters and provokes attempts by these daughters to break away. (Chodrow 135)

In cases where intergenerational trauma exists, a motherless woman may find herself at odds with parenting her own children because she lacks a positive example from her own life. Chodrow's assertion may be impacted by culture, but to date there are limited studies, and so far there are no studies that apply this theory to Indigenous culture.

In *The Painted Drum*, The character, Faye Travers, directs attention to the ways in which mothers often become negative figures because she has felt abandoned, both emotionally and physically, by her mother, Elsie. The following passage succinctly expresses the heart of the rift in the mother-child relationship that occurs later in the Faye's life:

It is difficult for a woman to admit that she gets along with her own mother – somehow it seems a form of betrayal, at least, it used to among other women in my generation. To join the company of women, to be adults, we go through a period of proudly boasting of having survived our own mother's indifference, anger, overpowering love, the burden of her pain, her tendency to drink or teetotal, her warmth or coldness, praise or criticism, sexual confusions or embarrassing clarity. It isn't enough that she sweat, labored, bore her daughters howling or under total anesthesia or both. No. She must be

responsible for our psychic weaknesses the rest of her life. It is all right to feel kinship with your father, to forgive. We all know that. But your mother is held to a standard so exacting that it has no principles. She simply must be to blame. (Erdrich 20)

Despite the sarcastic tone in which Erdrich's passage is written, Faye nonetheless directs attention towards a child's view of a flawed mother-figure. As Faye notes, the mother, in general for many women, is to blame for all of the faults of the child. Her mothering is neglected and the child then comes to believe that they have "survived" her upbringing. But if Faye's observations about the mother-child relationship are to be taken as a universal fact, it would help to have specific examples of areas in which the mother has failed. What types of betrayal has Elsie committed as a mother that severed her bond with Faye? What acts or in what ways has she neglected Faye? And, if Anaquot is the community's foremost example of neglectful mothering, how do the perceived faults of Elsie's mothering epitomize or constitute intergenerational trauma?

Faye feels a fracture in the relationship she shares with her mother when it becomes obvious that her mother does not have Faye's best interests at heart. When her father pits mother and daughter against one another in fights for his attention, Faye feels betrayed because her mother does not support her (Erdrich 81-83). This type of mothering is in opposition to the idealized traditional Ojibwe mothering styles, which expect women to place the needs of their children above their husband's needs. Faye's sense of abandonment may seem slight to an outside reader, but for Faye the grievance is monumental—so monumental, she remembers the incidents

years later. More significantly, children within Erdrich's novels, like Shawnee, are in constant fear of abandonment, which is not unfounded based upon the many children within the fictitious Ojibwe community that have actually been abandoned (Hansen 121, 123-130).

The Painted Drum provides several examples in which mothers abandon their children. Abandonment has, according to Ruth Landes, always been a consideration and worry that some Ojibwe children faced. Landes states that "stress situations" for Ojibwe children included the prospect of "orphanhood, neglect by parents, jealousy of a step-mother, resentment of a step-father, [and] starvation" (6). As some traditional stories note, mothers and daughters could often find themselves at odds in Ojibwe communities. When the dispute between a mother and daughter went unresolved, the result could include the abandonment of the child by the mother who would force the child out of the home (Landes 33). The issue of fathers abandoning their children goes back to colonization, during which time foreign fur traders would often wed and have children with Ojibwe women, then return to their countries of origin, leaving behind Native wives and children (Child 45). Even though it was common for men to abandon their children, including the men who impregnate Sky-Woman in oral stories, it remained less common for women to abandon their children. Several children are abandoned in *The Painted Drum*, and through this abandonment they view their mothers as figures that cannot be trusted.

Mothers abandoning their children is not exclusively a contemporary problem, yet it becomes more prevalent within *The Painted Drum* after Anaquot sets the example. Anaquot's decisions affect several generations within her Ojibwe family.

Because Anaquot's surviving children grow up without her, they have no example of how a healthy mother-child relationship works. Erdrich presents a webbed connection, suggesting that if one mother abandons her child then a domino effect occurs with succeeding generations forced, without guidelines, to forge a mother-child and child-culture relationship. It is implied that without a mother-figure, both the child and the child's context for acquiring cultural knowledge is harmed or undermined. In some cases, cultural knowledge may be lost if multiple generations are not taught traditional values and social expectations. Regardless of whether Ojibwe mothers willingly abandon their children, or are forced into abandonment by circumstances beyond their control, the children of these mothers must sort out their futures without motherly guidance or cultural knowledge.

Emotionally, Faye believes that her mother was always absent. Faye and her sister were not "technically abandoned," but her mother's disinterest may have been as harmful as abandonment. Ira physically abandons her children, leaving them without food. The children are so hungry they eat toothpaste. Clearly, Ira is unable to provide for her children in the Sky-Woman's model (Erdrich 191). The young Shawnee, much like Anaquot's elder daughter, is forced into the position of surrogate mother to her younger siblings. When she cannot find food for the children, she puts herself in danger by walking through a snowstorm in search of food and shelter. The actual abandonment of Shawnee and her siblings is quite different from the psychological abandonment that Faye faces. However, the emotional and psychological outcomes are similar. After nearly freezing to death because Ira was not around to care for her children, the children stare at her in a frozen state, which

symbolically reflects the frozen and fractured mother-child relationship that now exists between Ira and her children. Her children no longer view her as their mother.

Whereas Faye accepts a metaphorical distance from her mother, Shawnee puts physical distance between herself and her mother. When Ira visits Shawnee in the hospital, Shawnee demonstrates her antipathy towards her mother. Withdrawn, Shawnee does not allow her mother to touch her and reacts by pulling her hand away when Ira reaches out for her (Erdrich 330). As Erdrich writes, “It seemed to Shawnee that she had been on a long trip, that she had gone somewhere far away and her mother was left behind” (Erdrich 229). Shawnee finds the strength to abandon her mother, removing herself from the mother-child relationship before her mother can abandon her again. For Shawnee, trusting her mother is not an option.

Beneath the surface, the abandonment of the children in *The Painted Drum* strongly reflects a lack of traditional Ojibwe values, teachings, and culture. The drum chooses when it will be heard, and women that have been abandoned by their mothers are often the only ones that are able to hear the drum’s rhythm. At the beginning of *The Painted Drum*, Faye is the individual who finds the old drum and realizes that it has significant cultural ties to the Ojibwe community. Her actions and decision to save the drum from being appropriated by outside agents set the events of *The Painted Drum* in motion. She has, metaphorically and literally, heard the call of the drum. It is not a coincidence that Shawnee, on the night that she and her siblings are abandoned by their mother, also hears the sound of the drum. The sound of the drum leads Shawnee towards relative safety. The drum reaches out to these individuals because the sound of the drum is the catalyst that begins the healing process in the

mother-child relationship, but initiates healing and restoration of the traditional Ojibwe practices and ideology within a contemporary reality.

At first, it seems as if the mother-child relationship, once severed, will never be restored, but there are numerous steps that begin to repair the strain on the mother-child relationship that occur in order to mediate strains in this complex relationship. First, Erdrich suggests that all mothers have faults. Even though Shawnee views her mother as a monster, Honey reminds Shawnee, “Your mother is a human being. She has her faults, as do all of us” (Erdrich 238). Honey is not making excuses for Ira’s neglect, but issuing a reminder that is meant to serve as the start the process of healing and forgiveness. While Shawnee does not forgive her mother, the option was still presented to her. Shawnee, however, does realize that mothers are fallible. Children tend to view their mothers as “perfect,” regardless of whether or not the mother herself has ever claimed perfection (Ruddick 31). In fact, the “psychoanalytic feminists trace women’s desire to care for children to a predominantly ‘positive’ (albeit often personally costly) feminine identity that is forged in a daughter’s struggle to maintain a differentiated connection to her mother” (Ruddick 31). In order to build a new foundation, mother and child must forgive. After realizing that the mother is a human being, the child can then reassess the actions of the mother.

Ira did indeed abandon her children, and if the incident was perceived entirely from Shawnee’s perspective, Ira is without question a mother that has failed her children in many ways. As Sara Ruddick suggests, “To be a ‘mother’ means to ‘see’ children as demanding protection, nurturance, and training and then commit oneself to the work of trying to meet these demands” (33). Following Sky-Woman’s example,

a mother should care for her children first in order to nurture them into Ojibwe society (Child 29). From Shawnee's perspective, Ira has failed to be an effective mother because she has put her children in further danger by leaving them unsupervised. However, there is a second interpretation. It is true that Ira left her children in order to go to a bar in town, but her actions are not wholly selfish. Ira leaves her children in order to find a way to provide the family with food, even if that means selling her body to a stranger (Erdrich 203). From Ira's perspective, she had no choice but to leave her children unattended in order to search for food to feed them. While Ira's actions are inevitably questionable, her intent is not as malicious as Shawnee first believes. However, it is during this time that the drum calls to the children, stepping in and acting as a protective figure when Ira must be absent. Prior to Shawnee's venture into the snow with her siblings, the painted drum has emerged as a community figure, bringing individuals together to discuss their culture and tradition.

Faye cannot confront her mother, Elsie, and discuss how she felt when her mother abandoned her until many years later when she Elsie's caretaker. When Faye is finally able to ask Elsie where she was on the day that Faye's sister died, old resentments resurface and, for the first time, are addressed by the mother and daughter (Erdrich 263-264). Faye and Elsie have both experienced Faye's sister's death differently, and only after they confront Faye's sister's death, is their relationship reborn. For the first time, Faye sees how her mother demonstrates her love through small actions. For example, Elsie remembers that Faye does not like the heel of bread, so she takes the heel for herself (Erdrich 69). Even though Faye

notices the gesture, she still resents her mother at this point and does not recognize the small demonstration of love. It is not until later when she confronts Elsie that she begins to realize her mother has always cared for her.

Faye's ability to finally forgive her mother is only one step in the family's healing process, as Elsie must also come to terms with herself and her capabilities as a mother. Though they are separated by generations, Elsie and Anaquot must both address their roles as mothers. Anaquot was by no means a "perfect" mother to any of her children, but she eventually came to the realization "that she had not always been such a bad mother to her older daughter" (Erdrich 231). Anaquot understands that she has failed to raise her second infant, but notes that many of the strengths in character that her older daughter has are inherent, or perhaps come from some of Anaquot's teachings. This acceptance of both her successes and failings as a mother gives Anaquot new insight into her own mother-child relationship. Ira also reflects upon her experiences as a mother and decides that one mistake does not define her as a mother or as a human being (Erdrich 220, 252-253). When both the child and the mother come to an understanding that "perfect" mothers do not exist, they can begin to rebuild the complex mother-child relationship.

Ojibwe women are, however, more than mothers. It is of note that, traditionally, elder Ojibwe women were highly respected for the knowledge they gained through life experiences (Child xxvi). Elder Ojibwe women typically had vast stores of knowledge that they would pass on to upcoming generations within the community. In *The Painted Drum*, Chook embodies this traditional community figurehead and she provides the community with the cultural knowledge necessary

for understanding the sacred drum that has been repatriated to them. In the past there may have been multiple elder women available for consultation about cultural knowledge, but the contemporary community illustrated in the novel must rely upon just one woman. The lack of multiple community elder figures stems from a pattern of disruptions to the relationships between mothers and their children within the community. Without strong, knowledgeable mother figures, the identity of the individuals and the community at large is affected. As Hansen suggests, traditional concepts can “perish in a single generation if unarticulated” between mother and child (128).

Bernard is an example of an Ojibwe individual living without traditional knowledge because his parents did not pass specific cultural details to him. In this example, Chook steps in and becomes a type of “other” or “surrogate” mother to Bernard. Even though she is busy raising her grandchildren, she sees the need to educate Bernard about his identity in an Ojibwe context. Chook fulfills the role of wise, elder woman and surrogate mother by nurturing both Bernard and her grandchildren, so they, too will be able to pass it on in turn. Within *The Painted Drum*, the traditional past and the contemporary present are connected through the sacred drum, but also by Chook as a mother figure—a role of the utmost importance in the past, but one that is very much present in the contemporary.

The Painted Drum shows various perspectives on pregnancy, birth, and motherhood, some of which reflect the impact of colonization more than others. Generations of Ojibwe women within the novel have used Anaquot as an example of inappropriate relationships outside of marriage and poor mothering skills. However,

contemporary generations are more forgiving of mothers, like Ira, that have faults. Erdrich suggests that mothers can make mistakes, but such mistakes can also be the result of forces outside of their control. *The Painted Drum* depicts the ways in which traditional knowledge of birthing and motherhood are still very much at the forefront of contemporary women's minds, even if these women characters are unable to live according to traditional expectations. Just as children are sometimes abandoned, similarly traditional Ojibwe practices have been abandoned as an effect of colonization, but *The Painted Drum* posits that both the values of Ojibwe mothering practices and the foundations of Ojibwe culture can be rebuilt using knowledge from the traditional past adjusted for a contemporary reality.

CHAPTER 2: CHEROKEE BIRTHING AND MOTHERHOOD IN BETTY LOUISE BELL'S *FACES IN THE MOON*

As Arnold Krupat suggests, examinations of texts should begin on a specific tribal level that takes into account historical context as well as contemporary issues. Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* reveals that Cherokee tribal views of birthing and motherhood manifest themselves in both creation stories and within contemporary literature. By incorporating traditional knowledge and stories, contemporary fiction reaffirms Cherokee values and offers notable examples of the expectations for raising children in Cherokee society. Cherokee mothers remain the bearers of Cherokee culture and usually have the responsibility of passing their heritage to their children. Cherokee-specific analysis also reveals the way in which contemporary mother-child relationships find their foundations in oral narratives about Selu, the first Cherokee woman and well-known mother figure within Cherokee cosmology. Despite the ways in which Cherokee views of birthing and motherhood have adapted due to colonization and assimilation efforts, traditional tribal knowledge still influences contemporary representations of birthing and motherhood in Bell's work. *Faces in the Moon* offers insight into traditional birthing and mothering patterns and demonstrates that these patterns have not been abandoned and are still at the forefront of Cherokee culture even though colonization has altered the agency of Cherokee women.

It would be impossible to fully appreciate Cherokee birthing and motherhood in *Faces in the Moon* without understanding to some degree the Cherokee societal and cultural doctrines. Traditionally, "women enjoyed high economic, social, and political status" in several American Indian societies, including the Cherokee

(McGowan 53). The traditional status of Cherokee women was prominent because of the lack of an enforced hierarchy. Cherokee women were not subservient to men because gendered tasks and sub-societies ensured that a woman controlled her own body and men, likewise, had their own gendered obligations (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 13). Unlike European structures that usually placed men in higher positions of power, Cherokee culture is constructed around the central need for balance. Cherokee society revolves around the concept of dualism, which divides contrasting aspects of life into two separate categories. Each aspect is not entirely separate from the other, however; instead, categories such as “woman” and “man” also exist in a partnership that fosters balance within an Indigenous community. Cherokee men and women completed their gendered tasks separately, but contributed equally to household duties. Cherokee women were the living representation of agriculture and Cherokee men were the embodiment of hunting. Without a balance of both land husbandry and hunting, the Cherokee community could not be sustained. Distribution of authority allowed for Cherokee communities to be evenly balanced so that neither gender had more authority or power than the other (Sattler 225).

The story of Selu, also known as the Corn Mother, is the basis for Cherokee views on motherhood. Cherokee society “constructed gender and created community based on the principles embodied in their account of Kanati and Selu,” with special attention to the roles of women (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 15). Selu provided the Cherokee with corn, and Cherokee women were given the role of propagating this important food source and allocating the harvest. Because corn was the basis of the diet for all Cherokee people, the women were seen as mothers not only of their own

children, but of all the children and community members. They, like Selu, were providers worthy of respect. Cherokee women view Selu as the embodiment of maternal instinct and often attempt to raise children in a manner that honors the concepts embodied in Selu. In Cherokee cosmology, mothering is perceived as a sacred obligation and is a role that takes precedent over being a wife (McGowan 55). Motherhood existed as “a multidirectional web that spread out across a town and a community” (Smith 11). Therefore, mothers became part of a “broad social involvement” (Smith 11). Since Cherokee women worked agricultural fields together they often networked as mothers. Women cared not only for their own children, but also for the children of the community at large. Raising children in a network allowed for more than one woman to be responsible for the type of information and teaching that her child needed. Teaching itself was a mother’s responsibility as women needed to pass tribal knowledge to the next generation (Smith 50, 61).

As storyteller Marilou Awiakta shows in her retellings of traditional stories about Selu, the balance of gender roles was not strictly linked to the governance of Cherokee communities. The notion of balance is ascribed to the very genesis of Cherokee people and is thus an active part of Cherokee society. According to Awiakta’s assessment of the Cherokee compass-story, “genders must cooperate and get along, for themselves, for the sake of the community and the environment” (23). Incorporating oral stories about Cherokee creation into the community was not only a way to honor Selu and Kanati, the first Cherokee man, but to keep examples of the sacred ways of living in the minds of community members, thus establishing a balance between Cherokee origins and contemporary lifestyles. Keeping oral

traditions alive within contemporary literature positively depicts Cherokee identity and offers a connection to the sacred past for modern readers.

Since balance was desired and gendered hierarchies were not established in Cherokee communities, Cherokee women have always been “powerful in the roles that they play in their own cultures” (Kidwell 55). As in Ojibwe culture, for Cherokees the term “power” held meanings beyond the realm of dominance and authority. Cherokee women, for example, had authority in terms of their ability to fulfill multiple roles within their society, including their “intimate” connection to “aspects of the culture” (Sattler 216). Power was distributed among both men and women, and levels of influence varied. However, in Cherokee society, sovereignty was not intended to benefit individuals, but for the betterment of the community as a whole. For example, by dividing shares of agricultural crops, Cherokee women had the power to decide which individuals in the community had access to food stores and how much each would receive. In this understanding of power, Cherokee women were cultural purveyors not only of the agricultural harvest, but were also responsible for teaching agricultural practices to future generations.

Children were viewed as a gift to each family but also valued as clan members and community members (McGowan 56). Cherokee children were included in daily activities and Cherokee mothers often took their young children with them as they completed tasks. Mothers were able to manage groups of children while working, during which time they would initiate children in various gender specific tasks. Young girls, for example, would learn agricultural techniques they would need in

later life. With Selu's guidelines as community values taught to young women, future mothers had a foundation upon which to raise their own children.

Identity for Cherokee women is not solely dependent upon a woman's ability to conceive children, but it certainly was a source of additional power and prestige within Cherokee society (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 55). Since Cherokee women did not have what colonizers identified as "economic resources and military might on which political power in the Anglo-American system rested" outsiders often saw them as powerless, overworked, and little more than bearers of children (Perdue, *Trail of Tears* 293). However, American Indian women often held significant power that went unrecognized by European colonizers. Cherokee women, in addition to their role as mothers of the community, also had the ability to participate in the Cherokee political system (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 53). War Women, who spoke on behalf of the Cherokee when discussing matters of war, "also had the power to save lives" by granting pardons to captives of war (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 53). These positions of political power were ignored by colonizing forces. During the colonization process, Cherokee women struggled to keep their cultural identity when white society began dictating women's roles of Indigenous populations.

Faces in the Moon traces the story of three generations of Cherokee women and includes several representations of pregnancy and birthing. In each case, the connection that the mother and child share during pregnancy is a physical reality, but the degree to which the mother and child share a spiritual connection varies in each specific circumstance. Biologically, the unborn child gains nourishment from her mother's womb. Since the unborn child is physically connected to its mother, it is

also able to hear her thoughts and words on a more spiritual level of existence. In the novel, the unborn child speaks even before being born, stating, “Already I know I was born here, but it will not give birth to me. I listen to my mother and plan where and how I will be born” (Bell 73-74). The ability of the unborn child to speak for itself is significant for several different reasons. First, the child does not appear to be solely dependent upon the mother figure. Even though the mother is providing nourishment and protection for the child, the child is a rational, competent being that is already beginning to make her own decisions.

The child’s independence suggests that while the child needs the mother in order to survive, the child is still inherently its own person. This way of thinking is opposite of mainstream psychoanalytic theory that suggests the mother must “guide her child’s separation from her” after the child is born and has become a young adult (Chodrow 83). In this system, the child must learn to become independent over time because the child is born entirely dependent upon its mother. But the unborn child in *Faces in the Moon* already shows her ability to be independent without having to be conditioned by the mother at a later time. In traditional Cherokee culture, and continued by some Cherokee women today, “women coaxed infants out with both loving and hollow threats” (Smith 12). Within this traditional practice, the child decides when and where she will be born. On a spiritual level, this independence can be linked to the child’s inherent individuality. The will of the mother does not seem to be a consideration for the child. In this case, the unborn child holds more will power than the mother in terms of birthing.

The ease of giving birth as discussed in *Faces in the Moon* suggests that for Cherokee women the act should not bring about unnecessary anxiety for the mother. Protagonist Lucie's discussion of her mother is straightforward and direct. The fact that her mother "had made love and given birth" is little more than a footnote in her mother's life (Bell 32). At first, this passage may be overlooked. However, this depicts the lack of Lucie's maternal instinct or concern for having, raising, or even being a mother. For Lucie, giving birth is of far less concern than her focus on her love and social life. Yet the passage also confirms, in a broader context, early European reports that Cherokee women gave birth and then recovered quickly, returning to their daily lives and tasks without complaint (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 33). There are possible explanations for this, including the fact the Cherokee women were more likely to engage in demanding acts of physical labor, making them stronger and more resilient than their White counterparts of the time. Whereas Cherokee women were working agricultural fields, for example, white mothers "enjoyed engaging in debates about the books they read with friends" and read to their children (Smith 113). The infant itself was expected to enter the world without help from others. According to Theda Perdue, "During delivery, a woman stood, knelt, or sat, but she never gave birth lying down. Usually no one bothered to catch the baby, who simply fell on leaves placed beneath the mother" (*Cherokee Women* 32). The intent of this process was not to harm the infant, but rather to ensure that few others touched the baby during the birthing process, thus keeping the act of birthing between the mother and infant as much as possible. In order to further nurture this relationship, "A woman remained apart from her family for seven days following

delivery; then she bathed, put on clean clothes, and returned home” (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 34).

Perhaps the ease of birthing is related, like other aspects of mothering, to the story of Selu and the creation of Cherokee people. According to the Cherokee stories about Selu’s birth, Selu herself was birthed from a corn stalk in order to become a companion to Kanati. When Selu was born, she came from the “top of the corn stalk . . . strong, ripe, tender. And singing,” which is very telling of the way in which Cherokee mothers traditionally viewed birthing (Awiakta 25). This representation does not depict pain, but rather a celebration. If the corn stalk that gave birth of Selu felt the pain of birth, this pain is not the focus of the oral story. Selu’s birth is not attended by other individuals. Instead, the corn is Selu’s mother and gives birth to her without complaint or help from others, once again shifting the focus of Selu’s birth away from any physical pain and instead suggesting the strength Cherokee women have during the childbearing process. Selu’s song when she enters the world is a way of introducing herself into the world (Awiakta 25). The story of Selu’s birth is significant because pain and anxiety are not centralized, as the focus is instead on the celebration of bringing a new life into the world. Cherokee mothers saw motherhood as part of their “identity that allocated power to a network of women and extended from their wombs to their crops to their communities” (Smith 26).

In *Faces in the Moon*, Gracie lives in an abusive relationship. Based on the rise of domestic violence that persisted after colonization and the Cherokee removal from states east of the Mississippi, Gracie’s relationship reflects a reality numerous Cherokee women face today. Similarly, colonization and the westernization of

birthing practices shifted views of birthing for Cherokee women. This is not to say that births were never complicated and women never felt pain, but the modern trauma of forced sterilization and being forced to lie down to give birth in westernized hospitals reflects a psychological pain still experienced by Cherokee women today (Perdue, *Trail of Tears*, 278, 290).

With a Cherokee network of mothers in place, single parenthood was not a distressing event for Cherokee mothers. If a mother divorced or was widowed she knew that the community would help in the rearing of the child. The age when a mother became pregnant was also of less consequence because women fulfilled their own life cycles at their own pace. In *Faces in the Moon*, though, “teenage pregnancy” is viewed in a negative light (Bell 49). Becoming pregnant at an early age has different circumstances in contemporary America, and also has a different stigma attached to it. As depicted in *Faces in the Moon*, teenage pregnancy for contemporary Cherokee women, due to the ways in which this issue is presented in mainstream society, is a symbol of failure on the part of a young woman due to the struggles the mother and child will face. Should a young woman become pregnant, especially without a strong support system in her life, she is less likely to thrive academically or economically. Thus, single-parents are more likely to struggle financially while attempting to raise a child without the support systems found in traditional Cherokee society. *Faces in the Moon* does not make an argument for teenage pregnancy, but rather points out that the Cherokee clan system that traditionally supported young mothers is no longer thriving in contemporary society. Instead, colonization has

destroyed the systems that would have provided Gracie with more support in raising Lucie.

Motherhood also underwent a process of colonization in Cherokee communities. Cherokee mothers were known for attending to their children's needs without giving children unwarranted attention, yet kept children close to them, while European cultures stressed the importance of not doting upon children and allowing them to be educated away from the family (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 161). Cherokee mothers, however, did not necessarily begin reflecting the ideologies of EuroWestern culture. *Faces in the Moon* shows examples of three types of mothers: neglectful mothers (Lucie), mother figures that are very attentive to the needs of their children (Aunt Lizzie), and mothers that fall into gray areas in between (Helen). Cherokee women prided themselves on their mothering abilities and "Because white women could not give birth to Cherokee children or afford their children clan protection, their motherhood could not have the same significance as that of Cherokee women" (Smith 42). Despite this, the colonization process altered familial relationships. While Cherokee women were influenced by white, often Christian women in regards to their mothering techniques and domestic responsibilities, Cherokee men were also uprooted from their traditional gendered tasks. Domestic violence became a familial issue that women had to endure alongside the culture shock of being removed from their traditional homelands and community systems they experienced (Perdue, *Trail of Tears* 290). Such issues reshaped the roles of Cherokee women, and thus often altered the ways Cherokee women give birth and mother.

This is telling in the representation of motherhood presented in *Faces in the Moon* because passages about motherhood reflect the intertwining of traditional Cherokee community and contemporary Cherokee society and demonstrates the influence of EuroWestern culture and society on Cherokee communities, although some semblance of the traditional networks is still present in *Faces in the Moon*. Lucie recalls her upbringing in a conflicted manner, reflecting that she “was raised on the voices of women. Indian women. The kitchen table was first a place of remembering, a place where women came and drew their lives from each other” (Bell 4). While marriages where both partners were Cherokee was common, it is not peculiar that Lucie’s father is visibly absent from the contemporary homestead (Sattler 227). Historically, father figures could leave the home for extended periods of time and mothers would work together to balance household duties and in some cases, young children were asked to help. As a result of colonization, the number of single-parent households grew due to issues of displacement, alcoholism, and other economic factors.

In *Faces in the Moon*, during the early stages of childhood, Lucie views her mother in somewhat idealistic terms. Physically, a photograph portrays a young woman that is visibly striking. The woman holds an infant Lucie in her arms and is the portrait of a happy new mother (Bell 8). In later years this is not a reality that Lucie identifies with because Lucie is never able to connect with her mother, Gracie, as a loving figure. Lucie gives her mother her undivided attention and respect out of obligation, but there is no shared mother-child bond that allows Gracie to reciprocate affection towards Lucie (Bell 58). For Lucie, effectively listening to the storytelling

in her home consists of listening to her mother and other elders without speaking. In this type of listener-speaker relationship Lucie is able to glean information without being disrespectful by interrupting. She is able to learn from others and retains stories for later use. In this example, the storytelling process that Lucie is present for also includes the transmission of important cultural knowledge and life-lessons even though she was never directly invited to participate in the conversations.

Nonetheless, mothers often undergo a cycle of mothering in which all mothers are first revered by their female children, thought of as infallible, but inevitably make a decision that separates the mother from the daughter (Chodrow 88-89, 135). As presented in *Faces in the Moon*, some mothers, like Helen, at first have the ability to protect their children from the dangers of the world and physical harm of others but then find themselves in situations where they fail to protect their children. Within this cycle, the mother reaches a point where she must choose between her relationship with her daughter or a relationship with a male lover. Selecting her own needs over those of her daughter, Gracie chooses the male lover and severs her bond with her daughter. Within *Faces in the Moon* it is significant that Lucie is then harmed by the male lover that the Gracie selects as her predominant relationship. As generally depicted in *Faces in the Moon*, through various mother-daughter relationships, the mother's behavior is first ambiguous and it is hard for the child to understand if their mother is slowly abandoning the mother-child relationship for her male lover. However, forms of mothering are also examples of mothers selecting relationships. Gracie's mother, Helen, "made a home for them in an abandoned car" and "left Gracie in the back seat to look after the baby, Rozella, while she walked into town

and looked for work” (Bell 12). Helen, despite facing economic hardships, is still able to provide her children with a home but the novel does not offer insight regarding any significant emotional support Helen provides to her children. As a whole, Gracie shapes her own life around her childhood experiences. Though Helen has attempted to provide for Gracie, she has failed her in many other aspects of mothering and has become an example of a lifestyle that Gracie will, to an extent, replicate when she becomes a mother to Lucie.

Regardless, Lucie is embarrassed by her mother’s actions. Gracie does her best to provide for Lucie by taking a job at the local school cafeteria, which is a great embarrassment to Lucie (Bell 49). When she becomes embarrassed by her mother Lucie invents a story that her biological mother had to put her up for adoption, and Gracie is her adopted parent. This case of embarrassment may say more about how Lucie deals with societal pressures than Gracie, but this instance of embarrassment further shows the downward spiral in Lucie and Gracie’s relationship as daughter and mother. When Gracie attends Lucie’s wedding, Lucie is embarrassed by Gracie’s appearance and she watches as “three hundred pounds of turquoise, with gloves, tries to find the front door of my in-laws’ North Shore home” (Bell 50). At the wedding, Gracie’s attention is focused on the shrimp at the buffet table, which only further disappoints and embarrasses Lucie (Bell 50). When Lucie claims “It wasn’t my fault I hated her then. A child would have had more sense,” she suggests that she cannot love her mother, because her mother is a child herself (Bell 51). Even in adulthood, Lucie still feels that her mother has embarrassed her for slights that Gracie does not even know she has committed. For example, when Lucie has earned a teaching

degree and gotten a job, Lucie invites Gracie to sit-in on one of her lectures. Gracie refuses and instead hides in Lucie's office and acts as if Lucie "had lied about college" (Bell 47).

Part of the tension between Gracie and Lucie stems from Gracie's lack of motherly presence in Lucie's childhood. Gracie threatens Lucie that she will one day "leave y'all to yourself" (Bell 9). This threat shows the power that the mother believes she holds over her child. Rooted in the belief that the child needs the mother in order to survive, Gracie's threat is one that a young Lucie finds troublesome. When Lucie is abandoned she is not left to her own devices, but placed with another family member for an entire summer (Bell 153).

When Gracie does return for Lucie, it is clear that Lucie has no interest in leaving Lizzie's home. After being cared for and mothered by her Aunt Lizzie, Lucie's view of her mother changes dramatically. Whereas Lucie once saw her mother as merely her mother, she begins to see Gracie's style of mothering as a flawed. When compared to her experiences living in the country, with a woman that truly loves her and shows compassion for her, Lucie realizes that Gracie has never been a true mother-figure to her. When Lucie later reflects upon her mother's appearance as an adult, Gracie becomes "A fat sloppy woman in a muumuu with a wide tear under her left armpit and a voice that either cursed or begged its way through life" (Bell 154). There is a distinct change in the mother figure from Lucie's view, because now she has seen a positive motherly influence in her life. There is nothing ideal or attractive about Gracie. She is the depiction of the ugliness of the act that she has committed against Lucie by abandoning her, and "for Lucie, she was

never better than the shame of that moment” (Bell 154). Her innocence has been marred and she realizes that mothers are capable of lying to their children, of being imperfect (Bell 150). While mothers are at the forefront of the novel, fathers are not entirely absent from the text.

To be fatherless in the traditional Cherokee community is not necessarily detrimental to a child’s development. Cherokee mothers are adaptive and can duplicate many father-figure roles in order to provide balance within a child’s life, or traditionally had other male-figures to rely upon. In example, extended networking allowed for young males without fathers to be taught by uncles, grandfathers, and brothers, to ensure they received a proper Cherokee upbringing. To be absent a mother in traditional and contemporary Cherokee culture though, is significantly detrimental for any Cherokee family, including the character Lucie in *Faces in the Moon*. Children without mothers are pitied and are seen as lacking an influence they will not find elsewhere (Bell 137). Two forms of abandonment are presented in *Faces in the Moon*. When Helen is forced to abandon Gracie and Rozella in order to go work to provide food for them, her abandonment of her children is rationalized because it is a task that she must complete, but Helen returns to her children to care for them when her work days end. However, when Gracie abandons Lucie, she does so because she lacks the maternal instinct to care for Lucie. Gracie’s actions are unforgivable to Lucie, initially, because she is being abandoned without reason, although Lucie will later appreciate the fact that she has been left in the country with a mother-figure that does care for her. Leaving Lucie is one example where Gracie has emotionally damaged Lucie and has severed the mother-daughter relationship.

But this is only one of the ways in which Gracie has failed to protect her child from the world.

The trauma that Lucie faces from Gracie's abusive boyfriend J.D. is far more scarring than her abandonment. Gracie places herself in an abusive relationship, and while this is problematic, it is far more complex with the inclusion of Lucie. In traditional Cherokee society, a mother had the duty of "raising her children with qualities that would protect them in a dangerous world," but also acted as agents of protection until a child reached maturity (Smith 43). However, Gracie sides with Lucie's abuser rather than protecting Lucie from him. J.D. feels that he has the right to reprimand and hit Lucie, even though she is not related to him. Rather than protect Lucie, Gracie "would come roaring out of the bedroom and hit her again" if Lucie had the audacity to cry or wake Gracie (Bell 67). Not only is J.D. abusive, Gracie also hits Lucie rather than address her daughter's allegations. Not only is Gracie unable to protect Lucie from her attacker, she becomes a secondary attacker that further abuses an adolescent.

Leaving Lucie alone with J.D. is an additional act of negligence that will change Lucie's life. When Lucie fails to act as J.D. expects a child to, J.D. rapes Lucie (Bell 68). Gracie puts Lucie in a situation that brings about her rape. Unable, and to an extent unwilling to protect her daughter in order to remain under J.D.'s care, Gracie has violated the sacred oath that traditional Cherokee women took when they brought children into the world. Lucie can no longer view her mother as the figure she grew up with or as a protector, if she ever saw her as a protector to begin with. But this does not mean that the mother-child relationship is permanently severed.

Lucie always has the power to forgive Gracie for her egregious shortcomings when Lucie realizes that her mother never had a good role model herself.

Children often come to the realization that their mothers are not entirely good or bad, and acknowledge a dualism that exists in every mother. Once this becomes apparent to the child, they are sometimes able to forgive their mother's mistakes. In *Faces in the Moon*, Lucie never fully forgives Gracie for her neglect. However, Lucie does come to the realization that her past will never fully be behind her if she does not acknowledge the small connection she has to Gracie through story. After Gracie's death, Lucie takes the stories that her mother wrote down and, in order to come to terms with her past, burns them (Bell 9, 185). This symbolic burning allows Lucie to move past merely hating her mother. As an adult reflecting on her childhood, Lucie begins to accept certain aspects of Gracie's life. The larger realization is that mothers have the strength to sacrifice for their children in order to "give their children better lives" (Bell 182).

While Gracie does not sacrifice for Lucie, Lucie is able to see through the example of Aunt Lizzie that true mothers make sacrifices. Lucie is also familiar with the story of how Helen, Gracie's mother, was forced to raise her family in a junkyard while she worked for a modest income (Bell 12). Helen then put her girls in danger by marrying a child molester, and ignorant to his attacks against her children, remained under his roof. Gracie's ineffective mothering is in part due to her own experiences when she was left without a mother. Since Gracie did not learn how to mother from her own mother, she cannot effectively connect with Lucie. Lucie notices this later, realizing that Gracie was motherless by age nine (Bell 183). Even

though Lucie knows her mother's past, she cannot instantly forgive Gracie, but her ability to empathize with Gracie's situation shows that Lucie does not blindly hate her mother. Her empathy, including her decision to come visit Gracie in the hospital as she is dying, shows that Lucie at least forgives Gracie enough to still be in her life, even if the root of her decision to go to Gracie is out of daughterly obligation.

The mother-child relationship between Gracie and Lucie changes over time, paralleling traditional Selu stories about Selu and her sons. While stories about Selu vary slightly, they always involve Selu's two sons idolizing her (Awiakta 17-18). She is a mother who both protects them and provides their sustenance. But when the sons suddenly find Selu filling her corn basket with corn that she has rubbed from her body, the children view her as a "witch" and become afraid that she is going to harm them, so they devise a plan to kill her (Mooney 259). Storyteller Marilou Awiakta notes that point of this Selu story is that the two young men (in Awiakta's version, Selu's grandsons) "broke their relationship" with Selu (18). The turn in the Selu story is the ability for the children to restore their relationship with the mother figure.

In Cherokee oral tradition, Selu takes on the role of both a mother and a teacher. The "spiritual base and spine of the story" revolves around balance, suggesting that the mother-child relationship itself must have balance in order to be effective (Awiakta 16). Even as Selu dies, she gives instructions to her sons to further sustain them with her body after death. Eventually, the children realize that they have mistakenly harmed their mother and must find a way to heal the relationship with Selu. This is one of the "most sustaining elements" of the story because of its focus on "healing" the Cherokee community and the relationship with Selu (Awiakta 26).

Because Selu is the mother of the Cherokee people, all Cherokee individuals are her sons and daughters. In order to restore the balance of the relationship between Selu and her children, Cherokee communities traditionally grow and cultivate corn according to Selu's last wishes. Thus, the mother-child relationship that is reflected in *Faces in the Moon* is an offshoot of the same patterns that exist in traditional Cherokee oral stories about Selu and creation. A Cherokee child can grow to hate her mother or resent her for her wrongdoings, but by later forgiving her mother will repeat a cycle that exists with the Cherokee cosmology, similar to the relationship between Lucie and Gracie. Forgiveness itself can be embodied on different levels. In the Selu story, the sons forgive Selu and then honor her by planting corn and living based on her instructions. However, Lucie forgives her mother on a much smaller scale, and simply forgives her mother enough to visit Gracie out of obligation before she dies and then burn her writings. Notwithstanding, the effects of colonization on contemporary Cherokee society must also be considered when analyzing *Faces in the Moon*.

Traditionally, Cherokee women's agency allowed them to have power in several gendered roles, including not only birthing and mothering, but also agriculture and economics within their matrilineal communities. In contemporary literature, the implications of the shift to patriarchal society are strikingly apparent. Whereas Cherokee women once had the ability to choose their own husbands and could survive with the help of their surrounding community, contemporary Cherokee women often make the tough decision of settling upon a partner due to outside forces of oppression that do not allow them to thrive economically without a husband. Lizzie

remarks that Helen did not marry for love, but married because “she had two little girls and no body to look out after her” (Bell 157). This passage represents one of the several comparative differences between traditional Cherokee society and contemporary Cherokee society in Bell’s novel. The novel places emphasis on the ways in which hints of traditional Cherokee values are present, but how they have been hindered and dismantled through colonization. In one passage, Lizzie poignantly sums up many of the key issues in the contemporary Cherokee society:

The Cherokee always been a proud people. They took care of their children and families. That always come first. When my granddaddy come from Georgia he didn’t leave no body behind. Nowadays seems like people forget how to look out for their families. But it ain’t their fault, I reckon. Times is different. No truer word been said. Now, you’re gonna grow up ‘out knowing your people. We’s not always gonna be round, and ya gonna have to count on your momma. And she can’t count on herself. (Bell 122-123)

While some aspects of birthing and motherhood have remained consistent in Bell’s representation when compared to historical accounts, other aspects have changed. One of the struggles that contemporary Cherokee mothers sometimes face is poverty, a faceless enemy that threatens to remove children from their care. Whereas Cherokee mothers were traditionally providers for their homes, after colonization women were removed from their traditional roles based on EuroWestern thinking. Due to this sudden shift, women found themselves more reliant upon men in order to help them care for their children (Smith 76). However, Cherokee mothers often faced difficult decisions regarding the care of their children. If a mother was unable to feed

her child, it was not uncommon for the child to be given to a mission school or another similar charitable organization in order for the child to be fed, suggesting Cherokee mothers considered a variety of options for the betterment of their children (Smith 79).

There are notable differences in the traditional communities discussed in the aforementioned scholarship and the contemporary community depicted in Bell's novel. Sattler, for example, discusses the importance of dualism in Cherokee communities, which allowed for no one gender to have more power or authority over the other (225). However, since contact Cherokee societies saw a large change in male and female roles. Most notably, Cherokee women lost a significant amount of agency and authority within their homes and were cast aside in the political sphere. A matrilineal society, Cherokee women birthed children for their nuclear family, kinship circle, and clan, but also had the responsibility of raising children for the community (Smith 50). Unfortunately, Bell's novel depicts a community that lacks a strong network of mother figures. Helen, for example, must leave her children alone in a car while she works because there are no other women in her life that have the ability to care for her children. This shows the shift in contemporary society that does not allow for Cherokee women to take their children to work in many situations, which is strikingly different from traditional incidents where children were expected to help with agricultural work. This does not mean, however, that there are not surrogate mothers found within Bell's novel. Figures like Aunt Lizzie are able to bridge the void created by neglectful or uncaring mothers like Gracie. When living with Aunt Lizzie, Lucie is able to feel love, is cherished, and learns about her identity

in a positive, encouraging manner that makes up for some of the neglect that Lucie has become used to.

Faces in the Moon depicts the persistence of Cherokee women and mothers to further Cherokee culture in a new world, but also the challenges of maintaining some aspects of Cherokee culture post-colonization. Bell weaves traditional roles and values of Cherokee culture into contemporary adaptations of Cherokee motherhood. The result is a new, hybrid representation of Cherokee motherhood that is idealized by some of the women in *Faces in the Moon* and completely abandoned by others. Though Gracie has not had a perfect upbringing, she comes to find that her mother, like all contemporary Cherokee mothers, still remain the “conservators of traditional values” and continue to pass values to their children even if only by accident (Perdue, *Cherokee Women* 64; Smith 40). While the characters Bell creates are vastly different, they all share several key characteristics that unite them as strong Cherokee women figures. They are mothers that trace their views of mothering back to Selu creation stories. The mother-child relationship is also a significant component of mothering in general, and *Faces in the Moon* represents the ways in which the spiritual and physical connection between mother and child can vary. While the foundations of contemporary representations of birthing and motherhood in Cherokee literature are inherently linked to creation stories, traditional culture, and sacred knowledge, this conclusion is not overarching and representative of all American Indian and Indigenous communities. However, similar patterns can be found in the Cherokee/Creek works *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* by Dawn Karima Pettigrew.

**CHAPTER 3: CREEK BIRTHING AND MOTHERHOOD
IN DAWN KARIMA PETTIGREW'S *THE WAY WE MAKE SENSE* AND *THE
MARRIAGE OF SAINTS***

The Way We Make Sense (2002) and *The Marriage of Saints* (2006) by Dawn Karima Pettigrew present vivid representations of pregnancy, birthing, and motherhood while following the lives of Oklahoma StandsStraight and her daughters, Indiana, Georgia, Carolina, and Tennessee Jane. Using Krupat's concept of literary indigenism, Pettigrew's work showcases similar patterns regarding the birthing and mothering process that are found in *The Painted Drum*, *Faces in the Moon*, and *Once Were Warriors*. For example, similar to the Cherokee novel *Faces in the Moon*, Pettigrew's novels depict the generational impact that mothering has on children and how, in turn, children become mothers themselves. Since Pettigrew's novels include characters that are of mixed Creek and Cherokee descent, the previous Cherokee-specific information presented with Bell's novel would be useful for approaching Pettigrew's work, but the following discussion will focus on Creek-specific details. Both *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* depict typical post-contact examples of pregnancy, birthing, motherhood, marriage, domestic abuse, and rape, while showing that even though some Creek traditions, cosmology, and contemporary lifestyles have been pushed aside, Creek women are able to better the lives and futures of their offspring through mothering better than the previous generation.

Pettigrew's novels follow the lives of the female members of the Redpaint-StandsStraight family. Oklahoma Redpaint, the matriarch of the family, lives in Oklahoma where she attempts to raise her children while also protecting them from her husband, Jack, and his gambling habits. Jack StandsStraight makes a living doing

small jobs and competing in rodeos, and when he cannot pay an entry fee to a rodeo contest he uses his daughter, Indiana, as collateral. The once-happy family is torn apart when Jack does not win his rodeo competition and tells Oklahoma that they must send Indiana away with the cattleman that paid Jack's rodeo entry fees.

Oklahoma quickly sends Indiana away to live with her grandparents to save her. Feeling isolated, rejected, and distanced from the only home that she has ever known, Indiana feels abandoned by her mother and does not begin to regain her identity until she gives birth to and begins raising her daughter, Manna. Conditioned to see the worst in people, and not to trust anyone in the world, Manna feels like she cannot live up to her mother's expectations and eventually runs away and travels across the country to New Mexico. Meanwhile, Indiana's sisters Georgia, Carolina, and Tennessee Jane grow up in Oklahoma with their mother, whom they partially blame for Indiana's disappearance.

An understanding of the traditional past and the effects of colonization are important to an analysis of the works of Dawn Karima Pettigrew. Analyzing Pettigrew's novels requires at minimum a basic knowledge of traditional views on Creek womanhood and Creek cosmology. While neighboring Cherokee communities allotted women significant amounts of power within the community, Creek women lived vastly different lives. Creek cosmology includes about how Creeks entered the world, yet is unique because there is also a focus on an apocalyptic prophecy that makes an account that "all Creeks will eventually return to the opening of the earth, the navel of the world, from which they emerged" (Grantham 19). Despite the ways in which Creeks viewed females in relation to apocalyptic stories about the downfall

of Creek society, “Nowhere in Creek cosmology is the female principle held in permanent subservience to the male” (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 44).

Similar to the oral stories of numerous Indigenous communities, feminine language surrounds the creation of the Creek people. The “naval” from which the Creeks emerged illustrates the feminine principles likened to a birthing umbilical cord. It is from a womanly figure that the Creeks were made, and therefore their presence in Creek society is significant because without women, there would be no future Creek offspring. According to some Creek oral stories, “the destruction of the world will be caused by a loss of the Creek women, who will be taken away to an island” (Grantham 19). This demonstrates a circular story in which it is from a woman that the Creeks are born, and it is without women that the Creeks will disappear.

In Creek cosmology, it was through Mother Earth’s womb that “incomplete but living things like seeds were stirring, desiring knowledge and completeness” were cared for until they became physical beings (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 15). Mother Earth plays a key role in Creek society because she assisted in creating the divisions of labor that were present in Creek communities (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 21). The Creeks relied upon several deities for support and guidance. In some communities oral stories that offered advice on how to live varied, but there was an underlying fact associated with Mother Earth across clans. The birth of the Creek race began with “gestation in the womb of Mother Earth” and after these children were born they would forever receive instruction and responsibilities from their mother (Chaudhuri

and Chaudhuri 22). For Creek women, establishing female identity included varying responsibilities and practices.

Traditionally, Creek women “enjoyed considerable freedom and respect but endured rather onerous constraints and generally lacked direct, formal access to power. The overall picture is one of limited self-determination within a generally male-dominated and male-controlled system” (Sattler 218). Sattler’s drastic statement and analysis of the traditional Creek community is simultaneously accurate and problematic. Similar problematic misinterpretations of female “power,” or a complete lack of power, surrounding the dialectical differences in male and female gendered Creek language patterns have arisen in past studies. In his analysis of the Creek language, for example, H. F. Buckner suggests that because women spoke slightly different dialects of the Creek language they were subservient and lacked power within their communities. Claudio Saunt suggests “Buckner failed to consider the possibility that these separate dialects were emblematic of women’s power rather than weakness” (141). However, in terms of political aspiration it is true that Creek women did not have the leadership opportunities that their Cherokee sisters had. As many scholars noted, Creek “men and women stood in extreme opposition in the real and symbolic worlds” (Saunt 140). Yet, just because Creek women did not participate in the politics of the community, this does not mean that they were without power in all aspects of their lives. Similarly to Cherokee women, Creek women had specific duties, like tending to agricultural needs, and obligations, like raising children, that were entirely their own and made them powerful as female figures within the

community. Part of a woman's power within her community also directly relates to Creek female identity.

The concept and practices of Creek womanhood was traditionally made up of numerous aspects of female identity, including aspects of female sexuality. While "little effort went into the control of female sexuality among the Cherokee," Creek sexuality was monitored more closely within the community, especially in regards to women (Sattler 222). Generally speaking, sex within the Creek community was considered to be a "healthy activity" (Ethridge 113). Prior to marriage, young Creek women had the responsibility of learning about their menstruation cycle, which included the power they held as Creek women while menstruating, during which time they were expected to abstain from sex and keep their woman's blood away from Creek warriors.

The menstruation cycle was an important time in a Creek woman's life and a great deal of empowerment, teaching, and responsibility revolved around this cycle. As Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri explain, "Menstruation was a time for the most intense possible continuing education for the seed bearers of culture" (47). Women were separated from men during their cycle, similar to other Indigenous communities including the Cherokee, but during this time were often educated by female elders. In fact, "the entire educational system and instructions from women elders took place" in menstruation lodges (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 10). Regardless of some of the misconceptions brought about by separation, the separation was of benefit to the young Creek woman who learned about her upcoming responsibilities as a woman entering her child rearing years (Saunt 142). While the menstruation cycle and the

events and teachings surrounding this time were once critical, they are absent within Pettigrew's novels. Pettigrew does, however, incorporate pregnancy into her novels.

Once a Creek woman was old enough to become pregnant and raise children it was expected that a suitable match with a male from a non-related clan would be identified. Marriages were usually orchestrated by the man, but there were instances where other family members arranged marriages for individuals (Debo 16).

Pregnancy was an important life stage for Creek women, and similar to their menstruations, came with certain expectations and exclusions from the rest of the community. Creek cosmology highly praises pregnant mothers because they connect their unborn children to Mother Earth: "The mother feeds the children in her womb; she is the source of power, food, mother's milk, and is the gatekeeper of the herbal and medicinal world" (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 44-45). A pregnant Creek woman went to a separate pregnancy lodge where she was expected "to absent herself from her husband and from public company for four months" (Debo 18). As in many other Indigenous communities, a baby's umbilical cord has significance; the "umbilical cord is buried in one place on earth so Creeks traditionally always had a symbolic connection to the area" (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 81). In Pettigrew's novels, ceremonies involving the umbilical cord are not mentioned—perhaps suggesting that for the Redpaint-Standstraight women, this ceremony is no longer practical.

However, pregnancy and birthing stories are central within the novels.

For the Standstraight women, birthing is a seemingly easy task. Indiana recounts the birth of her daughter, Manna, as if it were an everyday event. When wading in a small river, Indiana states, "Then, no pain or warning, my baby slides

out” (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 50). There could be many reasons for Indiana’s description of the event. Perhaps Indiana did have a truly simple birth with no pain—in which case she would be the envy of many. However, since it is Indiana’s reflection and she was the only individual present for Manna’s birth, she may have a positive outlook on the event simply because that is how she chooses to recall the event. The way in which an event can change based on the storyteller can be seen when Carolina StandsStraight’s birth is recounted by witnesses to her birth. In Creek oration, the “storyteller can emphasize certain themes and even alter content according to the reactions of listeners” (Saunt 31).

When Carolina first hears the story of her birth, she hears it from her father. Carolina is Jack’s favorite daughter, which could influence the way he describes her birth. Jack tells Carolina that she was born on a horse, when Oklahoma StrandsStraight suddenly went into labor while riding (Pettigrew *TMOS* 12). In Jack’s retelling the horses all went still and awaited Carolina’s entry into the world, even though horses ordinarily dislike blood. Later, Oklahoma recounts the story of Carolina’s birth from her own point of view; her version includes more mention of physical labor pains, gushing blood, and panic (Pettigrew *TMOS* 41). Oklahoma nevertheless still remembers the event positively, though without the same nonchalance and ease as Jack. Since Jack helps deliver Carolina, Oklahoma believes Carolina became Jack’s favorite because he assisted in her birth. From the moment that Carolina is born, she is rarely out of her father’s reach.

The duties of the StandsStraight women mirror that of their historical counterparts. Most parallel to tradition is the fact that the StandsStraight women are

expected to care for the home while also furthering Jack's name. In example, Jack uses his daughters for potential community standing. When Jack StandsStraight looks at his daughters he views them in terms of which daughter can produce the best offspring. He believes that "Carolina is the StandsStraight woman that can make real StandsStraight men" and therefore holds her in the highest regards compared to his other daughters (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 10). Since Caroline is the daughter that Jack prizes, he holds little interest in his daughter Indiana. When Jack is low on funds, yet wants to enter a rodeo, he uses Indiana as collateral because she is the daughter he "can spare" (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 11). When Jack loses his daughter, she is bartered away because she is unable to show value to her father. Without the promise of valuable male heirs, the women within Jack's life are not seen as his equals but as his property.

The promise of having children is important to the community at large, and Jack StandsStraight is not the only individual that focuses on the promise of pregnancy within marriages. Sao, unrelated to the StandsStraight women, is another character introduced and woven throughout Pettigrew's work. After marrying, Sao is confronted by her mother, who does not agree with the match. When Sao's mother finds out that Sao is not pregnant, she takes the news in a positive manner, stating that if Sao is not pregnant there is "still hope for an annulment" (Pettigrew *TMOS* 93). Birthing scenarios within Pettigrew's work to highlight both the positive and negative aspects of the final stages of pregnancy and the beginning of post-birth motherhood. Sao recounts her mother's miscarriage, describing the event in detail before adding that the only thing wrong with her mother's first infant was that fact that "she never

breathed” (Pettigrew *TMOS* 76). While the event was no doubt tragic for Sao’s parents, Sao’s father handles the event by asking the saints and God to provide him with a child. Sao’s father, like Jack StandsStraight, is concerned about his own legacy. However, he also yearns for a child to complete the nuclear family he and his wife are attempting to establish. According to Sao, she was “born in County General exactly nine months” after her father pleaded with the saints and God to give him a child. The passage is also significant because it is clear that some groups within the contemporary community in Pettigrew’s work have turned to Christian saints and God to guide and help them, as well as an illustration of the assimilation process that Creeks experienced during removal.

For characters like Jack and Manna, children are thought of as a form of protection. As Manna Redpaint, Indiana’s daughter, makes her way across country she temporarily becomes a mother-figure when a woman named Sugar Begay places her two-year old daughter, Candy, in Manna’s care. At first Manna is reluctant to take care of Candy; she does not believe she has knows how to be an effective mother. However, even though Manna herself is struggling to survive, she begins to care for Candy. Manna reflects, “Babies are safety. If you manage to keep them clean and fed and alive, they just might ward off trouble. This baby is getting to be a handy person to know” (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 107).

Pettigrew’s novels also provide insight into contemporary issues surrounding pregnancy. In *The Marriage of Saints* Georgia’s daughter, Lena, recounts that she enjoys watching a television show where “girls finally find out who daddied their babies” (Pettigrew 58). While the scene is meant to be somewhat comical, Pettigrew

is also alluding to real-life problems faced by young, expectant mothers. The television show illustrates the problem of absent fathers, whether it is due to the choice of the father, or due to a lack of knowledge about paternity, and Lena finds the dysfunctional breakdown of the nuclear family entertaining. Part of this nuclear breakdown is associated with the assimilation process forced upon Creek communities during colonization.

Targeting Creek women as advocates of assimilation and the “civilization plan” was instrumental in the success of the destruction of traditional Creek communities. When Benjamin Hawkins, head Indian Agent posted in North Carolina from roughly 1785-1814, began working with Creek women, his plan was seemingly appealing for Creek women:

As envisioned by Hawkins, in the plan for civilization Creek women would continue their subsistence agricultural roles, but they would also raise cash crops. Women would engage in cottage industries, especially cloth making, and ranching. They would grow their own cotton, some of which would be used in manufacturing their own cloth and some of which would be sold on the market. Until they became self-sufficient, Hawkins would supply each family that wanted to participate with spinning wheels, cotton cards, hoes, plows, and other manufactured items necessary to the plan. (Ethridge 149)

Creek women went along with Hawkins’ plan because it allowed them more economic independence, especially during a time in which Creek men began to prioritize themselves as individuals rather than prioritizing the needs of the

community. By entering the trade market early, Creek women found that they were better able to navigate a world dominated by white men (Ethridge 176). In fact, one of the “main complaints lodged by Creek men against the plan for civilization was that the women, by growing cotton and making cloth, would become independent, ‘proud and not obedient to their husbands’” (Ethridge 193). The plan for civilization and assimilation, however, was also accompanied by the horrors of Creek removal from their traditional homelands.

One of the most extensive works on Creek history is Angie Debo’s *The Road to Disappearance* (1941). Despite some criticism of “the paucity of Creek ethnohistoriography in the 1930s,” Debo’s accounting of Creek removal and assimilation are key to understanding the effects these events had on Creek women (Green 17). Colonizers quickly realized that Creek women held considerable influence within their communities. Even though women did not participate in Creek forms of government, they were in charge of agriculture and children, both of which were of key interest to assimilation policies. Indian agents first began instructing Creek men to “take control of family property and to assume command over their wives and daughters” (Saunt 139). Similarly, the changes in the European markets and the deerskin trade eventually “eliminated the need for women’s labor in the dressing of skins” and the trade became exclusive to Creek men (Saunt 144). Because of “the destruction of game and the disintegration of community agriculture, an increasing amount of labor and hardship fell upon the women and they became bent and worn from unrelieved drudgery” (Debo 84).

Removal directly touched all Creeks, but Creek women were almost immediately targets for the cruelty of white colonizers. Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri record stories of removal, often noting the ways in which women and children were treated:

Along the trail, they split us up. I lost my mother and father and ended up with an uncle. Little babies sometimes would have their heads smashed against a tree. ... After our walk, there were no babies left; they had killed the babies. Hardly and women made it. ... Be watchful of the whites. The snake you welcome will be the one that destroys you. They will sell their own mother—they will leave their burial grounds—they have no roots—they don't know where their umbilical cord is buried. That is why they are restless. If you allow one in—you can't get rid of him. (156-157)

It is hard to estimate how many women and children died during the removal process, but undoubtedly the process severely impacted the next several generations of Creek communities. Long-term effects of removal included the loss of strictly female practices, including menstruation ceremonies and education. According to some Creek scholars, “A full understanding of female education has declined, contributing to cultural erosion among many assimilated Creeks” (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 47). After relocation, “It was impossible for the Creeks to return to the old way of living, and with few exceptions they had not learned any other” (Debo 84). However, “unlike the Cherokees and Choctaws, the Creeks received their allotments in unified 160-acre parcels, most of which could reasonably support a single family” (Green

69). This was a small gift, because with the “vitality of Creek communities and the maintenance of the town organization in an unofficial setting, left the Creeks in a relatively strong social and economic position” (Green 69-70).

During colonization, domestic violence also became more prevalent within Creek communities, and violence against women significantly changed the way in which men view women. Prior to contact domestic abuse within the Creek community was minimally recorded or discussed, but post-contact documents reveal that Creek warriors “expressed their masculinity through violence towards the opposite sex” (Saunt 151). Claudio Saunt suggests that tensions between Creek warriors and white settlers “occasionally manifested itself in rapes and in the mutilation of white women” but did not concern Creek women because they were not under attack (151). Hostility towards women continued to grow during the colonization and assimilation of the Creek warriors: “Warriors who had increasingly found their manliness compromised by the new order showed special anger toward women” (Saunt 266). Creek warriors became notorious for attacking and mutilating women, and in one instance “disemboweled a pregnant woman and impaled her fetus” (Saunt 266-67). In attempt to show good favor, US troops began to report in their campaigns against the Creeks that they had “spared Creek women and children,” partially in the hope that this would change the ways in which Creek warriors dealt with white women and children (Saunt 268). While the actions of some Creek warriors did not reflect the thoughts and actions of all Creek warriors, post-contact violence against women became rampant and undoubtedly domestic abuse found its way into some Creek homes.

Pettigrew's novels reflect the contemporary impact of domestic violence in Creek communities. Even though Carolina is under Jack's protection, the women of Pettigrew's novels are still in danger from domestic violence. Within the StrandsStraight community, the women tell stories of a man that "beat his wife so bad her own mama couldn't recognize her when she went to pick out her body at the morgue" (Pettigrew *TMOS* 10). The story is important because as children, the StrandsStraight girls are taught to be wary of men, because even husbands can turn upon their wives, but domestic abuse extended beyond husband-wife situations. Tensions between Indiana and her daughter Manna manifest when Manna begins asking about Joe Turner, the father that Manna knows very little about because Indiana refuses to discuss her troubled past. When Manna begs to know more about Joe, she receives "her first black eye, her mother's answer to one too many questions" (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 66). While no form of domestic violence is acceptable, it is notable that Indiana uses violence against her own child. In attempting to protect Manna from the past, Indiana refuses to give up information about Joe Turner. However, by attempting to protect her daughter from mental distress, Indiana physically harms her daughter.

Unfortunately, when Tennessee Jane is left unprotected by her father and her sister, she becomes the victim of violence against women that plagues many native and non-native communities. Tennessee Jane is not Jack's favorite daughter, but he has plans for her. Just as Carolina has the obligation to further the familial line, which focuses on Jack's lineage rather than Oklahoma's, Tennessee Jane is meant to attract a suitor. Because of her beauty, it is assumed that Tennessee Jane will likely attract a

decent suitor of high community status, and hopefully wealth, and therefore Jack sends Indiana with Tennessee Jane to look after her. In a dramatic turn of events, Tennessee Jane is badly beaten and raped by Darrell Earl GoingBack. When Indiana approaches her father to tell him that Tennessee Jane has been taken by Darrell, and what is happening to her, Jack's first reaction is to tell Indiana that she has lost him his "future" (Pettigrew *TMOS* 4). It is Indiana who finds Tennessee Jane, and as she begins to carry her sister to safety she turns back to witness "Darrell Earl GoingBack, fishing away, like he hadn't wronged Tennessee Jane one bit" (Pettigrew *TMOS* 5). While Darrell's actions do not represent an entire community, fictitious or otherwise, it is clear that he does not find his actions concerning. He does not attempt to hide himself or conceal his activities, suggesting that he is not concerned with the repercussions of his actions.

Tennessee Jane's rape sets in motion a series of events that devastates the StandsStraight family, especially the relationship between Oklahoma and her daughters. The mother-child relationships in both *The Way We Make Sense* and *The Marriage of Saints* align with a similar pattern found in other texts within this study. Prior to her rape, Indiana viewed her mother as a woman who balanced and maintained her family. Indiana especially appreciated the fact that her mother doted upon Jack, even if he was not perfect, because she thought "the more they love each other" the more each parent will love each child in the family (Pettigrew *TWWMS* 16). Though this does not become apparent within the StandsStraight family, because Jack clearly has a favorite daughter, and daughters that he views as being expendable,

the ideal picture of the nuclear family that Indiana enjoyed is an image that will later be shattered for her.

After Tennessee Jane's rape, Jack attempts to enter a rodeo in order to win a large cash championship prize. Down on his luck, and without funds, Jack decides that his best chance is to offer one of his daughters as collateral. Jack selects Indiana. It is clear that Indiana is one of Jack's expendable daughters because she is not Carolina, but also because she does not possess Tennessee Jane's striking beauty. However, the rodeo occurs after Indiana has failed to follow her father's instructions and keep Tennessee Jane safe. Jack blames Indiana for Tennessee Jane's rape as much as he blames Tennessee Jane's physical attacker. Because Indiana has lost Jack his "future," he seemingly has no trouble offering Indiana up as collateral (Pettigrew *T MOS* 4). When Jack fails to win a championship, Indiana is promised to a rancher as if she is property.

Jack betrays Indiana, and in part, Oklahoma does little to stand up for her daughter. When Oklahoma receives the news that her daughter has been traded away as payment for an entry fee she remains calm. She does not attempt to dissuade Jack or tell him that it is not allowable to send Indiana away. At first, this troubles the daughters who know Indiana's fate. Oklahoma later reflects, "Indiana was the start of quiet. I lost her in a way I can't name, and the house never filled with laughter after that" (Pettigrew *T MOS* 43). The quiet that Oklahoma perceives in her later years is because her daughters have all left the home, and because they believe Oklahoma did not stand up to Jack and protect Indiana. Yet in truth, Oklahoma went to great lengths to protect Indiana and defy Jack behind his back. Days before Indiana was sent to the

rancher Jack has promised her to, Oklahoma packed Indiana a bag and sent her to North Carolina to live with her grandparents rather than at home with her mother in Oklahoma. North Carolina is part of the traditional Creek and Cherokee homelands, so as Indiana leaves home in one sense, she arrives at home in another. She is then raised in North Carolina, where she finds herself missing her familial home and her sister, Carolina. Symbolically, the family is separated by time and space and the connection between a once strong group of women is partially severed.

The mother-child relationships in the works of Dawn Karima Pettigrew vary slightly from similar patterns found in Indigenous literature. In Pettigrew's works, Oklahoma's children do not later forgive their mother for her failures. However, they do allow their experiences to affect their lives and the lives of the children that they later bring into the world. By sending Indiana away, Oklahoma saves Indiana from being sold into a loveless marriage but in saving her, Oklahoma also creates a separation between herself and Indiana that later causes her daughter to feel abandoned. Likewise, Indiana attempts to protect her daughter Manna from the lies and betrayals of men, but only effectively distances herself from her daughter, who does not understand that her mother is attempting to protect her.

Even though Oklahoma does her best to protect her daughters, she has shortcomings as a mother and the mixture of positive and negative mothering has repercussions in how her own daughters mother their own children. When raising their own children, the StandsStraight daughters become far more protective mothers. Indiana grows up away from her family and falls in love with Joe Turner, who leaves her pregnant and uncertain of her future. When Indiana gives birth to Manna, she

immediately becomes a protective mother that will stop at nothing, including using powerful magic to turn a man into a tree, to make sure that her own daughter does not make the poor choices she made as a young woman. Indiana raises Manna under the assumption that “for as much Heaven as you have, you can find yourself in just as much Hell” (Pettigrew *TMOS* 71). Thus, Indiana attempts to keep Manna as far away from men and the dangers of love as she can. Indiana believes that, in regards to Manna, “I am the one that gave her life. I am the one that she must love” (Pettigrew *TMOS* 74). While Indiana has good intentions as a mother, she is too protective and ultimately she only distances herself from Manna. While Oklahoma literally sends Indiana away, Indiana mentally pushes Manna away, and in both cases the daughters feel distanced from their mother. Inevitably, Manna blames Indiana for the troubles in her love life—including the fact that her lover, Thomas Crow, has been turned into a tree (Pettigrew *TMOS* 82).

Despite some communication barriers between mothers and their children, Dawn Karima Pettigrew’s work shows an overall positive outlook for the future of Creek, or Cherokee, women within her fiction. The women of Pettigrew’s novels, regardless of their hardships, fulfill their duties as Indigenous mothers by caring for their children. Seemingly, traditional aspects of Creek womanhood and motherhood have less presence in the *StandsStraight* home. For example, the nuclear family seems to be less significant for Indiana because she feels her family abandoned her, and therefore Manna also “adopts” Sugar without the help of any other nuclear family member. In this case, Creek family systems have changed, but at the heart of the matter is the actual mothering of children that is valued.

However, in Pettigrew's work there is an absence of the traditional Creek warrior figure—which, in part, explains why Jack StandsStraight is lost in the world around him. During colonization, the warrior was “condemned” (Saunt 153). “For Creek men, to be a man was to be a hunter and a warrior,” and neither position exists within the realm that Jack inhabits (Ethridge 138). The implications of these historic repositioning of Creek identity introduced violence toward women, which is graphically depicted in Pettigrew's novels. Thus, unable to find a place where he fits in the world, Jack threatens Oklahoma's position as a mother by separating her from her children. A similar identity crisis can be further assessed in Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*, which chronicles the life of Beth Heke, a mother struggling to raise a family while protecting her children from their father, Jake, a warrior without a purpose.

CHAPTER 4: MAORI BIRTHING AND MOTHERHOOD IN ALAN DUFF'S *ONCE WERE WARRIORS*

Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*, and the 1995 film adaptation of the same name, offer insight into contemporary Maori culture while merging the traditional past with the contemporary issues. As in Dawn Karima Pettigrew's novels, *Once Were Warriors* shows how the assimilation process has displaced many male figures because there is no longer a need for the traditional warrior role within the contemporary community. One negative effect of this particular aspect of assimilation process is the rise of violence inflicted upon women by Native men (Saunt 151; 266). Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* depicts the strained relationship between main characters Beth Heke and her husband, Jake. Because Beth must deal with the challenges of alcoholism and domestic abuse, she fails to fully develop a healthy relationship with her daughter, Grace; she represents a broader group of mothers and children that have been unable to effectively establish a viable mother-child relationship. It is only after Grace's death that Beth begins to fulfill a role of a community mother, taking in a homeless child and weaning her son away from gang activity. As Beth steps into the role of community mother, she initiates the transference of Maori culture and values that will rebuild the chaos of the community that surrounds her.

The generation depicted, the mid-1990s, in *Once Were Warriors* is one in which the Heke children are subjected to alcoholism, physical and mental abuses, and abandonment. The pivotal issue surrounding the Heke family involves the rape of Grace, an action that sets into motion a change throughout the community. The mother-child relationship between Beth and Grace is altered when Beth is unable to

protect her daughter from rape. Following being raped, Grace withdraws inward. Feeling that her mother has inadequately shielded her, and traumatized from the rape, Grace commits suicide. Grace's rape is a catalyst that affects not only Grace, but also alters the rest of her family and community. Here, the mother-child relationship is severed literally and metaphorically. The key component of the mother-child relationship in *Once Were Warriors* is Beth's reaction to her daughter's extreme actions. Living with the weight of Grace's death, Beth develops mothering skills that she did not possess when Grace was alive, allowing Beth to become a mother to the children of the community around her. Through these actions, Beth begins to posthumously rebuild her relationship with Grace.

Aspects of mothering dominate several areas of Maori culture and community, tracing back to origin stories. According to Maori scholar Berys Heuer's accounts of Maori origin stories, the "restrictions upon the activities of women" originate in the stories about Rangi-nui (Sky-Father), Papa-tua-nuku (Earth-mother), and their eldest son Tane (449). While several Indigenous cosmologies recount a female figure in search of companionship, in Maori culture Tane sought "to create a race of mortals to dwell on earth." In order to accomplish this, he needed to find a "non-supernatural woman" to be his companion (Heuer 449). Unable to find a suitable companion, Tane creates a woman out of soil and breathes life into her until she is animate. This aspect of Maori cosmology is significant for two key reasons. First, a male is responsible for the origin of mankind, a gendered task that is later bestowed upon Tane's female creation. Secondly, this Maori origin story represents a system in which the female figure must be human, or, fallible. The need for Tane to

find a human woman transfers into Maori mothering patterns because, in regards to mothering, Maori culture acknowledges that because mothers are human, they will make mistakes along the way. However, there are several other culturally specific notions of pregnancy, birthing, and mothering that are unique to Maori culture.

Traditionally, elaborate customs related to pregnancy were key descriptors of gender and social status in Maori communities. Social status played a role in pregnancy, and Maori women practiced different birthing ceremonies depending on which social class they belonged to (Duffié 13). While birthing practices are still not universal in contemporary Maori communities, status-based aspects of birthing practices have diminished. Blood, especially the blood involved in menstruation and childbirth, is considered polluted and must be kept away from members of the community. Expectant mothers were taken to smaller huts that were built for their use outside of the center of the community (Duffié 13). Mothers often had a few other women to assist with the birth, but the event was not a community affair. Giving birth was an important symbol of status and part of a woman's duty because "children were greatly desired, males to become warriors, females to contract political alliances" (Heuer 487). A majority of the post-birth ceremonies and traditions were only associated with the birth of a male child (Heuer 463). While male children were preferred to female children, especially for a couple's first child, daughters were accepted into the community because they would one day produce more Maori heirs. Experienced elders could recite "spells" to newborn females that would help them to "grow up qualified to produce food, weave garments, collect sea food, collect firewood, and welcome guests" (Heuer 463). Nonetheless, the preference for male

children is notable because of its effect upon Maori women's pregnancy and birthing options.

The desire for male children generated social consent for abortions in some traditional Maori communities. Studies have suggested that in some communities, female infants were "initially in danger of infanticide" because communities lacked the resources to feed "non-warrior mouths" while in other communities it was considered to be a bad omen not to have a first-born male heir (Heuer 464). The extent to which this varied from community to community is not well documented, however, and *Once Were Warriors* does not explore this topic. In some cases, abortion was preferred, but postnatal infanticide has also been documented historically (Heuer 465).

After a child was born, mothers began to bond with their children, creating both a physical and mental connection to be shared over a lifetime. The physical birthing of children is an important biological process in American Indian and Indigenous communities because the child has "a sense of belonging through the mother" long before entering the world (Anderson 43). In *Once Were Warriors*, Beth prides herself on the physical aspects of mothering. In particular, she reflects upon breastfeeding her children. This act of mothering is not merely a responsibility that Beth takes on as a mother, but instead symbolizes the demands that loving her children has placed upon her body. For Beth, breastfeeding is timeless; even though Beth is not currently breastfeeding her children, the connection transmitted between them is everlasting:

Over to Huata's bunk, her youngest; could remember like last week him suckling on her, that special feel of feeding your own with your own body, its produce. The love imparting through it.

(Duff 33)

Through breastfeeding her children Beth is able to bond with them on more than a purely physical level. Beth's breast milk becomes both a source of nourishment into the physical embodiment of love, and it is with love that Beth sustains her children literally and emotionally. This strong connection to mothering allows Beth to take pride in herself as a mother, but her connection to her children is similar to connections contemporary Maori mothers share with their children.

Part of the mother-child connection is presented and strengthened through Maori oral tradition. Recent studies have examined the ways in which Maori mother-child birth stories shape the lives of both the mother and her child. These stories, relayed to children by their mothers as they reflect on the events surrounding their birthing experiences, are common throughout Maori communities in New Zealand today. The average Maori individual can trace their first childhood memory to 2.5 years of age (Reese, Hayne, MacDonald 114). This phenomenon can be, according to many studies, linked to mothers that relay birthing stories to their children. Recent scholars have asserted that birthing stories are a "culturally appropriate test of Maori mothers' reminiscing style" (Reese, Hayne, MacDonald 116). By embedding details into their stories, Maori mothers allow children to reflect on early childhood events—events that children will later recall as their own memories. While the story belongs to the child, there are other narrative and cultural elements at work. But mothers are

also being held to Maori cultural standards. It is expected that mothers convey birthing stories to their children to help establish their childhood identities.

Both similarities and differences exist within contemporary Maori communities, including childrearing and mothering expectations. Even though mothers typically cared for their children, other members of the community are expected to help raise children. When grandparents cared for children they continued to pass cultural knowledge through educational stories. As written in Maori literature, the “figure of the grandparent-grandchild bond is all the more striking as a manifestation of the blood/land/memory complex” (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 136). However, *Once Were Warriors* provides a contemporary representation of Maori familial structures in its depiction of the Heke family. Part of the strain within the Heke family stems from Beth’s separation from her own family, which left her without extended family support in raising her children. The Heke children, then, are not raised in a setting where they have access to the cultural knowledge of their extended family, as their mother Beth was.

Beth’s decision to leave her family in order to live with her husband was in accordance with traditional expectations of Maori marriages. Women were expected to “live with her future husband’s people” (Heuer 454). What makes Beth’s situation different from traditional expectations is that Jake, Beth’s husband, has no “people” present to help Beth rear her family. This is one of the several cases in which traditional expectations and contemporary situations collide in *Once Were Warriors*. Beth’s isolation from her own family goes unnoted because as a wife, she has an

obligation to move into the home she will share with her husband. However, without a support system from Jake's family, Beth's situation is more difficult.

Beth embodies other traditional aspects of Maori womanhood, like hosting house guests despite their unruly nature, that, in the reality of her contemporary situation, puts her family in danger. As Mary Kay Duffié notes, "the Maori are in many ways the envy of the indigenous world because much of their aboriginal culture remains intact, despite two centuries of governmental strategies to assimilate them" (3). Traditionally, wives were seen as extensions of their husbands and were expected to host guests within their homes. In *Once Were Warriors*, Jake invites large groups of his friends back to the Heke home. As an "extension of hospitality to visitors," Beth hosts these individuals but in fulfilling this obligation, Beth admits alcohol and violence into her home (Heuer 474). Though Beth does not invite Jake's drunken friends to her home, she does not make an attempt to remove them from her house when they become loud, aggressive, and violent. Instead, Beth herself participates in the heavy drinking that leads to the group's rowdy behavior, despite the fact that she then becomes subject to Jake's violent abuses. The aftermath of the festivities within the Heke home suggests that a wife's role of hostess can be dangerous in contemporary society where alcoholism is present.

The visual display of extreme intoxication is made even more striking in the film adaptation. In the film, Beth is required to do more than open her home and refrigerator to Jake's party guests, she must also attempt to keep control over Jake and his mates as they become inebriated. In several scenes, Beth's role as hostess transforms into that of a battered woman, as she has no control over Jake's alcohol-

induced mood swings. Films from the film adaptation show Grace and her siblings comforting one another upstairs while the party rages on below. Grace is unable to change her circumstances and begins to feel as if her mother is no longer protecting her, and this revelation puts a significant strain on the mother-child relationship (Duff 22-23).

In both the novel and the film, the only child able to leave the Heke home is Nig, Beth's oldest son. The mother-child relationship between Beth and Nig is, initially, almost non-existent. Nig no longer views Beth as a mother figure and instead turns to a Maori gang community of other individuals that are dissatisfied with their homes. Nig is also uninterested in remaining at home because he does not identify with his father. Distanced from his mother, and essentially absent a male-role model, Nig turns to the pseudo-family within his gang. Nig's allegiance is to his gang, not his mother, and he seems unwilling to help his mother stand against Jake. Beth's relationship with Nig evolves differently in the film adaptation, though. The term "gang" is used to describe Nig's circle of friends within the film adaptation, but the members are not unified by acts of violence as the term might imply. Rather, they are united, at least in part, but their interpretations of Maori culture. New members of Nig's group, for example, must be initiated, with a traditional Maori facial tattoo. The term "gang" has a negative connotation in many settings, but in *Once Were Warriors* the term is more ambiguous as the members become a surrogate family for Nig. But when Nig leaves the Heke home, the family dynamic is further altered. Beth continues to reach out to her oldest child, while neglecting the needs of the younger children still living within her home.

As Grace becomes a teenager, Beth's issues with Jake and Nig as well as her inability to understand her daughter fractures their mother-child relationship. The distance between Beth and Grace stems from Grace's thinking that she cannot share her concerns with her mother. Unable to communicate with her mother, Grace finds solace in the friendship she shares with Toot. When Grace and Toot discuss Grace's inability to confide in her mother, Grace notes that she "can't seem to get through to her" and mentions that she "can't kinda like talk to her" (Duff 109). This breakdown in communication between mother and daughter puts Grace in the position of feeling both physically and emotionally distant from her mother. Thus, *Once Were Warriors* challenges the widely accepted mainstream theory "that girls naturally identify with their mother" (Chodrow 89). But Grace feels most abandoned by Beth immediately after she has been raped.

The Maori oral tradition provides important context for understanding Grace's rape and subsequent suicide in the novel. In Maori oral tradition, after Tane created an ideal mate, Hine-ahu-one, the couple gave birth to a daughter named Hine-titama. Years later, Tane decided to marry Hine-titama. While Tane knew that he had chosen to wed his daughter, Hine-titama was unaware of the fact that she consummated a relationship with her father. Together, Tane and Hine-titama continued to further the human race and had their own children. However, Hine-titama soon began to question her own identity. In written versions of the story, Hine-titama cannot remember anything about her father, suggesting that he was absent from her life from a very early age, not unlike Jake's symbolic absence from the Heke home in *Once Were Warriors*. When Hine-titama inquired about her parentage, she learned that she wed

her father. She reacted by fleeing to the underworld “to take a position at the doorway through which all of her earthly descendants would eventually pass” (Heuer 449).

Hine-titama’s death is symbolic, but extremely important because it establishes precedence for Maori views on specific instances of suicide.

In traditional Maori communities, when a woman was “forced into an uncongenial union ... her only recourse was to commit suicide” (Heuer 458). Mainstream American culture views on suicide often trace their roots back to Christian religion, which suggests that suicide is one of the worse forms of sin, and similar taboos exist in contemporary Maori society. However, the story of Hine-titama allows for a more open discussion of suicide within Maori communities. Hine-titama is not negatively depicted because of her decision to flee to the underworld in order to rid herself of her union with her father, Tane. In oral tradition, her action is recorded as an acceptable way to deal with her situation, and because the story was passed from generation to generation within Maori communities, in general, suicide is not a taboo subject for Maori individuals (Heuer 461). Instead, women had the agency to take their own lives rather than remain trapped in “unsuitable” relationships, which, as Hine-titama reflects, includes a forced sexual relationship with one’s father (Heuer 458).

While there is a veil of ambiguity within Duff’s novel, reading Jake as Grace’s attacker aligns with Maori cosmology and the suicide of Hine-titama. Combined with her inability to discuss the subject with her mother, Grace decides to end her own life rather than live with the psychological and physical pain that has been inflicted upon her. Tane seemingly wooed Hane-titama, but Grace is not a

willing participant when Jake enters her room and rapes her. Unable to fight back, Grace retreats into her mind and waits for the ordeal to finish. Any form of rape is a traumatic experience, but for Grace the event is further amplified because her father is the perpetrator. Her own mother is unable to protect her from Jake's advances because Beth is also inebriated during the event. Similar to Hane-titama after she learns her lover is her father, Grace is unwilling to become her father's lover. Though Grace did not have a choice the first night Jake enters her room, she will not allow Jake to repeat his visit and decides that suicide will protect her from further assaults.

The connection between Grace and Hane-titama is founded upon oral tradition, yet present complex messages for contemporary readers. Grace's decision to commit suicide aligns with oral tradition, and by committing suicide Grace asserts her own agency while also exhibiting traditional Maori cultural beliefs and expectations. However, the event is problematic because Grace is not living in the traditional past. Grace inhabits a contemporary setting in which suicide is not an acceptable option. Based on the cataclysmic effect that Grace's suicide has upon the individuals she leaves behind, it is clear that Duff does not intend for readers to "accept" Grace's death. While Grace handles her own rape in a similar fashion to Hane-titame, self-inflicted violence does not translate into contemporary Maori communities. If individuals like Grace have a strong mother-child relationship, they will be more likely to discuss issues with mother-figures and less likely to inflict harm upon themselves. While suicide was historically accepted, contemporary communities have moved away from accepting suicide as a form of agency in Maori communities.

In Lee Tamahori's film adaptation of *Once Were Warriors*, the direct cultural implications found within the novel are altered because Grace is raped by "Only Bully," not her father. Grace's reaction to being raped is the same in both versions of *Once Were Warriors*, regardless of the perpetrator. The film, however, does not directly align with the Maori story of Tane and Hane-titama, and Grace's decision to commit suicide is therefore more complex. Grace may seemingly appear to be in a better position to receive external help regarding her situation, because her father was not the attacker, but the fundamental element in both the novel and the film is Grace's inability to confide in her mother. Without her mother, Grace is unable to heal within both the novel and film. The tension in the mother-child relationship creates a fracture and, after Grace has been raped, shatters in a way that seems irreparable.

Beth and Grace are distant from one another, and their inability to communicate makes it nearly impossible for Beth to fully step into the role of a mother-figure. Even though Beth attempts to provide food, clothing, shelter, love, and some comfort for her daughter, she is unable to separate her duties as a wife and as a mother and must choose between Jake's needs or her children's needs. In prioritizing Jake's needs, Beth is not able to care for her children. Thus, Beth is depicted as a woman who is more concerned with hosting her husband's parties than she is being a mother. Grace steps into the role of mother to her siblings until she feels "half mad" because Beth does not fulfill traditional or contemporary views of motherhood (Duff 21). As Beth notes, the last time that her daughter communicates with her is within a suicide note. In her letter, Grace reveals her feelings to Beth for the first and last time. Beth wishes she could have done more to protect her daughter, in part because she

blames herself, but also acknowledges that she cannot mend her relationship with Grace.

Tamahori's film also distances Beth from her son, Boogie. In the Heke home, Boogie has been unable to connect with his alcoholic father and his distant mother. Boogie acts out, and finds himself in trouble for breaking minor laws, and the Auckland court system decides his family cannot supervise him. Thus, Boogie is sent to a boy's home. During his exclusion from the Heke home, Boogie meets Bennett, a social services worker that significantly reshapes Boogie's life path. Boogie's initial reaction is to view Bennett, and all Auckland authorities, as hostile forces. However, Bennett takes an interest in Boogie and begins teaching him how to properly use a *taiaha*, a hand-to-hand combat weapon traditionally used by Maori warriors. Bennett assumes the role of elder teacher and passes cultural knowledge to Boogie. Bennett's teachings connect Boogie to aspects of Maori culture with which he has not previously identified in part because no male figure in Boogie's immediate family has assumed the role. By teaching Boogie how to use the *taiaha*, and other culturally specific knowledge, Bennett provides Boogie with a concept of "warrior" that is appropriate in a contemporary context. Bennett is a positive influence on Boogie, but he is also a cultural mediator who is able to help bring traditional knowledge back into the rest of the Heke home after Grace's death.

Grace continues to influence her community posthumously. Beth makes the decision to bring Grace's body back to land traditionally belonging to her family rather than bury Grace near the home Beth shares with Jake. This decision reveals the continuing distance that Beth is placing between her family and Jake, but also

indicates Beth's symbolic and physical return to traditional Maori culture and community. In returning to her home, Beth begins altering her identity as a mother. At the viewing of Grace's body, Beth apologizes to her daughter for her imperfections as a mother. The scene is compounded by the presence of Bennett. Again, Bennett stands in as more than a social worker looking out for Boogie's best interests. Bennett is a key figure in the delivery of the Maori blessings that surround Grace's funeral. The deeply rooted connection to traditional Maori culture is passed from Bennett to Boogie as he trains Boogie with the *taiaha*. At Grace's funeral, Bennett continues to transfer his knowledge to the Heke family and the rest of the surrounding community.

Bennett's role within the community allows him to transfer traditional Maori knowledge to a new generation of Maori youths and, in some cases, restore knowledge that has been lost to adults within the community. Bennett is not a mother or a father, but he effectively steps into both roles. Psychologically, Bennett is a nurturing figure to Boogie during Boogie's identity. While father-figures can also be supportive of their children, Bennett's tenderness towards Boogie is indicative of a motherly role. By passing sacred songs to Beth at Grace's funeral, Bennett is also transferring knowledge that has been absent from the Heke family prior to Grace's death. Bennett's presence at Grace's funeral allows Beth to acknowledge the importance of Maori cultural values. Following Bennett's example, and having seen how Boogie has transformed under Bennett's tutorage, Beth begins to take on the role of mother-figure that she did not assume when Grace was alive.

Beth begins to alter her life and steps into the role of mother-figure to her surviving children and the rest of the community. Grace's death is the catalyst that leads Beth to become a better mother to her surviving children. In both the novel and the film, Beth comes to understand that traditional familial standards of behavior are not applicable to her family. While Beth is expected to be a constant hostess, be subservient to her husband, and remain isolated from her family according to traditional Maori culture, Beth knows that her life must change. After Grace's death, Beth ascribes to the Maori way of thinking known as *kaupapa*. This type of knowledge "derives from the past and informs the future" (Aspin and Hutchings 420). Beth does not overtly dismiss traditional Maori teachings and knowledge, but does begin to adapt this knowledge to the contemporary community she inhabits. Beth becomes independent and leaves Jake, thus protecting her children from alcoholism, violence, and the possibility of sexual assault. Beth's transformation into a community mother is of note because through Beth, Duff suggests that the passing of cultural knowledge to youths, often a task strongly associated with Maori mothering, can greatly alter contemporary communities.

Beth becomes a surrogate mother when she takes Toot in; her decision to invite Toot into her home is partially based on Toot's friendship with Grace, but is also a demonstration of Beth's transition into a strong, confident Maori woman who is capable of mothering. But Beth also becomes heavily involved in cultural aspects of her community, as shown in the film during Grace's funeral when Beth becomes immersed in traditional knowledge, spirituality, and Maori teachings. No longer distanced from Maori-specific knowledge, Beth steps into the role of a traditional

warrior figure that will fight for her community and help rebuild the fractured familial infrastructure of the community that surrounds her.

As Beth undergoes her transformation, she also rebuilds her relationship with her son Nig. Even though Nig feels slighted by Beth for her decisions to place her husband's needs before those of her children, he notices Beth's change in mothering. Once Beth becomes a more active mother, Nig slowly returns to the family unit. In Tamahori's film adaptation, especially, Nig becomes much more involved with his family after Grace's death. After Grace's funeral, Nig returns with Beth and the other Heke children to their home and fills the role that Jake has neglected—that of the head of the household. Just as Beth begins to assume the duties of a Maori woman, Nig begins to undertake the duties of a Maori man. Thus, Nig and Beth confront Jake and Uncle Bully in the final scenes of the film as a newly united force.

Once Were Warriors suggests that the mother-child relationship impacts and is impacted by culture. Both the novel and the film indicate that mothers who address issues such as alcoholism, violence, sexual assault, and reclaiming identity can inspire meaningful changes within their families and communities, and communities appear ready for such messages of hope. Tamahori's film remained in New Zealand theaters for nearly twelve months, and one-third of the country's population is estimated to have viewed the film (Martens 138). The graphic representations of alcoholism, violence, domestic violence, gang activities, poverty, homelessness, sexual abuse, and teen suicide undoubtedly portray the effects of colonialism upon the Maori. However, positive changes within Maori communities have been documented as a result of Duff's and Tamahori's efforts to confront the issues. Within months after the release

of *Once Were Warriors* in theaters, New Zealand police departments saw an exponential rise in reported cases of domestic violence, and women's shelters received more admissions (Martens 139). While many of the issues presented in *Once Were Warriors* are still major concerns, a healing cycle has been established, and Maori youths are at the center of this process. According to Emiel Martens' research on the impact of *Once Were Warriors*, the film "especially appealed to Maori youngsters in the cities" (145). With so many younger individuals viewing the film, this upcoming generation can begin to shape their views on the issues within the film and can, hopefully, avoid perpetuating cycles of violence, alcoholism, and abuse.

Once Were Warriors illustrates harrowing examples of the negative effects of colonization upon the Maori people. However, both the text and the film provide examples of resilience within the Maori community. Alcoholism, domestic violence, and sexual abuse are negative situations, but Beth Heke begins to fight against these through her community activism. By teaching traditional values, Beth is able to influence the next generation in hopes that they will not succumb to the same negative behaviors of the current generation. Beth alters her life in honor of Grace, mending the mother-daughter relationship symbolically. In becoming a community mother, Beth undoubtedly reshapes the next generation while reestablishing the historic past within her community.

CONCLUSION

This study began with four questions: How are birthing, motherhood, and the mother-child relationship depicted in Indigenous literature? How do contemporary literary representations of these life events compare to traditional, tribally specific concepts, knowledge, and practices? How is the mother-child relationship established in Indigenous contemporary literature? And, finally, what impact do these literary representations of birthing and motherhood hold for contemporary readers and scholars of Indigenous literature? Clearly, Indigenous novels are full of examples of birthing and mothering. When compared to traditional practices, it is clear that colonization has altered the way in which Indigenous mothers birth, care for, and raise their children. Colonization has often negatively impacted the flow of traditional knowledge from mother to child, however, contemporary literature shows the emergence of strong surrogate and “other” mothers that are able to fill this void and pass cultural knowledge to the next generation. It is this key literary figure that can bring about hope for contemporary communities, because through this figure there will be community healing and a resurgence of Indigenous knowledge.

Using Arnold Krupat’s literary theory of nationalism and indigenism to analyze each text/Nation pairing focuses discussion on the immediate Nation represented within each novel. This type of analysis is beneficial for Indigenous literary studies because it allows researchers to analyze Indigenous literature without the use of Western theories. According to Krupat, nationalists appreciate this lens of analysis because “nationalists are leery of Native literatures being taught in the context of general American literature courses of surveys” and often believe the same

for literary studies (9). Nationalism allows readers to understand, for example, how Cherokee and Creek women experienced political power differently within their communities. However, Krupat also suggest that while nationalism is an important theory, “positions also need other positions” to help support a broader reading of Indigenous literature (7). Both indigenism and cosmopolitanism literary theories can help further examine Indigenous literature in a broader context by highlighting the similarities found across the Indigenous novels within this study, but also allows for a larger discussion of Indigenous literature as a world literature.

From an Indigenist point of view, “it is not the nation, but the ‘earth’ that is the source of the values on which a critical perspective must be based” (Krupat 10). For Indigenous literature, this literary theory is beneficial because it emphasizes similar experiences, for example, the impact of colonization, that are shared across Nations. The five novels discussed in this project come from distinctly different Indigenous Nations, but share striking similarities in their depiction of birthing, motherhood, womanhood, and the significant impact the mother-child relationship has for Indigenous communities as a whole.

Pregnancy is, first and foremost, a life stage often revered within the Ojibwe, Cherokee, Creek, and Maori novels *The Painted Drum*, *Faces in the Moon*, *The Way We Make Sense*, *The Marriage of Saints*, and *Once Were Warriors*. The cultures from which each novel originates have tribally specific guidelines and expectations for pregnant mothers, many of which dictate that the child is born into the mother’s community and their umbilical cord is buried in that location. In each traditional culture, women were distanced from other members of the communities when their

due dates approached. As represented in the novels *The Way We Make Sense*, *The Marriage of Saints*, and *Once Were Warriors*, multiple mothers reflect positively upon their pregnancies because of the way in which pregnancy links them to their culture's oral traditions. For example, this strong connection to traditional responsibilities of mothers is linked directly to oral stories about Selu in *Faces in the Moon*. Selu's story establishes a foundation for future generations of Cherokee mothers. In the novels, mothers are associated with teaching children traditional practices and cultural knowledge within not only Cherokee culture, but also within Ojibwe, Creek, and Maori Nations.

However, all of the novels suggest that the physical act of giving birth alone does not make a woman a mother. In *The Painted Drum*, Anaquot has given birth but she is not a "mother" to her youngest infant because she does not rear the child. Anaquot's body is a vessel but because she neglects the child, and does not care for the life she has given birth to, she is not a mother by Ojibwe standards. Instead, Anaquot's eldest daughter steps in and takes on the role of mother-figure to the infant. In *Faces in the Moon*, Lucie is distanced from her mother Gracie because of the fact that Gracie has never cared for Lucie. Instead, Lucie is raised by an Auntie, a woman that she will view as more of a mother-figure than her own biological mother will ever be. These "types" of mothers have been represented in Table 1 while Table 2 shows the different family structures represented in each novel.

Table 1: Types of mothers

	<i>Painted Drum</i>	<i>Faces in the Moon</i>	<i>The Way We Make Sense</i>	<i>The Marriage of Saints</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i>
Neglectful	Ira; Anaquot	Gracie			Beth
Attentive			Georgia	Georgia	
In-Between	Faye	Helen	Oklahoma; Indiana	Oklahoma; Indiana	Beth (later)
Surrogate/ Others	Chook; Anaquot's daughter; Shawnee	Aunt Lizzie	Manna	Manna	Grace; Bennett

A series of events transcends each of the novels in this study, creating a cycle worthy of discussion from an indigenist perspective. Within each of the novels, mother-figures come to face a life changing decision, during which time they must decide whether to maintain their relationship with their child or continue a relationship with a male lover. In all of these cases, the mother remains in her relationship with her lover. In *Faces in the Moon*, Gracie remains with an abusive, child molester and turns against her daughter. Regardless of whether or not Gracie was aware that J.D. raped her daughter, Lucie, she still sends Lucie away rather than mother her. Similarly, Oklahoma chooses to stay with Jack in Dawn Karima Pettigrew's novels even after Jack attempts to barter away one of their daughters, which severs Oklahoma's relationship with all of her daughter, each of which feels that Oklahoma did not do enough to protect Indiana. But *Once Were Warriors* best depicts a mother's decision to focus on her relationship with her lover rather than with her children. The decision for Beth to allow parties to take place at her home is complex because by allowing these events she is fulfilling the Maori obligation of

being a good hostess. Beth Heke is aware of the danger that she invites into her home, because the alcoholism and violence is commonplace at her husband Jake's parties, and chooses to continue to play hostess rather than protect her children. By placing her children in an unstable environment, Beth is partially at fault for Grace's rape, and since Grace does not view Beth as a mother that she can confide in, Grace commits suicide.

In these instances, children find themselves in fear of being abandoned either literally or metaphorically. In *The Marriage of Saints*, Manna becomes the caretaker of a young baby who is literally abandoned by her mother. However, Manna feels that she has also been abandoned by her own mother. Similarly, in *Faces in the Moon* Lucie believes that Gracie has abandoned her mentally long before she is left to be raised in the country by her Auntie. In *Once Were Warriors*, Grace feels that Beth has abandoned all of the children in order to attend rowdy parties downstairs, which leaves Grace to fill the role of mother-figure to her younger siblings. It is also clear that the Heke children are aware of the domestic violence and alcoholism that occurs within their family, which further distances them from their mother.

Table 2: Types of families

	<i>Painted Drum</i>	<i>Faces in the Moon</i>	<i>The Way We Make Sense</i>	<i>The Marriage of Saints</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i>
Single mother	Elsie; Ira	Helen; Gracie	Georgia; Indiana	Georgia; Indiana	
Surrogate Mother	Chook		Manna	Manna	Bennett; Grace
Married mother	Anaquot	Aunt Lizzie (surrogate)	Oklahoma;	Oklahoma;	Beth
Mother living with lover	Anaquot	Helen; Gracie			
One child	Elsie	Gracie	Manna (surrogate); Georgia; Indiana	Manna (surrogate); Georgia; Indiana	
Multiple children	Chook (surrogate); Anaquot	Helen	Oklahoma	Oklahoma	Beth; Bennett (surrogate)

Table 3: Types of mother-child relationships represented

	<i>Painted Drum</i>	<i>Faces in the Moon</i>	<i>The Way We Make Sense</i>	<i>The Marriage of Saints</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i>
Mom-Daughter	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Mom-Son	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Grandparent-Children	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Absent mom-Orphan	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
Surrogate-Daughter	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Surrogate-Son	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
Community mom - Community	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES

Violence against women is depicted in every novel within this study². Abuses include mental abuse, being beaten, sexually assaulted, raped, and women within Dawn Karima Pettigrew's work even gossip about women being beaten so badly they nearly die. Alcohol is often depicted alongside these acts of violence, showing yet another trend that is represented across novels within this study. In many of these literary instances, abused women are unable to leave their abuser because there is a lack of community support present in a contemporary environment. Whereas traditionally a woman had the option of divorcing her husband and having other women in the community share the responsibility of raising her children, contemporary environments reflect poverty, a lack of social mobility, and an inability for women to leave their attackers. In cases where young daughters have been raped, these texts show examples of mothers being naïve to the incident, and daughters finding themselves unable to mention their attack.

Table 4: Types of violence represented

	<i>Painted Drum</i>	<i>Faces in the Moon</i>	<i>The Way We Make Sense</i>	<i>The Marriage of Saints</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i>
Physical		Wife/husband			Wife/husband
Physical		Parent/child	Parent/child	Parent/child	Parent/Child
Physical	Other/Child	Other/Child	Other/Child	Other/Child	Other/Child
Sexual					Family member
Sexual	Non-related	Non-related	Non-related	Non-relative	
Rape					Family member
Rape		Non-related	Non-related	Non-relative	

² Refer to Table 4 for comparative information on types of violence represented in each novel.

From an indigenist perspective, there are key historic factors that may help to explain why multiple Nations share similar experiences within their literature. First and foremost, the impact of colonization greatly altered womanhood for many Nations. In some communities women lost some of their traditional powers and rights, and in other communities women's power became almost non-existent. As Native men became the heads of their households, views on womanhood often changed. With colonization came higher rates of physical abuse against women, including sexual assault and rape. Lastly, during the Relocation Era, American Indian communities were torn apart and separated in an attempt to further assimilate Native peoples, creating a distinct loss of traditional Indigenous community infrastructure. The fact that all of these similar incidents appear within five different texts by different authors from different Nations is very telling: these issues are real, current issues that many Indigenous women face. Though these events take place on the fictitious page, they mirror real life events.

Table 5: Types of Colonial Impact

	<i>Painted Drum</i>	<i>Faces in the Moon</i>	<i>... Make Sense</i>	<i>Marriage of Saints</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i>
Alcoholism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Relocation	Rural	Rural / Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban
Living in Homeland	Yes	Yes	Varies by character	Varies by character	Beth -- No
Christian Influence	Yes	Unknown	Yes	Yes	No
Native Language Used in Novel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Traditional Community	No	No	No	No	No
Loss of Traditional Knowledge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

While some of the issues raised within the novels are seemingly Nation-specific, or even Indigenous-specific, there is one issue that has universal applications. The mother-child relationship is a relationship that exists regardless of physical borders, boundaries, ethnicities, or culture. Within this study, the mother-child relationship depicted in each Indigenous novel can be examined on two levels. First, the relationship shared between the mother and child is unique to each mother-child pair, and depicts how differently each mother can be perceived from her child's and her own vantage point. Secondly, without the strong foundations that are created in mother-child relationships, communities themselves will fracture. Thus, the mother-child relationship reflects the need for both personal and communal infrastructures so that tradition may be incorporated into the contemporary present.

Examples like Sky-Woman show the difference between the past and present. Sky-Woman is the preeminent example of womanhood and strength within traditional Ojibwe society. Within *The Painted Drum* there are very divergent representations of mothering. Chook is a striking example of a woman that uses traditional mothering techniques as well as addresses contemporary concerns while raising children, including children that are not her own. Because Chook has an effective example of mothering to recall, she is better able to pass similar mothering patterns to her own children and grandchildren. However, Anaquot serves as a type of warning to Ojibwe mothers that are raising children in Erdrich's novel. Anaquot abandons her children, an offense that fractures not only Anaquot's relationship with her children, but later causes unrest within the entire community for generations to come. *The Painted Drum* depicts multiple mothering styles, some of which are more effective than others for the child's wellbeing, stressing that there is no single experience for mothers or children as they negotiate the mother-child relationship.

For a majority of *Once Were Warriors*, Beth Heke struggles to fulfill her mothering responsibilities. The visual displays of alcoholism and violence within Lee Tamahori's film adaptation are perhaps best able to depict the external forces within Beth's environment that prohibit her from fully attending to her children's needs. Even though it is clear that Beth loves her children, her love does not protect the family. Grace feels unsafe in her own home after she is sexually assaulted, and she commits suicide rather than discuss the situation with Beth. The physical and emotional distance between Grace and her mother is key within *Once Were Warriors* because Beth only begins to re-examine her role as a mother after Grace's death.

Grace's death sets Beth's transformation into a community-mother in motion. Having "failed" her daughter, Beth sets out to change the lives of her living children, but also begins taking in other abandoned children like Grace's close friend Toot.

The mother-child relationship is complex because there are many layers and external forces that must be addressed on a case-to-case basis. The only universal commonality that exists is the admission that a perfect mother does not exist. Yet, as a cycle, the mother-child relationship is individualized and can be influenced by internal and external forces. During the first stage of the mother-child relationship the child idealizes the mother. In this stage, the mother and child are united and the child views the mother as an individual that protects and cares for them. However, internal and external forces begin to place a strain upon the relationship. In multiple cases, the child begins to feel that the mother has abandoned them on either a literal or emotional level.

More significantly, the mother-child relationship is dualistic. This relationship alters not only the individual mother-child pair in question, but the community as a whole. Since mothers are often responsible for passing cultural knowledge to the next generation, children that grow up without mothers can lose these connections. In *The Painted Drum* the children that have grown up without strong mother-figures in their life are often culturally disadvantaged. Bernard, Anaquot's grandson, is uncertain of his own identity and aspects of Ojibwe culture because his own mother did not learn parenting techniques from Anaquot. Faye was also abandoned by her mother and is able to hear the sound of the drum. She too struggles with her identity because her relationship with her mother had been severed. In both cases, the mother-

child relationship has greatly altered the way in which the child perceives the world that they live in. However, the larger community also suffers because these motherless children do not have access to traditional cultural knowledge. Thus, the severance of the mother-child relationship directly diminishes the dissemination of tribal knowledge within the community. However, the mother-child relationship can be repaired when the child begins to realize that mothers are not infallible. Children forgive at different times, and while the mother-child relationship takes time to rebuild, the prospect of a relationship existing in the future is promising. In the same way that a mother-child relationship can be mended, communities that have been effected by a lack of mothering can also be rebuilt.

One way to repair communities struggling to regain their connection to the traditional past is to establish networks with mother-figures that have retain culturally specific knowledge. In *The Painted Drum* the community does not know how to properly handle the traditional drum in part because motherless children have grown up without being introduced to culturally specific knowledge. It is the surrogate mother, Chook, who is able to bring traditionally knowledge back into the community. Chook's own experiences with her mother have given her the knowledge that she can bring back to the community. By infusing her knowledge, Chook is able to begin rebuilding the community by merging the traditionally past with the contemporary society her people inhabit.

The Maori community in *Once Were Warriors* has undergone significant changes as well, but Grace's death acts as a catalyst for change within the community. Beth has removed herself from her own culture when she leaves to build

her home with Jake. Maori traditional culture dictates that a Maori woman should move to her husband's home. Nevertheless, Maori women were still expected to maintain connections to their culture and pass culturally specific knowledge to their children. Beth fails to dedicate herself to her children because she is forced to live her life surrounded by Jake's vices. But after Grace's death, Beth returns to her homeland and begins to root herself in the culture that she has forsaken. Upon this emersion, Beth is able to take certain aspects of traditional Maori culture and bring them to a contemporary setting. By blending these traditions and values Beth becomes a stronger mother to her children and then begins to establish herself as a surrogate mother for other abandoned children. Again, Indigenous literature and film proposes that strong mother-figures can reshape communities.

Since the mother-child relationship has the strength and ability to alter communities, it could be assumed that children without mothers have no way to connect to their cultural identity, yet Indigenous novels negate this conclusion. Instead, members within communities who step in as mother-figures and community leaders are able to fill voids faced by abandoned children. In *The Painted Drum*, Chook's role in the community as a conveyor of culture is just as significant as her role as mother-figure to the grandchildren she has taken into her home. Similarly, Bennett provides the Maori with hope towards the future. While the Heke family's knowledge of their culture has been disrupted by alcoholism, Bennett is able to infuse culture into Boogie's teaching. In turn, Boogie learns to control his emotions in a way that his father, Jake, has been unable to do. Even though Chook and Bennett are not direct relations to the community members they take in, they act similarly to other

mothers by passing on traditions that would otherwise be lost to these abandoned individuals. In such, all three novels suggest that contemporary communities can be rebuilt and strengthened through varied forms of the mother-child relationship.

In conclusion, the mother-child relationship is worthy of a cosmopolitan analysis because mothers are at the forefront of all cultures, and the relationship they share with their children can have a significant impact on their community.

Contemporary Indigenous literature continues to depict that even though traditional birthing and mothering knowledge has been affected by colonization efforts, these traditions have in no way become universally assimilated. Children themselves view their mothers in phases, and though they can begin to hate their mothers for past slights, they have the ability to forgive. Through forgiveness, children are able to reconnect to aspects of their lives that may have been neglected during their childhood. Similarly, motherless children can often find surrogate mothers that will help connect them to their culture, traditions, and oral stories about womanhood.

Meanwhile, mothers continue to maintain a connection to traditional oral stories and examples of womanhood. By maintaining mother-child relationships, contemporary mothers can reshape and alter the communities that they are living in. In such, mothers are far more than women that give birth to children—they are the foundation upon which all societies are built.

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