

the resignation of the
governor-general | *Family Drama and National
Reproduction*

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— CHILDREN ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

Peter Hollingworth resigned his position as Governor-General of Australia in May 2003 more than three years short of the term for which he had been appointed. His resignation came after nearly eighteen months of controversy over how he had handled cases of the sexual abuse of children while in his previous job as Archbishop of the Brisbane Diocese of the Anglican Church and the release of a report of a church inquiry which found him culpable.

The Queensland Anglican inquiry was but one of many such inquiries during the period when the Hollingworth story was coming and going from Australian media and political agendas. Throughout that time, and in the period for some years before, and since, the issue of the abuse of children while in institutional care, past and present, has been a constant feature of public debate and inquiry. Notably, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families was the first national inquiry.¹ Its report, *Bringing Them Home*, was released in 1997. There have been three other reports since.² As well as these national reports into the care of children, there has been at least one (but often more) major inquiry and report into the care of children in every state and territory in Australia since *Bringing Them Home*.³ These inquiries have documented evidence of the often systematic abuse of children in the care of governments, in the care of Christian and other agencies, and in the care of foster families. Some agencies have conducted their own inquiries.

Beyond the reports, a wide array of representations of children, nearly all allegedly abused or at risk of abuse, have been put to political use in recent years across a variety of discursive fields and for a range of political purposes. The experiences of children have also been the

subjects of politically important court cases. These specific high-profile political, legal and media contests and scandals around the figure of the child take place against an ambient noise of constant media coverage of the everyday sexual abuse of children, a phenomena not confined to Australia. The editors of a US collection of queer perspectives on children observe that 'the persistence of stories about this trauma indicates the extent to which our culture is both repulsed by and fascinated with the traumas attributed to the sexual abuse of children'.⁴

The outcomes and effects of the state and national inquiries and the political crises concerning the care of children that have appeared with regularity are moot. With respect to inquiries, a generous assessment would be that the often fine recommendations made in the reports do not lead to speedy action. The most recent national report at the time of writing quotes an earlier report saying 'it is difficult to see where progress has been made and members of the community may legitimately ask how many recommendations, from how many reviews does it take for action to occur?'⁵ More broadly, and paradoxically contrary to the ongoing high visibility of the abuse of children, experts in various fields related to the welfare of children regularly make comments about the difficulty of getting children's issues onto political agendas.⁶ For the purposes of this paper I propose that we understand the inquiries into the care of children, the election promises and so on, as not *necessarily* part of any meaningful social policy response to the problems that are identified but, rather, as performative events through which subjects are produced, and so mutually intersubjectively governed.⁷

The Hollingworth controversy stands second only to the *Bringing Them Home* report in the amount of publicity given to political events related to the care of children over the decade that we can retrospectively describe as the Howard years. The stories of the Governor-General's resignation told of abuse, corruption and cover up in a key institution of white Australia, and crisis in the authority of a religious and national patriarchal figurehead *and* they became meaningful in relation to a range of other contemporaneous investigations, scandals and media/political events concerning children. For these reasons, the Governor-General affair constitutes a rich archive through which to identify subjects in the national drama of concern with the care of children and to reflect on the qualities and temporal trajectories associated with them. A critical interpretation of the story may have much to tell us about the shifting flows and forces of power during the Howard era in Australia. While the government has changed, these configurations of power are by no means of the past. Controversy around the relationship between children and sexuality has animated the first year of the Rudd government. I have, however, chosen to write of the Governor-General affair as a phenomenon of a time just past—even as we are uncertain of the dimensions of our new time.

In its investigation of the Hollingworth national drama this article foregrounds the politics of race. The Howard years, where I have identified a heightened concern with the care of children, were also a time of intensified contest over issues of race in Australia and saw a

resurgence of racism. The release of the *Bringing Them Home* report was followed by demands for an apology from the national government to those whose lives were affected. The apology and claims to sovereignty made by Indigenous peoples were taken up, if unevenly, in the government-sponsored and community movement for 'reconciliation'. While we are now 'post apology', Indigenous sovereignty remains a challenge that is barely engaged by governments and extreme Indigenous social disadvantage continues.⁸ The defence of the nation's sovereignty from intensely racialised imagined external threats, particularly from asylum seekers approaching Australia by sea but also from enemies in the 'war on terror', emerged as another theme in national politics during the Howard government. In a political overview of the six-month period that included Hollingworth's resignation one political scientist noted that 'defence and international security again pervade[d] the Australian news media'.⁹ The new government appears to have moved more distinctly away from its predecessor on these issues than on Indigenous issues.

— WAYWARD REPRODUCTION

Following Alys Eve Weinbaum's analysis, the focus on the production and reproduction of child and nation already always invokes the politics of race. She writes: 'Thinking about nations and national formation is always caught within a racialized reproductive logic about the propagation of national subjects and citizens'.¹⁰ By the same token, as many feminist writers have argued, 'all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender' and 'nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space'.¹¹ Weinbaum sums up by saying that reproductive politics are 'the racialized foundation upon which are built nations' (39).

In thinking about Peter Hollingworth's story in the context of the reproduction of a racialised nation, the white Australian nation, I consider the stories of the sexual abuse of children at the centre of the Hollingworth controversy as evidence of what Weinbaum calls 'wayward reproduction'. Weinbaum's paradigmatic case of 'wayward reproduction' is interracial reproduction. Working through an analysis that rejects a biological basis to 'race', ('the idea that racial "purity" can be reproduced is a ruse' (59)), yet noting the continuing and powerfully motivating belief that race can be reproduced through biological reproduction, she goes on:

From the vantage point of critical genealogical inquiry it [racial purity] is an idealization of reality that can only be produced by *disavowing what is all too well known*, and by repressing or otherwise manipulating the dimly, and sometimes unconsciously perceived complexity of our racial and reproductive histories. (59, emphasis added.)

That is, the fantasy of racial and national purity depends on the disavowal of the ubiquity of, and/or punishment of, interracial reproduction. The related purity of the state of childhood

similarly depends on a process of repression and disavowal of those experiences that belie the rigid boundary between child and adult.

Weinbaum notes that, historically, interspecies reproduction has been the analogy of choice for human racial mixture. Consequently, representations of interspecies reproduction can reference interracial reproduction and indeed 'the monstrosity of all wayward reproductions' (239). Arguably, while keeping its historical reference to interracial and interspecies reproduction, 'monstrosity' is used as much these days to refer to the sexual abuse of children as it is to these foundational forms of wayward reproduction. In the *Australian* newspaper that reported on the Anglican inquiry that found Hollingworth culpable, for example, an inside story detailing the nine matters involving him that were investigated is titled 'Monsters Who Preyed on Children'.¹² Weinbaum is careful to distinguish the changing sexual economy of reproduction—the growing legitimacy of lesbian mothers, for example—from the racial economy of reproduction which she claims is remarkably unchanging in contemporary USA. Nevertheless, if we accept her proposition about the racialised meanings of reproduction in general, her term 'wayward reproduction' can be deployed to describe the diverse manifestations of non-normative reproduction. Even when they are not explicitly crossing racial boundaries, non-(hetero)normative reproductions involving white bodies, for example, are often seen as threats to or betrayals of whiteness. I have argued elsewhere that white women who seek abortions, for example, are 'a worry to the white national interest'.¹³ It is in this vein that I identify the sexual abuse of children as 'wayward reproduction'. As well as stretching its racial dimensions in this deployment of Weinbaum's term I am also stretching its reproductive dimensions to include the care and raising of children as well as their physical biological conception, gestation and birthing. This is of course consistent with feminist appreciations of child rearing that acknowledge the breadth of labour involved in human reproduction.¹⁴ It is also inclusive of what we know about the potential physical, emotional and social impacts of sexual abuse on children.¹⁵

My claiming of the sexual abuse of children as wayward reproduction is not to avoid its condemnation. It is to locate it among many forms of reproductive practice, of the treatment of children in particular, which constitute the repressed and disavowed 'complexity of our racial and reproductive histories' (59). By using the term 'wayward reproduction' beyond Weinbaum's references to interracial reproduction to refer to the sexual abuse of children I do not intend to water down nor disrespect by reductive analogy the experiences of those whose lives have been marked disadvantageously by the policing of interracial reproduction. It is worth noting, however, that the two social phenomenon often coincided in Australia in the experiences of those Indigenous children, often with Indigenous mothers and white fathers, who were stolen from their families. Needless to say any complaint or revelation of such experience was usually denied and often punished and like most stories of the sexual

abuse of children had and has anecdotal value but no legal standing as ‘truth’.¹⁶ My use of ‘wayward reproduction’ includes the reproductive politics of white domains as racialised politics inasmuch as they constitute struggles over the disavowals and repressions that describe the boundaries of whiteness and the distribution of white privilege.

Let me briefly remind you of the Peter Hollingworth story. He became Governor-General in June 2001, after ten years as archbishop of the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane—during which time he had been named Australian of the Year. Five months after he began his duties as Governor-General the Supreme Court in Queensland found in favour of a young woman who had claimed she had been sexually abused a decade earlier by a boarding-house master at an Anglican church school.¹⁷ The December 2001 trial ordered that record damages of \$834,800 be paid to the victim by the school, which was represented in court by the Anglican diocese. \$400,000 of the damages was ‘as punishment to the diocese for its failure in providing its duty of care’ (202), a failure in which Peter Hollingworth was deeply implicated. The day after the trial ended the People’s Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse, led by Hetty Johnson, ‘Australia’s most prominent and outspoken child protection activist’ (front cover), called for his resignation. Other groups and individuals followed.

More allegations of the sexual abuse of children in Queensland Anglican schools, and their ‘cover up’ by the diocese, followed in the new year. In February 2002 another major story came to light. Hollingworth had come to know of a past sexual relationship between a teenage girl and a clergyman who had gone on to become an Anglican bishop (later identified as Beth Heinrich and Donald Shearman respectively). He had, however, decided that because the bishop was a valued member of the church that no action would be taken. On the ABC TV *Australian Story* program that featured Hollingworth he claimed, in words that were to be oft repeated, that ‘this was not sex abuse, there was no suggestion of rape or anything like that. Quite the contrary, my information is that it was rather the other way around.’¹⁸ At this point Hollingworth’s successor as Brisbane archbishop, Phillip Aspinall, instigated an inquiry into the handling of child sex abuse cases brought against the Anglican Church in Queensland.

The intensity of the issue was reignited when the church’s report was released in May 2003. The report condemned Hollingworth on two of the nine matters involving him during his tenure as archbishop that had been investigated. He was criticised because he ‘let a known paedophile continue working as a priest’ and for his lack of disapproval of Bishop Shearman’s behaviour in his communication to Beth Heinrich. The *Australian* front-page story on the report was headlined ‘G-G Protected Sex Abuser’.¹⁹

Amidst the response to the church inquiry a woman alleged that Hollingworth had raped her in the 1960s. Hollingworth stood down while the allegations were dealt with.²⁰ Calls for his resignation returned, including in a historic motion of the Australian Senate. With little public support (but with that of then prime minister, John Howard, until the end)

Hollingworth formally resigned on 25 May 2003. He was eventually replaced as Governor-General by Major General Michael Jeffrey, a former military man and thus conventional choice for head of state. He is also a man that historian Anna Haebich notes is on record in his support for assimilation policies towards Indigenous people.²¹

When Peter Hollingworth returned to the public gaze in an interview with the *Bulletin* magazine two years after his resignation he was unrepentant.²² Having suffered what the editor of the magazine describes as 'a public crucifixion', in which Hollingworth feels he was both unfairly accused and subsequently silenced, he told of feeling wounded by those friends and charities with whom he was associated who had shunned him. He performed, arguably, a kind of 'vicarious victimhood',²³ a predictable strategy of patriarchal whiteness when held to account. He was continuing to take medication for post-traumatic stress depression and still 'struggling to understand and deal with what happened'. Ironically, these are experiences described by those in whose name the calls for his resignation were made.

I turn now to a consideration of the key subjects in the story, looking first at the image of the child. Representations of the child outside narratives of reproduction, while possible, are often difficult to imagine and not often conceived. In this case, I argue that the national drama of 'wayward reproduction' involving the child was, again, played out through a choreography of national family characters and in this way the potential of the story to unsettle some of the certainties on which the nation is reproduced were contained. My argument is demonstrated through an elaboration of the three central national/familial characters: the child, the father and the mother.

— THE INNOCENT WHITE CHILD

Media coverage of the Governor-General's engagement with the sexual abuse of children in the Anglican church focused more on the processes of the management of complaints, and then the details of the controversy itself, rather than the experiences of the children or the relations of power that enabled the abuse. The handful of lurid but brief accounts of sexual abuse were, arguably, thus even more startling.²⁴ The words 'child' and 'children' very rarely appeared in the media coverage outside the pairing 'child abuse' and 'child protection'. These words implicitly reproduced the image of the passive and innocent child, the stock image of children across a wide range of cultural representations of child sexual abuse,²⁵ an image further enabled by the (understandable) anonymity of most of the child (now adult) victims.

Key to childhood innocence in general is the child's categorical separation from the adult and it is this separation that is threatened by revelations of sexual abuse. Sexuality (a dimension of agency), a category only legitimately accorded to adults and only in their relation with other adults, is revealed to be not so neatly confined. This affront to a basic distinction of contemporary dominant discourse, this wayward reproduction, demands the reinstatement of innocence.

Writing about visual imagery of children in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, Patricia Holland argues that this imagery is 'well suited' to 'the nostalgia each of us feels for a lost moment of satisfaction and a longing for a future of reconciliation and peace'.²⁶ Noting the actual catastrophic social changes that had happened to British society over the latter part of the twentieth century, she writes: 'In the constant renewal of childhood, the lost harmonious past can remain forever present and promise a future in which innocence is regained'.²⁷ A past, present and future imagined through the innocent child, where sentimental attachments stand in place of engagement with real life tough issues, suggests the world of what US writer Lauren Berlant calls the 'infantile citizen', whose political subjectivity is based on 'faith in the nation' and 'the suppression of critical knowledge'.²⁸ The renewal of childhood as innocence thus may deliver, in the Australian context, a lost harmonious past where 'all Australians [have] a sense of belonging to "one nation"' and 'pride in the heroic achievements of "our" forebears', which is how Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter described John Howard's preferred version of history.²⁹ Revelations of the sexual abuse of children, and their deliberate cover-up by those at the head of the nation-state, thus threatened the viability of not only childhood innocence and the infantile citizen's equilibrium but also the historical past that these figures both require and guarantee.

There was a glimpse of a figurative child who was not sexually innocent in the Hollingworth story.³⁰ I refer here to Hollingworth's statement on national television that Beth Heinrich had initiated, or welcomed, Donald Shearman's sexual advances when she was fourteen and he was her boarding house master. One journalist wrote of his comment that 'The hint of smile then played on his lips, as if we were all in on the joke. Australians did not find it funny'.³¹ This version of the sexually precocious child thus briefly appeared in the story to be met with round condemnation. Hollingworth's claim made the day after the program aired that he had never condoned the priest's act, 'regardless of whether or not the girl was a willing participant', further indicated to this journalist that, 'in modern parlance, Dr Hollingworth "just doesn't get it"'. The journalist went on to claim, not unreasonably, that Hollingworth's comments reproduced the knowledge of the priest, 'rather than his childhood victim', and further contributed to the silencing of those who have been sexually abused. While this may be literally true, on no side was there space for the voice of children whose sexual experience may be more complicated than only victimisation.

Steven Angelides has recently written a persuasive critique of dominant discourses of child sexual abuse which points to their desire for the recuperation of the child to a blameless, passive, asexual and innocent position.³² Like others, he argues that the dominant ideology of childhood sexuality, and the ideology of innocence in particular, is part of the problem, not part of the solution, when addressing the problem of the sexual abuse of children.³³ Angelides is particularly concerned with the erasure of any sense of an agentic childhood sexuality from discourses of sexual abuse. From a child-centred point of view concerned

with the agency of the child he argues that 'danger' and 'morality' as the key tropes for the relationship between children and sexuality (written in the Hollingworth stories as 'child abuse' and 'child protection' respectively) be replaced with 'education', 'risk' and 'pleasure' and that only then will we be able to 'think pragmatically about concrete strategies for assisting children in developing risk assessment skills and safe contexts for the experience of pleasure'. He makes clear that he is not arguing for a return of the Lolita model of 'child precocity, flirtatiousness and seductiveness'³⁴ that seemed entrenched in Hollingworth's account of Beth Heinrich. These concerns are far from an abstract theoretical dilemma but evident in the ambivalence in Beth Heinrich's adult reflection on her lifelong sexual obsession with Donald Shearman, beginning with their sexual relationship when she was fourteen. The *ABC Australian Story* where she spoke publicly 'for the first time' concludes with her comment that 'it bothers me that if Donald Shearman came back and said he was sorry and wanted to live with me, it bothers me that I might be willing to let him'.³⁵

The imagined innocent child in whose name the Governor-General was brought down was not without racial identity. Arguably it was a white child. This is, in part, a claim about the generic child and in particular the child of erotic narratives, including abuse narratives.³⁶ But in the story of the Governor-General the claim of whiteness also has basis in empirical sociological evidence. The literal children, past and present, whose stories brought about Hollingworth's downfall were all children in the care of the Anglican church, and so likely to be Anglican children, private school children, middle-class and of Anglo background, some capable of mounting a court case against the Anglican church. It should be noted, of course, that the case of the woman who was successful in her action against the church may well have involved, and in any case must be understood against, the norm of difficulty, if not trauma, for those who seek redress for experiences of sexual abuse as children through the criminal justice system with no guarantee of success. Australian child sexual abuse activist and academic Caroline Taylor writes that despite historically unprecedented awareness of and attention to child sexual abuse 'the reality in the court is that stigma and disbelief continue to be levelled at alleged victims'. She goes on to note that 'proportionate to reports of sexual offenses conviction rates for rape and other sexual offenses remain low, exceedingly low in some jurisdictions'.³⁷

More significantly, the whiteness of the imagined child in the Hollingworth case becomes clear in the process of juxtaposition when we consider high profile legal cases regarding children conducted in close temporal proximity to the Governor-General story. The initial legal defeat in August 2001 of two members of the Stolen Generations, Lorna Cubillo and Peter Gunner, in their campaign to seek legal redress from the Commonwealth government for their suffering after being removed from their mothers in the Northern Territory in 1947 and 1956 respectively was reiterated in the Federal Court of Appeal. Despite rhetorical claims that the rights of the child guided the removal of Indigenous children, Hannah Robert

concludes that in the Cubillo and Gunner case ‘it is the “right” of the (white, Anglo-) Australian Department to take, civilise, and “educate” Aboriginal children and to intervene in everyday Aboriginal family life which is being upheld’.³⁸

In another case, the children of the Afghani Bakhtiyari family, then held in Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia with other asylum seekers under the government’s policy of mandatory detention for ‘unlawful non-citizens’, invoked the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to have their detention declared unlawful. In 2003, in the wake of the Governor-General’s resignation, the Full Court of the Family Court found in their favour. This ruling then paved the way for a ruling later that year that they be released from detention. But nine months later the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs appealed that ruling and it was overturned unanimously by the High Court. In his judgement Kirby J concluded that ‘the Australian legislature intends a system of mandatory detention to remain in force with *no distinction to be made between children and adults*’ and this must be respected.³⁹

It is beyond the scope of this article to compare on legal grounds the different determinations regarding children made by different courts in relation to different laws. Suffice to say that these different cases involving differently racialised children, and the images and stories of children that were circulating more broadly at the time, draw a grid marked by race in its determination of who is a child and when a child’s rights vis a vis (white) adult or institutional power will be recognised.

Let me conclude this overview comparison of court cases involving differently racialised children with reference to a political controversy that germinated and unfolded at the exact time as the initial phases of the Governor-General crisis. The ‘children overboard’ affair refers to the Howard government’s claim in early October 2001 that a group of predominantly Middle Eastern people on a boat approaching Australia in order to seek asylum had deliberately thrown their children overboard in order to force first their rescue and then access to Australia. This claim was subsequently proved false. Many have argued that the ‘children overboard’ story played a significant part in inciting a fearful xenophobic response that contributed to the government’s re-election later that year.⁴⁰ In the prevailing story of the children overboard affair it was Australia, not asylum-seeking children, who were in need of protection: Prime Minister Howard stated that ‘we’re not a nation that’s going to be intimidated by this kind of behaviour’.⁴¹ This (fabricated) abuse of racially othered children confirmed the baseness of their race rather than the vulnerability of their age.

— BAD WHITE FATHERS

In the story of the white children whose fate was being discussed more sympathetically it is plausible to argue that Peter Hollingworth plays the role of Father. I make this claim not only because media coverage of his time as Governor-General repeatedly drew attention to

his combination of the performance of his official duties with simultaneous performances as (grand)father. For example, the Adelaide *Advertiser* reported of his swearing in ceremony that he 'could have been a grandfather cuddling his baby grandsons ... Four-day-old grandson William was the youngest witness in the chamber'.⁴² Hollingworth's status as a public father extended to being named, incorrectly, as a Father of the Year in a news report.⁴³ But above all, in his role as head of the nation state, and remembering Anne McClintock's claim that 'nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies',⁴⁴ Hollingworth was the father of the nation. Applying the trope of wayward reproduction, however, he was a Wayward Father.

I agree with legal academic Sandra Berns that Australia has been experiencing a 'risk society panic over masculinity and, ultimately, over the status of fatherhood'.⁴⁵ Assumptions about fatherhood in recent changes in law and social policy suggest that 'fatherhood is fragile' and needs, and is receiving, constant bolstering.⁴⁶ One cultural side of these phenomena has been the increasing number of images of fathers and their children—*without women*. Elspeth Probyn alerted us to such imagery in advertisements for McDonald's in the late 1990s. She noted then that 'feminists now find themselves surrounded by images of the family that are ... *barren* of any connotation of sexual difference'.⁴⁷ Representations like these of the family with no mother, or alternatively of celebratory father and child duos, have not abated. Against this background, and in particular with reference to the law, Berns observes that there is in general a lack of awareness of 'the degree to which patriarchy is resurgent'.⁴⁸

That it is a white patriarchy does, perhaps, need to be noted. The government disrespect for, and indeed public humiliation of, asylum-seeking fathers is a phenomenon that puts the (white) Australian-ness of the fathers who are currently in the ascendancy in relief. In a radio interview leading psychiatrist Louise Newman, who has spent several years working with asylum seekers in and out of detention centres, noted that there are 'very specific issues for men who are also fathers who are charged with, and experience themselves as failing in their duty to protect their wives and particularly their children, who witness the deterioration of their own family and who suffer a tremendous amount of guilt as a result of that'.⁴⁹ In its coverage of an instance of this trauma the front page of the *Weekend Australian* in July 2002 told of the thwarted attempt of two of the five Baktiyari children to seek asylum at the British embassy in the wake of their escape from the Woomera Detention Centre. The story was illustrated with a large photo of their father who, living legally in Sydney, had come to meet them before their forced return to Woomera. In a reiterating performance of disrespect and humiliation the photo is captioned 'Mr Baktiyari after *failing* to meet his sons yesterday' (emphasis added) and clearly depicts his anguish. The story reports a Victorian Greens spokesperson accusing the Howard government of '*deliberately preventing* the sons' reunion with their father' before they returned to detention.⁵⁰ Aboriginal fathers are, similarly,

materially thwarted and discursively undermined in their roles as fathers. An advertisement for Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) is headed '45% of Aboriginal men die before age 45. Many are fathers'.⁵¹ Their imprisonment, in numbers disproportionate to their presence in the Australian population, also does not assist their performance as fathers.⁵² Images of Aboriginal men as fathers, let alone affirming representations, are rare in mainstream public spheres. This stripping of the paternal rights and identities of men who are racialised is only the historical norm in many colonial societies where what are normatively deemed natural paternal capacities and entitlements turn out to be the exclusive property of white men.⁵³ Non-white men are not, however, spared gender-specific humiliations.

But the white father is not a unified or unproblematic figure. Fiona Probyn has pinpointed the specific *problem* of the white father in her discussion of the literal white fathers of so many of the stolen generation children.⁵⁴ These historical white fathers are relatively absent in the historical records and relatedly absent in most popular representations of the stolen generations. Probyn points to a 'wider denial' of both desire and abuse in sexual contact between white men and Aboriginal women which she notes are 'crucial aspects in the history of the stolen generations' (68). She claims that historical accounts that are available demonstrate that some white fathers of children born to Aboriginal women lost some of their white privileges and that 'descriptions of white men among the blacks draws attention to the instabilities of "whiteness" itself' (69). The actions of these 'bad' white fathers were then cause for introducing 'the "good white father" government into the lives of *all* Aboriginal people' (70), a parent figure also embodied in Christian church agencies (71). She considers John Howard's management of the place of the white fathers of the stolen generations in Australian history in his speeches about the stolen generations, Australian history, reconciliation and community. She argues that 'the denial of the stolen generations history is inextricably linked to the silence surrounding white fathers' and that Howard's community, (his 'fellow Australians'), is based on 'disassociation from "bad white fathers"'. Probyn claims that bad white fathers are 'repressed/disassociated in order that they may return in the form of the "good" white paternal figure of [Howard's] imaginary "Australian community"' (61–2). In her view this return sees '*the state* as good White Father' (73, emphasis added).

Probyn observes that 'Howard's argument that present generations cannot be held responsible for the actions of those in the past' suggests 'a peculiar belief that generational and family relationships cannot and do not transmit either cultural capital, memory or meaning' (73). The transmission of meaning over time in the form of hurt and trauma (and knowledge), is exactly what child sexual abuse survivors and their advocates have been so successful in establishing, discursively if not legally, and in the cases involving the Governor-General and the Anglican church establishing as the basis of accountability, justice and compensation. The greatest good white father, 'the embodiment of the nation at its formal

best',⁵⁵ was revealed to be a bad white father whose past behaviour and its effects could not be ignored. He was associated with the sexual abuse of children; at times, as Hollingworth himself complained, 'it was if he were a sex abuser himself'.⁵⁶ And he was incapable of speaking the approved sexual discourse of the time. One reading of the resignation of Peter Hollingworth as Governor-General is thus that it satisfied the historical cultural logic that demands repeated disassociation from the bad white father (and disassociation from his (our?) wayward desires and practices of abuse with respect to children). The views of those commentators more sympathetic to Hollingworth's own sense of being made the 'fall guy',⁵⁷ who believe he was scapegoated and made the victim of hypocrisy, make sense in this context.⁵⁸

It was repeatedly observed in the media that Hollingworth 'just doesn't get it'. I read this as a temporal reference. Hollingworth is quoted saying that while child sexual abuse is a sin it is 'part of the human condition' and that determining the appropriate response to the problem is not 'cut and dried' and must leave the way open for forgiveness of abusers. As one journalist has observed, his views reflect attitudes and practices from 'the era in which he grew up and his training in social work', views from the 1950s and 1960s that no longer have a legitimate place in mainstream public discourse.⁵⁹ In the current panic around paedophilia and child sexual abuse it is becoming harder to tell the difference between good white fathers and bad white fathers (a distinction necessary to guarantee the racial and sexual purity of the child and the nation) and Hollingworth's leniency towards abusers did not assist in the imperative to distinguish one from the other. Male priests, teachers, counsellors, male passengers on airlines,⁶⁰ not to mention actual fathers themselves, have all become unavoidably suspect in the ever-expanding narrative of the innocent child at risk. His resignation at least assisted in the demarcation of the good from the bad, the identifiable perpetrator from those who are innocent, and the past from the present—all necessary distinctions to enable disassociation from the guilty past.

— THE GOOD WHITE MOTHER

There was, of course, no inevitability to Hollingworth's resignation. Things could have been otherwise. These matters are the outcome of the minutiae of unpredictable political forces involving individuals and institutions as much as they are the outcome of historical legacies and large-scale structural forces. This brings me back to Hetty Johnson and her extended account of the Hollingworth story in her autobiography *In the Best Interests of the Child*. Media personality Derryn Hinch, himself well known as a crusader against the sexual abuse of children, describes her in his foreword to the book as the person who 'more than anybody else' was responsible for getting rid of Hollingworth.⁶¹ She was, indeed, named regularly in the media coverage of the Governor-General controversy. In this penultimate section I

turn to a close reading of Johnson's autobiography as one way to excavate the dimensions of one key subject position from which Hollingworth was judged and condemned. While many opposed her style and single-minded focus I investigate her account here because she speaks as a child sexual abuse campaigner rather than as one whose declared concern was the politics or constitutionality of the office of Governor-General and because her account is also the story of the historical victor. Johnson is described as 'a mother' on the back cover of her book, a nomination so ubiquitous that its significance may be missed, and in this account of the Hollingworth national drama I cast her as Mother. Further, the photographic image of Johnson on the cover of her autobiography conforms to what Jeannie Martin has observed connotes an 'Aussie mum': blonde hair and blue eyes.⁶²

The absence of the mother in some contemporary cultural representations where she might otherwise be expected to be found might be understood as the disappearance of the mother *in relation to the good white father*, where she is excessive to his representation (or easily replaced by consumer commodities),⁶³ because it would be wrong to say that the figure of the mother currently has no presence in Australian public life. Debates about the place of diversely embodied mothers, and their rights, in many cases precisely in relation to their role in the reproduction of the nation, have been regular features of Australian public life for the last decade.⁶⁴ It is not that the field is evenly divided into 'good mothers' and 'bad mothers', although the status of, among others, lesbian mothers, single mothers, teenage mothers, welfare mothers, working mothers, older technologically assisted mothers and mothers in the Family Court are hotly contested. All mothers, who in some senses begin from a position of assumed goodness, however temporary, hover close to the always-imminent possibility of becoming bad. (Fathers are generally on surer footing.) In her analysis of the trends in many of these debates, and their social policy and law reform outcomes, Sandra Berns detects a shift in the form of the ideal mother. She claims that the 'citizen mother' of federation, conceived quite distinctly from wifehood, 'has been replaced by the "facilitating mother"' who is 'compelled by the law to continue her ordained task, that of knitting together frayed human relationships'.⁶⁵ Both positions bear a legacy of the role of white mothers in colonial society more generally where they are cast as 'the custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character'.⁶⁶ It is in this capacity that I recognise Hetty Johnson as the Good White Mother, setting aright not only frayed familial relationships but also frayed national relations of reproduction, and dispensing with less than worthy men as she dispenses moral certainty. As Alys Eve Weinbaum would have it she is the mother in the mode of 'racializing force'.⁶⁷

Hetty Johnson was born in 1958 (also my year of birth) to parents who had migrated from Holland three years previously. In 1996 her seven-and-a-half-year-old daughter revealed that her paternal grandfather had sexually abused her. The following year, with the support of

her husband and friends, Johnson started to work publicly to combat child sexual abuse. In 2000 she registered the People's Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse as a charity, later changing its name to Bravehearts. The organisation does advocacy and media work and provides services to victims of abuse. Johnson believes firmly in 'the beautiful innocence of children' (235). Her conservatism on many gender issues, her endorsement of the values of 'mainstream' Australia including Christianity, and her outrage at certain of its flaws, fit her well for the title of 'infantile citizen' and for the role of 'facilitating mother'. This is not to downplay her energy, her activism, her boldness in challenging authority, nor her achievements. As Berlant comments, 'confronting the tension between utopia and history, the infantile citizen's stubborn naivete gives him/her enormous power to unsettle, expose, and reframe the machinery of national life'.⁶⁸

This is how Johnson describes the stakes of the Hollingworth saga:

The Governor-General debate was much more than an exposé on the failures of Peter Hollingworth. In my view it was *a defining moment in Australia's history*. What happened next would define the priority Australia would place on the rights of children to be protected from abuse. (227, emphasis added)

We were witnessing the emergence of a crisis in this country. We were hearing revelation after revelation of sexual assaults occurring against Australian children—*inside our most trusted institutions*. (225, emphasis added)

Christianity was under siege.

This worried me because I felt that Christianity was the glue that held our nation together and I could *see the glue coming unstuck* ... In a world of such instability, this worried me. (225, emphasis added)

Commenting on the Governor-General's speech on Australia Day at the end of January 2002, a month when allegations of cover-up of sexual abuse in Anglican church schools had been coming thick and fast, Hetty Johnson writes, 'I love Australia Day and *yet for the first time*, I felt shame. I really did' (216, emphasis added).

The key stake in the Governor-General saga for Johnson, and for many commentators who were critical of Hollingworth, was the stability of the reproduction of the white nation; a stability threatened by revelations of child abuse, of wayward reproduction. Johnson's response to revelations of child abuse and their media coverage all emphasise disbelief and shock. Her chapter on the Governor-General saga is littered with comments like 'I couldn't believe what I was reading ... could it be true? Surely not' (200); 'Could this really be happening on such a scale in this country?' (208); 'We were shocked and horribly disappointed' (213).

I borrow by pirating an observation by cultural historian Nicole Moore about the representation of abortion in mid-twentieth century Australian novels:

even as the speaking of [child sexual abuse] is figured as a breaking of taboos, a reader's acceptance of these taboos is presumed, and *as shock is the premised textual product*, so [child sexual abuse] is figured as outside and other to a reader's knowledge, but nevertheless communicable.⁶⁹

When stories of child sexual abuse are represented as shock revelations the author and her compliant readers are thus placed outside the sphere of child sexual abuse, while able to know about it. They are not victims, or perpetrators, or knowingly complicit or immobilised bystanders, or people for whom, to speak colloquially, 'shit happens'. In many of the reports and stories of the government inquiries the expression of shock at the abuse of children is followed by 'conspicuous compassion', in some cases compassion that is rewarded by its object.⁷⁰ At the public release in 2004 of the Senate's *Forgotten Australians* report into non-Indigenous children in care, for example, the senators who co-chaired the committee—both women, one Liberal and one ALP—'were given a standing ovation by scores of abuse victims' as they stated, like many report writers before them, how moved they were by what they had heard.⁷¹

This shocked and outraged response is consistent with Berlant's description of the infantile citizen. This subject's innocence comes to crisis when its utopian view of the nation is confronted by the nation experienced as a political field.⁷² The infantile citizen's response to revelations of flaws in the national fabric 'is not to think of these qualities as the national system, nor to become an adult; that is, to form a critical consciousness in the place of the passive patriotism the official national culture machine seeks to inculcate' (51, emphasis added). Berlant claims that in infantile citizen narratives 'the accumulation of plot tends to lead to an acceleration and a crisis of knowledge relieved not by modes of sustained criticism but by the quasi-amnesia of ersatz consciousness' (50). At the end of the day the infantile citizen can exclaim 'the system works!' (28) Fiona Nicoll observes a similar process when mainstream Australians are addressed through 'the heterosexual trope of "ordinary mum and dads" to present a vision of the nation as an imagined community where conflicts between different groups have already been reconciled'.⁷³

Against the investment of the shocked subject in a unified and harmonious nation, let's look more closely at Johnson's claim to have felt shame at the actions of Peter Hollingworth. Her statement of feeling shame on Australia Day took me by surprise in its bold displacement of, and disregard for, the many recent expressions of shame (and attendant calls for apology) that have been made in recent years particularly on Australia Day. National shame

in relation to the government's treatment of Indigenous people and asylum seekers has been widely proclaimed in Australia. But where some of these expressions involve a distancing from the nation, Johnson's is a sign of her investment in the nation, the church and the office of Governor-General. It works to reinvest in her belief in these institutions. In her extended discussion of shame, UK theorist Sara Ahmed states that 'By witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can "live up to" the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present'.⁷⁴ (In this context I suggest that Johnson speaks *for the nation* as well as *about the nation* when she claims to feel shame.) 'In other words', Ahmed goes on, 'our shame *means that we mean well*, and can work to reproduce the nation as an ideal.' (109) The expression of shame can also cover over what there is to be ashamed about. In Johnson's case the call for the Governor-General's resignation can be read as a need to be relieved of the shame that his presence as head of state constantly reminded her and, as I suggest above, as displacement of other expressions of shame occupying the same public spheres as the Governor-General controversy. Ahmed writes that the 'politics of shame is contradictory. It exposes the nation, and what it has covered over and covered up in its pride in itself, but at the same time *it involves a narrative of recovery as the re-covering of the nation*' (112). When made in this mode, an apology would mean that 'what is shameful is passed over through the enactment of shame' (120). There was no thorough-going apology issued by Hollingworth but the call to remove him as Governor-General, and his eventual demise, put at a distance the possibility that an apology or some similar action would 'stay open to hearing claims of others'. Ahmed argues that this happens 'only if we assume that the act of speaking our shame does not undo the shame of what we speak' (119).

In reading the commentary on the Hollingworth affair I came across a reflection on how Hollingworth could have handled the matters differently. In an interview with the editor of *St Mark's Review*, conducted after Hollingworth's resignation, social scientist and Anglican associate of Hollingworth Trevor Hogan offered an alternative vision. It is not that Hogan is not invested in the Australian nation, or the Anglican church. But from his position he offered a course of action that would have led both on a more open and careful pathway to the future. Hogan says:

Hollingworth's mistake in my view was not to engage from the outset in a very public conversation with the Australian people about the complex set of issues his situation represented: he could have started with an outright apology, and a commitment to redress the wrongs wrought by his 'sins of omission'. This then might have provided an opening—but only so on the condition that he had already publicly confessed his failing—for Hollingworth to talk about the competing spiritual and ethical dilemmas facing him at the time of his responsibility as Archbishop of Brisbane, to talk about how he was informed by Christian

notions of asylum, forgiveness and a sense of loyalty to his clergy, and perhaps a personal ignorance, naivety and insensitivity about sexual abuse of children, and to recognise the seriousness of the situation that his failure to act was helping to prolong ... [this could have been] a creative act in a society still struggling to work through our changing self-understandings of sexuality and personal responsibility in public positions of power in community care.⁷⁵

Hogan's imagined other past, and so future, here resembles in some ways Sara Ahmed's invocation of a 'good apology'. Where a bad apology facilitates a process where 'what is shameful is passed over through the enactment of shame', a good apology opens space for future accountability to the past. 'The apology in this instance would be a return address, an address to another, whose place we do not inhabit.'⁷⁶

But Hetty Johnson did not imagine Peter Hollingworth in any ongoing engagement or conversation with his 'others'. She had called for his resignation from the beginning and within eighteen months she won. Writing in 2004 of the events of previous year she says:

In the end his resignation was the best thing ever done for Australian children. His resignation sent out a message that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated by anyone, no matter who they or what their status in the community. It set a tide of change sweeping through the country.

It was Peter Hollingworth's most valuable contribution to the nation and I was grateful.
(235)

The system works! Johnson's triumph, relief and gratitude work to close down, rather than open up, or open to, any investigation of the institutional causes of the abuse of children and its subsequent cover-up, let alone the gendered and racialised dynamics of the phenomenon or the foundations which hold up and are held up by archbishops and governors-general. While Hollingworth's resignation may have brought satisfaction, and indeed even some sense of justice, to many who had been treated badly by Hollingworth and/or the Anglican Church it was not part of a process that furthered the kind of conversation that Hogan imagines. (I do not mean to imply here that public figures found to have acted unethically should never resign.)

On the contrary, Johnson's account of the resignation of the Governor-General, and the innocence of the child in particular, licences a potentially dangerous moral certainty. Johnson sums up her assessment of Hollingworth and her decision making around how to respond to the revelations of his choice to protect his institution and its money, not the child:

Life presents choices. Every day we must decide between doing the right thing or the wrong thing. We all struggle with this at times. None of us is perfect—least of all myself.

Sometimes we are unsure of what is right or wrong in a situation. *But this was different*. This was a child and, in fact, children, who had been sexually assaulted and needed comfort, protection, validation and support. (203, emphasis added).

Those who speak on behalf of children in defence of their innocence stand to acquire moral authority and indeed total authority over the domain of the child and thus all that it represents.⁷⁷ In fact, as others have noted, the child and the (always already racialised) nation are objects that permit only one legible relationship. This is what US queer theorist Lee Edelman rails against when he interrogates the ways in which 'the universalized fantasy subtending the image of the child', a child always defined in opposition to queerness, forcibly shapes both the structures 'within which "the political" itself can be thought' and 'the universal value attributed to political futurity'.⁷⁸ And it is what Angela Mitropoulos bitterly observes of the 2001 federal election when she says 'it is not easy to recall an election when xenophobia was quite so explicit ... nevertheless, it is also true that a Federal Election in which no-one claimed that they best represented "the national interest" is unthinkable'.⁷⁹

— HISTORICAL INVESTMENTS, THE WHITE NATION AND I

Discursive practices that renew childhood innocence have been working harder than usual to guarantee a lost harmonious past through which the nation can move towards a unified national future. The nostalgia for the past that is captured so well in the desire for the innocent child demands an intensification of the whiteness of the nation and of key national figures of reproduction. It requires, eventually, disavowal and repression of the 'complexity of our racial and reproductive histories'.⁸⁰

This is a personal matter as well as a national project. Writing as a queer white Australian woman my personal past and identity are not easily distinguished from the national past and identity that are also mine. Nor are my desires for the future, my political commitments, distinct from the nation and its past. My academic interest in the Hollingworth controversy developed some time after his resignation and my recollection of my response to the stories at the time they were unfolding is of a sense of restless indifference. I didn't feel strongly either way in relation to the call for his resignation partly because, as a half-hearted republican, I didn't care that much about the office of the governor-general. On the other hand, I also worried over how I should think and feel about an issue of such national importance involving the sexual abuse of children (a good white mother response!). I have subsequently considered the possibility that I didn't have a firm opinion because I didn't recognise what I now posit as the stakes of the drama: the reputation of the White Father and the White Nation. But it is also possible that my inability to have a position on Hollingworth was an intuitive recognition and ambivalence about exactly these stakes—and about my own white father,

my own white childhood, my imagined and material place in the white nation and its public institutions, and my imagined vision of its future. I know how Hetty Johnson feels about the glue coming unstuck. Opening up these personal and national relationships to critical investigation and/or to the gaze of the other is to open to an uncertain future.

Lee Edelman argues that taking the child as the image of futurity locks us into a reproductive heteronormative vision that depends on an innocent child—for if the child were not innocent then it would not ‘hark back to a notion of the self misrecognized as enjoying an originary fullness’ that is the basis, so he argues, of all visions of a better future.⁸¹ Consequently he rejects any mode of politics that is anchored by a desire to realise a future that is the vision of a current social subject. This is because this kind of politics will always mean the reproduction of that social subject and the reproduction of the foreclosures of that which threatens the subject as subject and the social order s/he imagines. It will always mean the valorisation of reproduction per se⁸² (which, after Alys Eve Weinbaum, is a valorisation of the reproduction of race). Edelman’s articulation of a queer theory and politics that refuses identity and reproduction suggests a position not inconsistent with Ahmed’s notion of a good apology. Hogan’s musing over how Hollingworth could have acted differently—by apologising, reflecting publicly on his own past investments and blindspots and acknowledging the damage he had consequently caused, and joining with others to work through difficult issues—can also be read as an unpacking of identity akin to its refusal.

Perhaps, like Hetty Johnson, I feel comfortable with things as they turned out with the Governor-General. Rather than an ongoing process challenging whiteness, its terrible histories, including the abuse of children, and its reproduction, perhaps I would prefer the return of a Good White Father like, for example, Hollingworth’s predecessor as Governor-General, Sir William Deane. He was openly supportive of Indigenous people and identified with the *Bringing Them Home* report through his authorship of its preface and Hollingworth was often compared to him.⁸³ But from my point of view as a queer white woman the Good White Father and the White Nation he embodies and secures, and the innocent child they both produce and require, are part of my problem as much as they may be part of my solution.

The Hollingworth controversy performed a convergence between two dimensions of national anxiety writ large: the rising moral panic around paedophilia and child sexual abuse and concern about the historical virtue of the white nation and the white men and women who created it. Peter Hollingworth’s proximity to the image of the bad white father and his repeated performances that led many to exclaim that ‘he just doesn’t get it’ were the building blocks of inevitability that led to his resignation. I have read Hetty Johnson’s account of the Hollingworth affair as evidence of the mending imperative of the Good White Mother and her agency as another building block of Hollingworth’s demise. The closure effected by his resignation reproduces what Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson has

called 'the white blindfold view of history'. This is 'a collective memory of honour, pride, compassion and sacrifice as the essence of white virtue, the purpose of which is to legitimate white sovereignty'.⁸⁴

But attempts to resolve historical legacies of trauma via national dramas motivated by a desire for wholeness and virtue involving idealised figures of family and nation—here the innocent (not sexual) white child, the good (not bad) white father and the good white mother, are unlikely to result in, to use Dominick LaCapra's terms, the 'working through' of continuing trauma and 'the elaboration of more desirable social and political institutions and practices'.⁸⁵ More than that, the ongoing equation of challenges to the white nation with dramas in the idealised, white, patriarchal family occludes ontologically previous questions about the legitimacy of the white nation and the traumas enacted as its founding conditions.

In this context, one conclusion from this discussion is that the project of accountability to the past in Australia can be assisted by analyses that attend to the cultural and social construction of the distinction between child and adult, and the relationships through which the child and other key identities of reproduction are framed, including through discourses of sexuality, as much as it must be informed by analyses of discourses of gender, race and nation. All take shape in, and actively shape, unevenly and at times unpredictably, the practices of colonialism. As much as racial purity and the national identity that depends on it and the virtue that underwrites both are fictions that must be maintained through disavowal and repression and through brutal practices of exclusion, so too is the innocence and purity of childhood. National accountability with respect to the treatment of children will involve not only listening and responding meaningfully to the voices of children abused in the past (and in the present)—the avowed intention of all the inquiries but not yet their real effect—but also working to prevent the recurrence of child sexual abuse. This means opening to childhood sexuality as a possible site of agentic pleasure as well as risk and resourcing discursive options that educate children in navigating the differences. Such accountability cannot sidestep the ways that race already frames the practices and meanings of childhood, sexuality and abuse.

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64. See the special issue of *Hecate* on motherhood, vol. 31, no. 2, 2005; Baird, 'Maternity, Whiteness and National Identity'.
65. Berns, p. 87.
66. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1995, p. 135.
67. Weinbaum, p. 17.
68. Berlant, p. 29.
69. Nicole Moore, *Covert Operations: Abortion in Australian Women's Fiction 1920s–1950*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1997, p. 189, emphasis added.
70. Suvendrini Perera, 'The Good Neighbour: Conspicuous Compassion and the Politics of Proximity', *borderlands e-journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2004.
71. 'Victims Deserve Justice' *The Mercury*, 3 September 2004.
72. Berlant, p. 28, further references in the text.
73. Fiona Nicoll, 'After Keating: Queer(y)ing Ordinary Mums and Dads', in David Carter (ed.), *The Ideas Market: An Alternative Take on Australia's Intellectual Life*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 176–7.
74. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 109, emphasis in original. Further references are included in the text.
75. Trevor Hogan in conversation with Scott Cowdell, 2003, 'Cultural Reflections on the Downfall of Peter Hollingworth', *St Mark's Review*, no. 194, p. 8.
76. Ahmed, p. 119.
77. For a similar argument see Joan Menefee, 'From the Mouths of Politicians: Representing Children in the Public Sphere', *Cultural Critique*, no. 43, 1999, 105–17.
78. Lee Edelman, 'The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification and the Death Drive', *Narrative*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1998, p. 19.
79. Angela Mitropolous, 'Signs of Life', *Overland*, no. 167, 2002, p. 72.
80. Weinbaum, p. 59.
81. Edelman, p. 20.
82. Edelman, p. 28.
83. See Ahmed for a critique of Deane's preface, pp. 34–5, 107–13.
84. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Indigenous History Wars and the Virtue of the White Nation', in Carter (ed.), *The Ideas Market*, p. 233.
85. LaCapra, final paragraph. Thanks to Victoria Burrows for drawing my attention to this article.